

In belly dancing there are no age or size restrictions; there's the lure of the costumes that offer the opportunity of reinventing oneself as a glittering beauty, or as an earthy new-age gypsy. Add to these enticements those of health, exercise and a high feel-good factor, and you have an unstoppable trend.

as Souheir Zaki, Nagua Fouad, Aida Nour, Mona Saïd, Lucy, Fifi Abdou, Nadia Hamdi, Azza Sherif, Saha Hamdi, Nelly Fouad, and countless others. Today for a selection of true stars performing, one is limited to the choice between Dina and Lucy. There are a few other skilled performers among current Egyptian belly dance artists, Dandesh and Randa Kamel, for example, but they have yet to reach similar ranks of stardom.

And yet, in the West, the popularity of belly dance seems to increase at a rate inversely proportional to its decline in the Middle East. In the West, belly dance is removed from the uniquely Arabic perception, fuelled and perpetuated by Egyptian cinema, that only women of questionable morals would perform it. When looked at without that bias, belly dancing has many attractions for women (and some men). There are no age or size restrictions; there's the lure of the costumes that offer the opportunity of reinventing oneself as a glittering beauty, or as an earthy new-age gypsy. Add to these enticements those of health, exercise and a high feel-good factor, and you have an unstoppable trend.

A NEW AGE OF DANCE

Just recently, the Latin American pop star, Shakira injected a new wave of excitement into this growing movement by using many belly-dance moves as part of her stage routine, and also by wearing accessories such as the beaded hip scarves associated with the dance. Shakira, the belly dance enthusiast and celebrity who is taking the world by storm, hails from Colombia and has a strong link with the Arab world through her Lebanese father. Shops in Khan el Khalili, specializing in belly dance accessories, have been flooded with requests for Shakira hip belts and scarves. Even shops as far away as Amera's Palace, an Australian outlet specializing in belly-dance costumes, have been overrun with shoppers on a mission to copy her look. One Egyptian vendor, Yasser, has had to maintain extra stock to keep up with the demand for the black and gold beaded hip scarf, such as the one which graces Shakira's hips as they swivel independently, just below her bared midriff.

If you wouldn't mind your own hip scarf, or a whole costume for that matter, you can contact: Yasser Bellydance Costumes, 2 Sekket Khan El

Kahlili. Tel: 786 5966

If you have the look but need the moves, Middle Eastern Dance classes are offered at Community Services Association in Maadi, Tel: 358 5284 / 376 8232. @

For the serious dancer wanting to improve his or her skill, lessons are given by: Raqia Hassan Tel: 748 2338. - Samia Fouad -ER



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