Festival Offers Taste of Assyrian Culture

Ceres, California -- An assortment of traditional foods, with recipes dating back more than 6,000 years, will be featured at the 10th annual Assyrian Food Festival in Ceres this weekend.

The festival, which attracts more than 1,000 people, offers a chance for Assyrians and non-Assyrians to celebrate and understand the culture.

The Assyrian empire, which fell in 612 B.C., covered parts of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria and Lebanon. More than 20,000 Assyrians live in Stanislaus County, according to the Assyrian Cultural Center of Bet-Nahrain in Ceres.

Among the festival highlights will be a traditional Assyrian tea house surrounded by museum-quality Iranian teapots called samovars; an exhibition of artwork and folkloric crafts; and Assyrian pastries, jams and other items for sale.

Performing will be the Presidio Children's Dance Theater and ballerina Sherene Melania, the granddaughter of Bet-Nahrain charter member Melania George and the late Abram L. George.

Melania studied with the San Francisco Ballet School and performed with the San Francisco Ballet in productions of "The Nutcracker" as early as age 8. Melania is a senior at the University of San Francisco, majoring in performing arts and social justice while performing as a freelance guest artist and member of the University of San Francisco Dance Ensemble.

Adult tickets are $12 in advance and include char-broiled beef kabob, chicken, fluffy rice, grilled tomato, salad and dessert. Tickets for children 10 and younger are $6, and tickets at the door will be $14.

Festival hours are 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday at the Assyrian Cultural Center at 3119 S. Central Ave.

Modesto Bee