



# Baladi News

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I used to publish a newsletter quite often during the year but after I started working full-time again, wow, no time for anything else. So, there has been no newsletter and I have to stand up in front of the class three times a week and blurt out any tidbits of invaluable info that you can't live without taking up valuable dance time to do it. Now that I have quite a few students again and more performers than ever, I am finding that there is even more information that is important to pass on. To that end, I have decided to re-publish the newsletter. I enjoy writing it, and it seems that you enjoy reading it.

## Our Website

[www.magma.ca/~shakira](http://www.magma.ca/~shakira) is our website. It hasn't been updated in a very long time, so there are no recent photos on it. My webmistress, Jennifer Houselander, is very talented and designed a superb website for us. She runs the web training department at Algonquin College but still finds time to maintain my website (when I let her). Hopefully this winter I will be able to send her some new photos to promote my latest group of wonderful dancers.

## Belly Dance Websites

There are an absolute ton of belly dance websites available to peruse. Now more than ever there are so many Canadian websites that there is absolutely no reason to buy from the US. There are, of course, a multitude of websites that are used for research and knowledge existing from all over the world. Anything you want to know is out there on the web. I have several links on my webpage, but there are new websites being discovered all the time. Tracey Vibert's website is always being updated since she runs the email news for this area. Every Sunday she sends out an email with all the belly dance stuff going on for Ottawa. You can sign up to get this newsy email by visiting her site. She also adds links continuously. Her husband, Tom, maintains her website as well as many other dancers and is also an accomplished videographer in the area. Another videographer used by belly dancers for their recitals is Herb at Vitaspa Productions who was the last fellow to copy our show video to DVD. I am very fortunate to have a talented and eager videographer of my own in Liam, who has been taping our shows for the last couple of years. He really enjoys it and likes to show the videos to his friends!

## Music and DVDs

Finding music to dance and practice to isn't as difficult as it used to be. Two Canadian websites have belly dance music, [www.amazon.ca](http://www.amazon.ca) and [www.mymusic.ca](http://www.mymusic.ca). It is always a good choice to purchase a CD that is a collection of dancer's favorites of which they carry several. If you have a favorite artist, you can also find them there. Amazon also has quite a collection of DVDs, both performance and instructional. [www.chapters.ca](http://www.chapters.ca) also has DVDs and Chapters and Amazon also have a lot of books. There is absolutely no need to buy from the States. Not that I have anything against buying from the States, but after you pay the exchange and duty, it just isn't worth it. Some of the Canadian belly dance sites I recommend also sell music and DVDs. As well, I am still trying to organize a group music order from Hollywood Music which has a salesman in Ontario. This is a little more time consuming than just buying them off the internet, because he wants a cheque up front for the items and so everyone has to pay in advance. He also has DVDs and videos from the Middle East which are great learning tools.

Speaking of DVDs and videos; I do the video study in class for a reason and that is to witness various styles and interpretations of the dance. Watching other people dance and imitating them helps to trigger more creativity with your own body, allowing it to move in new ways that you hadn't thought of before. Performance videos are a lot of fun and a great way to see all the spectacular dancers from around the world. It is definitely motivating to see someone you want to aspire to be like. Instructional DVDs and videos are great to have at home to fall back on. With any fitness routine, it has to be that, a routine. In order for it to be of benefit to your health, you really should partake in it at least three times a week. Since most of us couldn't afford to go to a class or gym that many times, you are left to your own devices at home. There are more instructional videos than you can shake a remote control at so there should be something out there you like. I have many performance and instructional DVDs and videos that I have collected over the years but tend to hoard them at home where they aren't much use to anyone. I have loaned videos in the past only to have to chase after them when I've forgotten who has them. I have recently loaned out a couple of videos, but have started a sign out program. In order for it to work, and for me to feel that they are safe away from my stash, I will have to instill a strict loan time and ask that everyone adhere to it. Because of the huge accumulated cost of the collection, and copyright infringement, I would prefer that you borrow the videos/DVDs to watch and not copy. I would really love to think that you are borrowing the instructional videos for preview purposes and that you will go out and purchase a copy of your very own. Many of the instructors now have video series with different focuses, so if you like one, you will more than likely love the others. For example: I had recently heard that Suhaila Salimpour had come out with dance fitness/instructional videos and I had wanted to try one. I went on the internet and found out that she is fusing them with other forms of exercise like, jazz, pilates, and yoga. Lo and behold, I was in Chapters looking for Christmas presents and I found her belly dance/yoga fusion DVD there for only \$20! There are lots of others so take a peek on Amazon. If you are not able to or prefer not to purchase over the internet, Chapters will order anything for you, especially if they know it is available in Canada to other vendors.

## **Schedule**

Just a reminder as to our yearly schedule. It stays pretty much the same every year and is marked on my flyer. Tuesdays and thursdays are my only nights available for teaching January to June and September to December. In July and August, there are fewer students and because I have a reduced work week then, we leave for camping on thursday nights all summer. To that end, classes in the summer fall solely on tuesdays (using the Thursday schedule). The only break we take during the year is over the Christmas holidays. Usually, we start back the week after school starts, but this year the kids are really late going back. It turns out that we are going back to class the same week they are. With the end of our classes occurring in the middle of December, I think three weeks is way long enough for us to be away from our dancing. I am sure not many of us make the effort to find the time to exercise over the holidays, unfortunately, but I was trying to get you to at least put the radio on and dance around the house when you could.

As for an explanation of the different classes I run. Essentially all three classes are the same but different - not much of an explanation. The basic format is the same, but the complication levels are slightly askew with each one. The Thursday night 6-7 class is the most basic, and yet I do try to challenge the people there that take it on a permanent basis. The Tuesday 7-8:30 class is the multi-level mixup class which anyone is able to attend, from beginners to advanced. It is a challenge for beginners, yes, but they always seem to keep up with little or no frustration. The advanced people know by now how to challenge themselves, and I think they enjoy the self study on tuesdays as opposed to the torture I try to induce on thursday nights from 7-8:30. On tuesdays, the extra half hour is used for fun stuff like video and prop study and for introducing new but short and easy to learn choreographies. The Thursday night 7-8:30 class is the most advanced and participants are "invited" to attend when I feel that they are ready to take on the responsibility. The people in this class are expected to perform at a certain level of expertise and to take their dancing one step further over and over again.

## **Belly Dance Workshops**

We have been very lucky in the last few years that there are many workshops being hosted in the Ottawa area. Workshops are entire weekends with full days of dance instruction by dance masters brought here from all over the world. It used to be that you had to travel to larger cities to study with the masters, but thankfully if you stay here, a lot of them eventually come to Ottawa. It is a huge savings to not have to pay travel and accommodations like I have had to do many times in the past. Although, the trips I took with my dance friends to study out of town were a riot and I would not change the fact that I went out of town to study. It is a lot of fun to go away to a new city to dance but it is expensive. Be that as it may, each spring and fall there is a multitude of workshops to choose from right in your own backyard. Workshops are most beneficial to those that already know the basics. Instructors do not travel to teach beginners, but to teach their philosophies and styles. You certainly get the most out of a workshop if you can forgo learning a move you already know, but can encompass it in a new combination or learn new methods of technique training that help train your body to improve its flexibility and understanding of music. Usually with each workshop, there is a grand show on the Saturday night where workshop participants and the master instructor perform. Even if you do not attend the workshops, these shows are a rare treat to witness and a must for all students.

## **Bazaar**

Twice a year, Tracey Vibert organizes a huge belly dance bazaar in Ottawa. If you don't buy anything any other time of year, you can buy it then. Six months goes by so fast, you don't even miss not shopping in between bazaars. Each year the spoils available there are more and more exciting. You can get anything your heart desires for dancing including new and used items such as music, DVDs, videos, hipscarves, costume parts, full costumes, jewelry and props such as canes, zills, and candelabras. You will spend hours just circling around and around not being able to decide on what sparkly items you can't live without. It is a grand opportunity to match up costume parts to fabric and to find just the right missing accessory. The next one is in February - which will arrive very soon, believe me.

## **Christmas Show 2005**

Just a few weeks ago we held our annual Christmas recital. It was held early in December as opposed to our usual last Sunday in the term so that we could have time together after the recital to discuss and regail about the goings on and as well, have more time afterwards to prepare for the hectic Christmas season. 2005 marked a change in venue for our recitals to the North Grenville Municipal Complex. For many years we held our recitals in our previous larger version of the studio. After it was unceremoniously cut in half (some of us will certainly not soon forget the night of that gruesome discovery!!) there was definitely no possibility of holding our grand shows there anymore. A panicky search for a new venue ensued with a strange turn of events which led us to a lovely outdoor show in the summer of 2004. For Christmas 2004, we tried a festive albeit breezy alternative at the newly re-located Vinegrette at the Howard Johnsons/Coachouse hotel. Although the set-up was ideal and it was such fun to offer a light meal to accompany the lovely dancing, a leaky door on a very cold day coupled with an overly extended show because of said meal, led us to seek an alternative. That is when the Municipal Complex opened up just in time for us to try it for the Summer 2005 recital. The room we choose turned out to be a wonderful set-up and the snack table provided by the dancers was a welcome addition and just enough of a repas to suit everyone. We continued to use the complex this Christmas, extending our rental agreement to two rooms, allowing for a gratuitous amount of space for our dressing room. Snacks again were provided by a committee no less, who outdid themselves balancing dancing and serving.

If we were to follow our usual format for Summer 2006, the recital would fall in late June. For this year, it was suggested that maybe a spring recital held in May might prove to allow for higher attendance since people won't be camping or cottaging quite yet. I think this is a definite possibility and has merit since our summer recital attendance is always pretty slim due to vacations etc. It would be lovely to get the same amount of people that attend our Christmas recitals as it is very important that the recitals be financial self-supporting. All proceeds from the ticket sales go totally to the rental of the rooms which basically allows us to break even.

## **Bra Shopping Made Easier**

Not quite belly dancing ... For quite a long while now I have been putting off the dreaded bra shopping trip, everybody does. I have been wearing the same bras I had before my son was born ... and he is now 10. It really was made clear that I needed to go shopping when a couple of months

ago at one of our performances the rest of the troupe complained about the state of my tattered and faded undergarment. So, I went shopping. I grabbed about seven bras in the size I have been wearing for twenty years (except for when I was nursing - those will never see the light of day again, I am sure) - ok so my fitting room experience was a disaster! ie. not one bra even came close to fitting - "what is wrong with these bras!" I exclaimed. So, back to tattered and pathetic. Then a few weeks ago, Oprah had a show on how to buy bras and jeans to fit. My husband, bless him, taped it for me so I could watch - or was he trying to tell me something. It didn't give you any practical hints except to shake you and make you realize the obvious. As for bras, they discovered that 99% of the audience was wearing the wrong size bra! They tried to stress that this was probably the same situation for the rest of us. As for jeans, they gave a few helpful hints as to what to watch for according to your body shape and height - no "muffin tops" allowed, no flat butts either, no bulky butts as well. It was good show and has triggered some thought processes on my part. So, back to the dreaded bra shopping. All along lurking in the back of my mind was the knowledge that the Sears catalogue devotes a whole page in their resource section to how to measure for a bra. After the "disaster", I decided to measure myself. Well, lo and behold, I came up with an entirely different bra and cup size. Amazing. So off I go with the knowledge of my new size. I grabbed three bras tried them on and FOUND ONE THAT FIT!!! I have been wearing it for three weeks straight I love it so much. I suppose I should get a second one so I can safely set fire to my old ones. I had also gotten some advice from one of my students who very wisely said, "pay the money and buy a good one". Then I also took my Mom's advice (I'll deny it if anyone tattles) and bought a Playtex - and, no, it is not pointy. Anyway, to help out everyone, I have photocopied the page out of the Sears catalogue. I did ask the advice of my copyright conscience/copyright police and she granted me permission to do so. Please find this sheet at the front of the studio - and use it, you will be thrilled with the comfy results.

### **Extended Class Fun and Games**

I am always coming up with new ideas to try to make classes more fun and exciting. My latest idea is to run "free" extracurricular activities after the normal class time that some students might find interesting, and yet others might give a pass. Some of the extracurricular "mini-workshops" that I would like to plan are basic jewellery making, bra decorating, drumming, extended veil and zill study, and anything else that seems to come to mind. It would only be for an extra 15 or 30 minutes depending on the type of study and would cost nothing more except your willingness to stay longer. These extensions will occur on Tuesday nights only (except for the odd extension to the advanced class - they already stay later to practice for performances) and will not occur every week. I imagine that they would probably occur once a month considering the amount of planning it will take to run them - you'd be surprised. I will also be allowing student members to volunteer to teach one of these extracurricular activities if they should have a skill that would be useful to the belly dance purpose.

### **Nath Keo Instructional DVD**

Nath was invited as a guest instructor by Denise Enan last spring and a couple of us went. He is an absolutely amazing instructor and we had loads of fun. He has now come out with an instructional DVD of belly dance combinations. I have ordered one and will be giving you a review after we receive it. He taught many unique combinations of movements at his workshop, which I promptly forgot, so I am excited to have the chance to re-learn them. If you are interested in ordering his DVD please contact him c/o Nath Keo Dance Studio, #11-1140 Fort St. Victoria BC V8V 3K8 250-388-7829 or [nathkeo@shaw.ca](mailto:nathkeo@shaw.ca), he is having a special if he receives the order before 15 Jan.

### **Belly Dance Superstars**

The Belly Dance Superstars are a hand picked group of dancers from the US. They have been on tour and are stopping in our area on March 5, 2006. Tickets are \$38 plus taxes and are available at the Casino box office, at all Admission Network Outlets, by phone at 1-800-361-4595, or at [www.admission.com](http://www.admission.com). They will be performing at the Casino in Hull so it should be for a fun evening - let's go semiformal!! Apparently there will be a load of belly dancers there from the area so the performers should get a very warm welcome. The BDS Stars consist of a core group of ensemble dancers which are accompanied by world renowned master dancers. I am not sure who is coming with them in March, but we could probably find out in advance. This is a show not to be missed so try to get a ticket before they sell out.

### **Luna**

Luna is a recent addition to the workshop inventory in Ottawa. She is holding a quickie workshop on 15 Jan so I am not sure if my newsletter will reach everyone in time. In her last workshop she eluded to how to dance to the different instruments and to make more use of your music so she decided to run a workshop specifically on the subject. If you are interested in attending please register with Denise Enan asap at 819-776-5033.

### **Denise Enan**

Speaking of Denise ... She has become the new Queen of the visiting Master Instructors. Meaning, she is the main workshop organizer these days. For a few years Julia Watson was working her bu- - off bringing people in but then others started doing the same and then students just ran out of funding. Now, Denise is back to being the only one. She has chosen some excellent guest instructors and so I look forward to seeing who she will be bringing in the Spring. She also has quite a few hip scarves that she brings directly from Egypt so it is an excellent time to shop. She also still has a few bedla sets (beaded bras and belts).

### **Shopping in Ottawa**

There are also some other fine places to purchase belly dance items in the Ottawa area. You can buy on the internet and happily accomplish it in Canadian funds no less, but to see things up close and personal you need to take a drive to Ottawa. There is Denise in Hull at her studio (phone ahead) for high quality Egyptian hip scarves. There is also Aziz and Co on Bank street who sell hip scarves and chains, as well as beaded tops and some veils. She also carries some beautiful Indian jewelry and decorative items. Last time I was in there she also had some belly dance videos and music from Hollywood Music Center. She is located just north of Gladstone and Staples so that should help you to find her. Just across the street from her is Silky Touch, a wonderful place that I have purchased loads of fabric from in the past. He really aims to please and will definitely give you a good deal if you mention you are a belly dancer. Another Indian fabric store is NuCreation on Booth Street just south of Somerset. I believe the Mom has retired due to ill health and either the daughter or another relative has taken over. Their shop is absolutely

stuffed with fabric and saris and you will definitely find something there you can't live without. But back to costume parts ... Julie Tierney also carries some hipscarves and veils at [www.ottawabellydance.com](http://www.ottawabellydance.com) or 254-8469. Nikita Nouwar has some belly dance pieces at [www.importsbynikitia.com](http://www.importsbynikitia.com) Both Julie and Nikita will see you with appointments. 240 Sparks is the home to Akad Diffusion who carry Turkish belly dance accessories and jewelry as well as home decor items. Apparently, Cleopatra's Secrets in the Old White Rose Mall on Robertson Road in Bells Corners carries some items. I was recently at Carlingwood so sought out the kiosk there that supposedly sells hipscarves and full costumes. It was right before Christmas so she had put the costumes away for now but did have a few hip scarves. They are not of the highest quality but will do for beginners or for a "save it for a performance" costume. I purchased a style that I hadn't seen before, using little gold hearts instead of coins. It is for viewing and for sale in the studio if you want to see it. She said she has quite a few and was also expecting a new shipment. There have also been sitings at Cashmere Haven in the Rideau Center and St. Laurent Mall. Well that should keep you busy in your after Christmas travels, but I also recommend you be patient as I have just heard that the next TAV Belly Dance Bazaar is coming up very soon on Sunday 19 Feb. It is a fantastic place to be for belly dance items and you will have a blast - so save your loonies!

### **Restaurant Review**

We recently were in search of a good Italian restaurant for my husband's birthday. For years our favorite was Casa Calarco on Somerset but they retired and we haven't found a replacement yet that can even compare. Over the holidays I sent query emails to some of my students but understandably didn't get too many replies. We ended up trying Ciccios on Preston as I had been there once before twenty years ago and it was good - not much to go by! Last year we had tried Giovanni's because it was rated #2 by the A Channel's "Best of" list but found it too expensive for the quality of food that we received - end of story. Ciccios was better but still not as good as our long lost favorite. The bread provided was so dreamy, I could have just eaten it, left, and been satiated. My husband ordered brushcetta but I found there were too many tomatoes on it. I know, I know, but I just don't like tomatoes all that much. I ordered the skewered garlic shrimp but found them a little tough. I ordered the small salad which could have fed us both, but it was very good none-the-less. I had the lasagna and it was nice and meaty albeit, I couldn't finish, and usually I do. My husband had his favorite Penne Ariabatta and he liked it. As always, we passed on dessert and waddled out to the car. But ... the reason for this review. After my desperate research that didn't really turn out, I mentioned to my husband that since I was starting up the newsletter again it would be a fun idea to ask my students to contribute restaurant reviews so all of us could get in on the inside track of where to go eat yummy food. To keep it on a positive note, let's just try to recommend a great place rather than give a scathing business ruining critique. I suppose this review of Ciccios wasn't entirely positive, but I must tell you the waitress we had was spectacular. I think she was just about the nicest, most pleasant and attentive service person we have ever had the honour of encountering. I would become a regular there just to have her take care of us. So, that being said, if you have had a pleasant and yummy restaurant experience lately, we want to hear about it. You can email it to me or write it down and I'll include it in the newsletter.

### **Fundraiser Exchanges**

I have over the years tried to think about how we could do a little fundraising for charity without just forking over money and that's it. I have had several ideas, but I think this one might actually work. Before the holidays I went looking for a new sparkly top but couldn't find the right one. I had looked in my own closet and I have quite a few but wanted something new. Afterwards I thought that maybe some of my students were in the same situation. So I decided that next year I would have a "holiday wear exchange". In November we all bring in our sparkly stuff and donate to the inventory, then we can "buy back" someone else's that we like instead, for a nominal fee like \$5 or \$10. The cash we raise could then go to a charity and we all could possibly have something new to wear for the holidays. Then I thought we could do it with jeans we have outgrown, purses, coats - whatever. Just bring in our high quality but we'll never wear them again items. So, how does that sound. I will try one soon and we'll all see how it goes.

Thanks a lot, and it is sooooo good to be back. I must close off now as if I make this any longer the font will be too small to read! (I'm trying to limit myself to two sheets of paper.) Bye from your newsletter scribe.

Nancy

