

MID-BITS!

Vol. 7 - Issue 2

Winter 2006

Sandrina from
Penticton, BC

Backstage Story: Bab's
Fashion Show & Gala

Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall

Turning a Colour-Blind Eye?
Canadian-Style Racism in Oriental Dance

Covering all the Shakes and Shimmies of Canada's Bellydance Scene



PRO - FILE



Sandrina from Penticton, BC

How did you get started? What first got you interested in bellydance?

After decades of dance study of various types, I realized I had always yearned to explore the mystery of Oriental Dance and had been denying myself. One day I finally found lessons available at my local community centre and had no more excuses. Encouragement from my husband also helped. The music was captivating and I came home from my first lesson thrilled that I had found a purpose for my hips!

How long have you been bellydancing and what changes have you noticed on the scene over the years?

After about a year of lessons, I desperately needed more to keep me interested. I had a habit of becoming blasé about many creative hobbies I took up. I didn't want this to happen and was fortunate to have the time to commit to an intensive two-year study - traveling through Canada and the US to learn from as many great teachers as possible. I've been dancing professionally now for two years.

You'd have to be living under a rock not to notice that bellydance is everywhere and becoming extremely popular.

What's your life about when you're not bellydancing? How do you balance work, social and family life and everything else?

For quite a while, everything about my life was bellydancing! Because of my other professions, I was able to pursue my passion. I'm a former teacher turned graphic designer, and my partner/husband and I own a firm together. After years of hard work creating a solid business, we now direct employees who run it very well. Finding bellydance was serendipity, because it entered my life right when I had time to pursue other passions. In fact, I think it found me! My husband plays an important role in my dancing: as well as being very supportive and encouraging, he's also a musician and a fine percussionist; so together we balance out well: my dancing, his drumming.

What's your main involvement in the bellydance scene - teaching, performing, choreographing?

Mainly, I love to dance. There is a fabulous Greek restaurant in Penticton called Theo's where I perform regularly. Nikos Theodosakis, the owner, gave me my first break for which I'm very grateful. Almost every time I perform, someone asks me to teach them— so a year ago I decided to dust off my education degree. I'm putting it to use in a much more satisfying and creative way than I could when I was in the mainstream school system (which I'm sorry to say, really stifled me). There is such satisfaction when you see women's' eyes light up at achieving a move and/or simply feeling beautiful. I choreograph for my classes but continue to stress improvisation. Choreographing is intensely hard work, something I think most people don't appreciate until they try it. However, having a music and dance background is very helpful.

Have you/would you like to travel to the Middle East? What value do you feel traveling to the Middle East has for bellydancers?

I've done a lot of traveling. It is a mind-expanding and eye-opening experience. I have visited Greece and Turkey which were wonderful. But I do think one can be an excellent bellydancer and with some work, gain an understanding of the roots and culture of the dance without traveling to the Middle East.

I think of it this way: The best golfers in the world today are not Scottish, nor do they need to visit Scotland, the birthplace of golf, to be the top in their field. Hard work, practice, and determination are key. As important as it is to be mindful and appreciate the roots of bellydance, it is just as important to realize the dance has expanded into something completely unique over the decades with many influences and styles. That being said, I highly recommend travel and cultural development because it helps us understand our world more, which nurtures us as dancers and as people.

Any particular style of dance you prefer performing (Cabaret, Folkloric, Turkish, etc.)?

I enjoy all styles; the only limit is owning enough costumes! Egyptian Cabaret is so eye-catching and elegant. I love the Turkish rhythms and earthiness of Folkloric but also find something quite powerful about Tribal. There's a choice of dance style for whatever mood I happen to be in – but I feel that truly, deep down, the dance is all one. My preference is to play zills and dance improvisationally to live dumbek, especially when the crowd is all warmed up and into it. The energy created can be awesome.

Who have been your major influences in bellydance? Any role models, well-known stars, teachers, etc.?

My first professional study was with Delilah Flynn from Seattle, who influenced me greatly. As a birthday present, my husband convinced her to take me as a private student and off I went. I admire her passion for the dance, her awareness of space, and ability to see and break down the movements. Rachel Brice, another teacher (and now a star) made a big impact in how I see the dance and see myself as a dancer. An intense conversation with her after a show where she saw me perform pretty much changed my life. Suhaila Salimpour is also amazing and speaks her mind. Bellydance is lifelong learning and the dancers I admire are powerful, intelligent, kind and passionate.

What's the best thing about being a bellydancer? And the worst?

I try to keep positive - there's not really anything bad about being a bellydancer! The occasional derision encountered from small-minded and judgmental people is certainly frustrating. But this is insignificant in the big picture and is overshadowed by the best thing: Being able to communicate and create art

through dance; having the moves I've worked so hard on finally flow through me unconsciously, and feeling the connective energy from the people around me.

What's the funniest or most outrageous thing that's happened to you as a dancer?

During the early months of my first year performing at Theo's Greek Restaurant, I was still a little shy. An important patron asked me to dance on top of his group's table (I had hoped he was only joking), but the owner agreed and set it up for me. The group was very appreciative and generous and it was quite a challenge as the tables were tiny. After my set, I was feeling quite pleased with myself, and at dinner with my partner we asked the owner, Nikos, who that fellow was. He informed us that the patron was the owner of the local strip club and humorously added that he was on the search for new talent. I was mortified! After I got over it, we giggled about it all night. Since then, I've danced on that same patron's table more than once and he has always been kind and appreciative. With time in, I'm no longer mortified by much.

