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April 2016

## Dancing Tips

The most common problem I've been seeing in beginners lately has been locked knees. Keep your knees soft – even when not obviously bent. This gives you room to move your hips – and lessens the chance of standing with a dropped pelvis.

With more experienced dancers, I have been seeing too many clenched fists and angled wrists. The line should flow "naturally" (always the hardest to achieve) from fingers, to hand, to forearm.

## Background Notes

I've delivered lectures on the history of the dance for over 15 years and sometimes I forget what is obvious to me is brand new to others. I realized in a recent thread on Bhuz (RIP) that I contributed to, it could be time for a short reprise of some of my research and observations.

## Naming

First, terminology. The poster was confused by the term "raqs sharqi". So,

**Raqs Sharqi** is the professional branch of "belly dance" from Egypt which was adapted to stage from the start of the 20th century (at the same time there was a professional style which is closer to what we think of as "beledi" epitomised by the Mohamed Ali Street dancers - who did have thousands of films made with them in so are not as well known).

To confuse things there was briefly a move to use the term for a sort of modern dance to Middle Eastern music in the UK in the 1990s.

Also, many dancers do not like the term "belly dance" and so use "raqs sharqi" instead - even if what they are dancing is not strictly "raqs sharqi".

To further confuse things, it is now referred to as "Orientale" in Egypt by many professional dancers ie the French translation of the Arabic. In this sense it means any Egyptian dance that is not folkloric.

"Beledi" is not a type of raqs sharqi!! If anything the reverse is true.

Although I thought this would help, they then wanted to know what term they should use.

Depends of what style you are doing (and many of us do more than one). If your dance is of the professional performance style - even if you are working in a troupe - I'd say "raqs sharqi" or "Orientale" (personally I use the latter).

If it is the more relaxed down home style (even if for performance) then (raqs) beledi.

If you use a lot of western influences but stay true to the feel then "contemporary belly dance". A bit further out - "belly dance fusion".

Where at least two of traditional music, costume, movement, and feel has gone "world dance" or similar.

If you can identify the time and place of a folk piece (ie music, costume, and movements match to a specific people) then "folkloric".

If you are fluffing around with big skirts and drums and making it up from bits and pieces "fantasy".

And of course within each of these broad genres there are more specific styles ie Orientale - Golden Age - Tahia Carioca; Folklore - Egypt - NE Bedouin.

Which is why I like "belly raqs"® - keeps the flexibility. But without "labels" it can all become a mishmash of indulgent "creative" dance ie without the cultural component it isn't actually "belly" dance - just dance.



## June 2016

### Dancing Tips

Don't stop dancing over winter! Give yourself a c-v warm-up (walk, skip, climb stairs, do the luxing) then spend a little time on technique and a little time dancing. You can also progress listening to Middle Eastern music (preferably not straight pop). This will help bring your ear in.

For the technique section, have a look at your dance notebook. What moves do you need to work on? Pick no more than two for a session. Observe your body and correct faults – drilling mindlessly for 10 minutes might improve your c-v fitness – but it might also drill in bad habits.

Also spend time just moving to the music without worrying about technique. If new to improvisation, don't worry about how you look. Also don't worry about repetition. The most common fault is actually putting too many different moves into a 3 minute track.

Work out what works on your body; how to change weight and move from one position to another; what can you do with your arms that is interesting (but as a rule of thumb – do not dance with your arms and take time to move smoothly between positions).

For more advanced dancers, be aware of whether the moves you are doing – including how and arms – are appropriate with the style of music. Try and match musical style with movement vocabulary and attitude.

### Background Notes

Continuing highlights from some of my history of the dance lectures from the last 15 plus years. In this case from posting to Bhuz.

### Early Changes to Egyptian Dance

OP: "Ballet influence was around since the beginning with Badia Masabni\*. Any clues as to why she felt the need to turn to ballet?"

A few reasons. One, her nightclub targeted men with money (yes, I know she also put on women's shows - but that wasn't the main income stream). These were often Europeans or Europhilic Egyptians (who often spoke French rather than Arabic). They had absorbed the European aesthetic. Hence her dancers were whiter, slimmer, more European looking (less rounded faces and non-woolly hair) and wore much less clothing than average. They also wanted to see "classy" dancing - not "native" or "pagan" stuff. For these men this meant ballet - or chorus girls.

Next, she was putting on shows on a big stage. Dancers had to learn to use the stage (traditional dancing does not move much in space - imagine dancing on a folded towel). Traditionally professional raqs performers learnt from older dancers - who also danced in the traditional way. They were not able to provide the type of training she needed. What other dance teachers would have been available?

Finally, there was a stigma attached to belly dance. It was banned several times. However, by providing something different she could protest she was not breaking the law. Her dancers were performing something quite different – not *raqs beledi* (local dance) but *raqs sharqi* (eastern dance).

\* Badīa`a Masabni (1893-1974) was a Lebanese dancer who was pivotal in changing the Egyptian dance scene. In 1926 she opened the 'Casino Badia' and later the 'Casino Opera'. This sâla included comedians, singers and dancers. Her target audience was the uppercase and Western identified rich. She also introduced a chorus line of up to 30 dancers.

The Casino Opera nurtured many well known dancers such as Tahiya Carioca, Samia Gamal, Nadia Gamal and musicians such as Farid al-Atrache and Abdul Wahab.

Badia left Egypt in 1951 to avoid paying back taxes.



## August 2016

### 8 Days with Dr Mo

Dr Mo Geddawi is an Egyptian born dancer and teacher. Mo was a co-founder of the Reda Troupe and has now been teaching for 50 years. 2016 was Mo's 5<sup>th</sup> intensive in Brisbane.

But this year was a little different. The first four days were dedicated to learning five choreographies (two Orientale – theatrical and classical – and three folkloric – Sa`iidi, Nubian and beledi). This was the usual hard slog; drilling the pieces over and over to get them to stick (one of them being over 8 minutes long!). Even at 78, Mo would teach in two hour blocks with only a single very brief break. We were all drenched in sweat well before then.

What I'm going to go over in class will be footwork, travelling patterns, weight changes, transitions, arabesques – and arms.

To add a little more stress for me, this year the local teacher who normally takes the warm-ups was unavailable; so an hour before start time I'm informed I'd be taking a 45 minutes warm-up – no prep, none of my music, and with a number of professional dancers in class.

But what made this year stand out was the second four days – this was teacher training. For this, Mo was joined by Jrisi, Maria, Lynn England and Adel Amin to deliver a mix of theory and practice. We didn't just hear about ways to drill our students – we did it ourselves. Weight changes, direction changes, arabesques, manipulations, folk steps, cane, and veil – we drilled until we got it – and developed empathy for our students.

Classes ran to 9pm with lectures on the history of our dance in Egypt, costuming, props (including care of snakes), Arabic music and rhythms, dance ethics, studio management, anatomy, and teaching methods. It was all very informative, useful information that any teacher needed to know.

The last day started with a very vigorous (physical) revision session – followed by ... the exam. Those that were left were faced with dancing (alone) in front of a panel of three (Mo, Jrisi, and Adel) and answering a series of questions from each. When each of us returned after they had a confab we heard not only how we went on our performance, but also our progress over the eight days. (And yes, I passed) This took a bit longer than expected. Great for those who went early – but torture for those who had to wait hours for their turn.

This was the best intensive to date. I only wish it had been available when I started teaching. I returned with new combos, ideas, and energy and almost wish I hadn't cancelled term 3.

### Background Notes

Continuing highlights from some of my history of the dance lectures from the last 15 plus years. In this case from posting to Bhuz.

#### Is Reda Folklore with Ballet?

This is a common misconception. Reda's influences were more American musicals than ballet. But yes, there is a Western aesthetic. There is more footwork than traditional Egyptian dance – even Badia's "raqs sharqi" (danse orientale) – and less hips. What he was trying to do was to build national pride by putting a (cleaned up) version of traditional dances on stage like the USSR and Turkey did – which means less repetition, more structure and glitzier costumes. Initially Orientale was not part of the Reda Troupe's repertoire and Reda rejects the label "belly dance" for any of his work.



Mo and Maria



The Panel



Reda style Fellahi dance

# December 2016

## Dancing Tips

Don't stop dancing over the holidays. You can shimmy anywhere. Walking to the kitchen or into the shower (actually shimmying in the shower can be fun).

Also a good time to just let loose. Let the music take you and dance. We are meant to be having fun.

## Background Notes

Continuing highlights from some of my history of the dance lectures from the last 15 plus years. In this case from posting in Facebook.

### Three myths that won't die

When Timeline posted "How Belly Dancing Scandalized and Charmed America" I had to click on it. Overall it is a great little video with interesting images and comments but it also embeds three belly dance myths. So I have to set the record straight.

1: Little Egypt danced at the Chicago World Fair

[Donna Carlton analysed primary sources from the Chicago World Fair \(newspaper articles, posters, letters\) and found NO evidence of a performer there called "Little Egypt".](#)

2: Belly Dance is rooted in ancient Fertility Dance

[The whole "fertility dance" thing probably is linked back to the feminist spirituality movement of the 1970s - maybe with help from the well discredited Curt Sachs. And is not accepted by any credible dance ethnologist - ie people who actually spend time studying the evidence. Also ignores the recent \(last few hundred years\) practice as a unisex dance. Then you get into exactly how old the dance actually is - most would only give it a few hundred years. No evidence that it has remained the same through centuries while language, religion and music has significantly changed.](#)

3: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Belly Dance costumes came from Hollywood

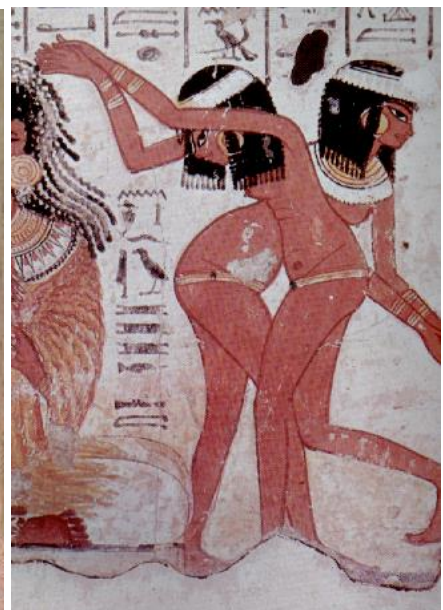
[Europe was WAY more important to the aesthetic in Egypt. Hollywood was NOT a big influence. French movies at least were in a language some Egyptians could understand and were not tainted with an association with the English. Further, the Ballet Russe is very likely to have had a strong influence. Along with the English's expectation of "natives" like in India - ie bare bellies which was not part of the normal dress in.](#)



Little Egypt



Ballet Russe



Ancient Egyptian Dance