

Los Angeles CITY BEAT

7 Days in L.A.

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Some Ecstatic Dancing

“We’re all trying to connect with a spiritual dimension, [and] dance is a way there.”. says Australian filmmaker **Michelle Mahrer** who, with producer **Nicole Ma**, will hold the U.S. Premiere of their new work, *Dances of Ecstasy*, this Friday night at the El Rey Theater, “through dance, other cultures have been doing for centuries what contemporary cultures may have lost.”

The hour-long film, which took several years to complete, documents long-held dance rituals and modern performances from around the world. Rich imagery, gorgeous music, and velvety narration make for an unparalleled sensory experience. Indeed, audiences have been known to get their groove on while the film is playing, which suits Mahrer and Ma just fine. “We wanted to appeal to emotions, not just films experimental aesthetics. It’s not a traditional documentary.”

And it won’t be a traditional premiere, either. Before the screening, Afro-Cuban percussion ensemble **EmiKeke** will perform, and there will be a “whirling” demonstration. Rather than a schmoozy “after party,” the film will be followed by a dance bash with ethno-techno **DJs Jason Bentley, Janaka and Patrick Harvard**. Amid extravagant Moroccan décor, these artists will bring a kinesthetic conclusion what filmmakers call “The *Dances of Ecstasy* Experience.” “we always has a vision to have a dance after the film, [so that] the film and dance become one,’ says Mahrer. “it’s a party, but a ritual experience as well. When you dance for hours, something changes in you.”

A lifelong dancer, Mahrer at one point studied meditative dance, which ultimately inspired the film. “I was really interested to explore different kinds of trance, from simple states to very. Very deep ones.” She says. And no, she doesn’t mean the pill-enhanced kind, in the film or at the party. “It’s a very uplifting, positive vibe,” she says of the *Dance’s* “Experience.” We’re seeking to bring people of different communities together, to attract all ages. [Communal] dance has a great power to heal and connect us. You don’t need drugs; *dance* is the elixer.”

Dances of Ecstasy; followed by *Global Dance Party*, El Rey Theater, 5515 Wilshire Blvd LS (323)936-6400 or *Theelrey.com*, Friday 8 p.m.- 1:30 a.m. \$22; \$17 advance, Film info: *Dancesofecstast.com*.