

BELLY DANCE FROM THE CORE, 3 WEEK SESSION For Beginners

February 2013

www.ancientartofbellydance.com, 413-259-7504

Class Syllabus

We will study the basics of belly dance with an introduction to veil.

Students will be given written material, with an instruction style that includes “*follow the leader*” and also some *descriptive break-down* of the movements and combinations covered in class. An objective of this class is to develop an understanding of how we engage and develop our core with some of the most elegant and fundamental movements in belly dance.

This 3 week part of the “To The Core” program also introduces some light choreography, providing an expressive outlet for these movements and a concept of transitions and layers. Students are not expected to memorize the choreography but are encouraged to find the natural transitions from one movement to the next to build upon grace and skill.

Each class begins with an opening warm-up series, including Kali’s stretch, and a core strengthening exercise. Each class ends with a gentle Yin yoga stretch. In addition to the opening and closing material just mentioned, each class will have a “follow along” portion with choreography with breakdowns of movements, and repetitive drills to build muscle memory.

Students’ Check List for Class

- Water bottle
- Comfortable yoga or sweat pants.
- Tank top/t-shirt
- Over shirt/sweat shirt
- Pen/note book

Online resource for silk veils

www.ancientartofbellydance.com

visit the link for Northampton Classes
where some links to veils are provided
for online shopping.

Or

Create your own veil with 3 yards of
flowing fabric (chiffon/silk work best).

Veil Combinations and Drills

Butterfly flips (forward and back) with turns

Butterfly switches (forward and back)

Sand Storm/Vertical Side Spirals

Wraps and unwrapping your veil

“Princess spins”

Barrel turns

Envelope

Side Explosions

Catching the “Flame”

Fire burst at the “crown”

Pay extra attention to the following sections of this manual to assist in helping you build great veil technique: Arms/Hands, Bell Posture

Each of the above will be introduced in class, be very aware that outstanding veil technique is connected to our frame. Our body mechanics, bell structure and arms are all mentioned in the following pages of this manual and will be touched upon in our class.

Veil Tips

Forward Butterfly Flip

- Hold veil in front, and “flip” over right shoulder.
- Then Turn Left

Forward Butterfly Switches

- Repeat the two steps above then...
- After you turn 360 degrees, “switch” the veil onto the left shoulder and off the right shoulder.
- Then spin Right.
OR
- Remain facing forward and flip veil on/off opposite shoulders (try with a level change).

Backward butterfly flips and switches

- Same as forward but begin with veil behind and flip over right shoulder from behind
- Turn Right (different from the forward flips/switches).
- Repeat the exercises for Forward flip/switches but with veil behind.

Sand Storm/Vertical Side Sprials

- Stand in gorgeous with right hip forward
- Veil is behind you
- Holding veil in each hand, raise left hand up to ceiling and right arm out to the right (L).
- Keep the veil behind your head as you lower your left hand to your right shoulder.

- Use right arm to “throw” veil over and forward
- Touch right hip with left hand and repeat “forward throw”
- Throw veil up and over backward
- Raise left hand to right shoulder
- Again, throw veil up and over/backward
- Repeat on each side

Turns and Spins

Often difficult for students new to dance, take it slow and follow your instructor’s advice on how to pace yourself and “spot”. Veil looks beautiful with turns and spins as the air can really animate the fabric.

Stillness/framing with veil

When we do complicated isolations and combinations and traveling steps, our veils, like our arms can be wonderful “frames” to showcase these movements.

Study Companion for New Students

Authored by Whitney Irwin (Attar)

www.ancientartofbellydance.com

This manual is for students to use as a practice companion, to study the art of belly dance with Attar. The material in this manual is not intended for sale or reproduction without permission of Whitney Irwin. Not every movement or combination is in this manual, but this contains written instruction on what is covered in Attar's classes.

Whitney (Attar) discovered Middle Eastern dances in 1998. Over the years her studies have been diverse from her dedication to study with instructors from Germany, Canada, USA (west coast and east coast).

Leyla Jouvana (Germany), Wendy Buonaventura (England), Aziza (Canada), Roxann (Portland), Jolin (Boston), are some of the fabulous instructors who influence Attar's artistic and technical styles in Middle Eastern dance.

Since 2002, Attar has had the honor of performing with various troupes including Tribal Fusion troupe Ozymandias (Worcester, MA), and the Folkloric Fusion troupes, aDhAM and Tiamat (Greenfield and Amherst MA).

As a soloist, Attar professionally performs American Belly Dance and Egyptian Cabaret at weddings, fairs and festivals. Some venues include The Academy of Music in Northampton MA, Northampton Center for the Arts, Garlic and Arts Festivals in Orange MA, First Night in Worcester MA (Ozymandias), Café Lebanon (Springfield MA), Maximum Capacity (Chicopee, MA), Clarion Hotel (Northampton MA), Art Walks (Brattleboro VT), Boston Underground Film Festival.

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Proper Alignment and Body Mechanics

- **Introduction and Stretch Suggestions**
- **Bell Posture**
- **Feet**
- **Knees**
- **Pelvis and Hips**
- **Ribs**
- **Shoulders**
- **Neck, lower back, shoulders and jaw tension.....**
- **Arms and Hands**
- **Stances**
- **Balancing**

Proper Alignment and Body Mechanics come with time and practice. Following along in class, as well as observing performances that are “live”, and on video can help to develop an understanding of proper body mechanics.

When practicing, pay attention to your tension, where it is and then release it.

When our core runs out of power, we need to give it a break and do a gentle stretch before we continue with our practice.

If our core (abdominals) get taxed, then our lower back can start to ache; indicating that we are using our lower back and not our core strength. This is time to stop and do a gentle stretch, such as Kali’s Stretch or the Yin Yoga stretch (in half lotus). Another stretch for the lower back is to lie on the floor facing the ceiling and hug your knees to your chest and roll slightly from side to side.

Kali’s Stretch is named after Attar’s first teacher, KALI.

1. Stand with arms above head
2. Reach with right arm from the shoulder as you also reach with left hip, then alternate sides.
3. Return to standing with arms up and bend forward to “flat back”.
4. On an exhale bend over to reach for your toes.
5. On an inhale, slowly roll back up, sweeping hair (or imaginary hair) out of face as you return to starting position and then repeat.

A Yin Yoga Stretch

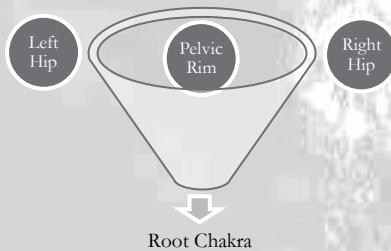
1. Sit on the floor in a half lotus with right foot on the outside.
2. Raise arms above head and inhale.
3. Exhale and lean forward, placing palms on the floor.
4. Adjust the distance of the hands to encourage a back that is not tense or hunched over.
5. Hold and breathe, with each exhale, feel gravity welcoming you closer to the earth.
6. When you’re ready to rise, do so on an inhale, then switch legs and repeat.

-Bell Posture Ribs are “full” of breath, as you exhale; the ribs remain open and filled with “energy”..... lined up from top to bottom are the top and bottom of your skull, top of shoulders, ribs, hips, knees, ankles, feet..... Like a BELL, our ribs’ structure is like the shell of the bell; our spine is what goes down the middle to be connected to the hips which are free to move like the “hammer” of a real bell.

-Our Feet “*The secret of a correct position lies in the feet. A good foundation enables the whole body to find its space and the soul to unfold in harmony*” ~B.K.S IYENGAR

-Our Knees are to be soft and bent, NOT straight as seen in many westernized dance forms. There is a logical reason as the knees allow us to make beautiful hip movements, lowers our center of gravity for control and balance, and acts as “shock absorbers”. Bent knees are more stable and less likely to suffer injury than straightened knees. Note that we should never turn our feet with our knees so as to prevent painful torqueing/twisting of the knee. Using our hips to rotate from is better.

Pelvis and Hips – Our pelvis is like a “bowl”, tipped too far forward or too far backward we can imagine our “bowl” spilling its contents. When we are in a neutral stance, our bowl is “just right”, and level on all its edges.



Our hips are our strong foundation, supporting our upper body and moving our legs. In this dance we initiate our traveling steps from the hips, using our abdominal core to support the back. Many Middle Eastern dancers believe belly dance should be called the hip dance. One trivial fact is that “belly” and “balady” sound similar; many believe that balady dance was misinterpreted as belly dance when seen in America.

-Ribs

Refer back to the “bell” posture as ribs should be open and “light”, filled with energy, even when we exhale. In belly dance, we isolate movements with our ribs that can be fluid or staccato (quick).

Knowing our neutral position for our ribs and upper torso gives us a good starting point.

-Shoulders

Open, Relaxed, and filled with life, our shoulders are part of our upper frame. Shoulder rolls generate “snake arms”, it’s important to have good form while keeping our upper body relaxed, yet strong.

-Neck, lower back, shoulders and jaw

Our neck is a continuation of our spine, our neck is also fragile and should be relaxed and “open”. If tension in our neck, lower back, shoulders or jaw sets in, take a break from what you are doing to relax these areas. Our power is in our core, and any tension may indicate that our core muscles need to be engaged after a rest.

-Arms and Hands

Our arms and hands are to move with intention, grace, and expression. Often times in dance, our arms and eyes are expressing our experience with a performance. Arms help us to define the space around us, frame and draw attention to master the moment. Snake arms, glyph arms, box arms, orange/lotus arms are just a few examples of arms for belly dance. Imagine your arms are hollow hoses that extend out beyond the fingers, filled with light and animated but not tense. Avoid “chicken arms” and “scare crow” arms where there are harsh angles caused by elbows pointed either too far up or too far down.

Snake Arms- Remember to move the arms from the alternating shoulder rolls. Give yourself “walls” to stop at for practice, top wall is at shoulder level and bottom wall is at waist level. Palms are down as arm rises up, and palm is up as arm sinks down.

Lotus Arms – For “inside” lotus arms, drag up the side of your body, to armpit, to ear for a count of 4. Then for “5,6” bring to back of head and “flip”, push up on “7”, then “flip” on “8”. Then drag down to opposite ear, meeting the rising hand on “4”, then let it go down and “forget about it”. For outside lotus arms, bring arm up and around to top of head and “flip” on “8”, then drag down, brushing ear as other arm rises up.

Lotus Hands are figure 8 hands, practice with your veil, spiral it around you, then continue the movement as you drop the veil, and bring hands to wrists touching to create lotus hands. Another way to do is start “palms in”, the turn left to be on top of right with palms facing left, then turn right so back of hands are together, then bring left hand down for both palms to face right, then bring right hand down so palms face in again.

Wave Hands – One hand at a time, palm to finger tips, “kneed the pillow” or “brush the wall”.



Jewels and Buttons

- **3 Lower Sacred Jewels, 3 Upper Sacred Jewels, Root Jewel**
- **Ball of Energy Exercise**

The three **Lower Jewels** are just above the hips. “Lower center” is about 3 inches below your naval, and “lower left” and “lower right”, are each found inside the soft spot just inside each hip bone. The sacred jewels of the lower abdomen are supportive of the lower back by keep the abdominal core engaged.

The three **Upper Jewels** are located just below the bra-line. The “upper central jewel” is located just below the breast bone, where the soft spot is located (below the ribs). The jewels help to support the upper back so our upper body movements do not result in tense shoulders or tension between the soldier blades.

The **Root Jewel** is in the center of your body behind the surface of the lower center. To engage the root is similar to a keegel exercise that helps to strengthen the pelvic floor. Drawing “in and up”.

ALL the buttons can be developed and initiated in body waves such as the camel and the duck. Side buttons/jewels are like a sideways abdominal crunch.

To develop the Sacred Jewels, practice our “ball of energy” exercise and feel them initiate with hip and rib circles and figure 8's.

Any one button may be engaged or released to create a “pop” or “lock” on an accent.

For Horizontal hip circles, engage the lower center button when the hips are circling back. For Horizontal Figure 8 hips, activate the lower left button when the hip is diagonal forward to the right and vice versa.

For Horizontal Rib Circles, activate the upper center button when ribs are back. For Horizontal figure 8 ribs, activate the opposite button for the direction the rib is (rib is forward left, then activate the back/right upper button.



The photo above shows the three upper and three lower sacred jewels on the dancer. Photography of Attar by Alicia Hunsicker.

Ball of Energy Exercise

Was developed by Attar to help bring awareness from our center and then outwards.

Visualize you are holding a ball of light in your cupped hands.

Bring the ball to your belly

Absorb the ball and “feel” it roll around your abdomen.

Feel it travel to your hips, spiral up to your ribs, shoulders, each wrist and spiral back down through your sacred jewels.

Basic Shapes

- Circles
- Waves and figure 8's
- Lines
- Vibrations/Shimmies

-Circles

Horizontal circles and vertical circles,
ovals, clockwise and counter clockwise, as an exercise, find your circles!

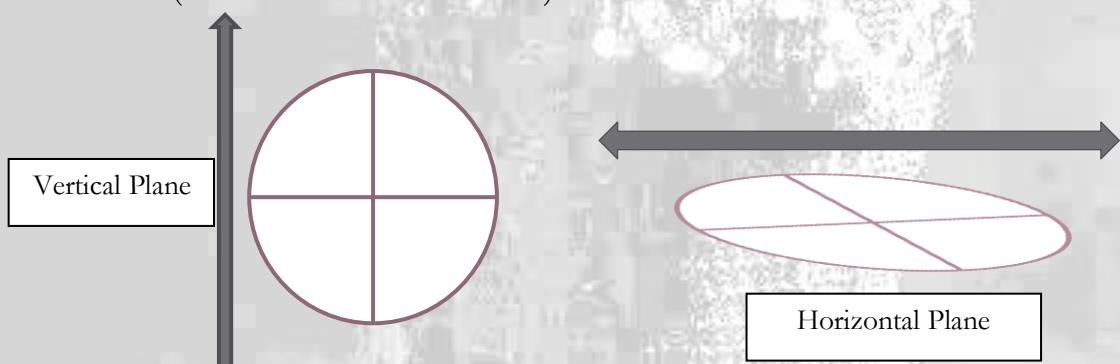
Exercise for finding Circles

Wrist and hand circles

Rib and hip circles

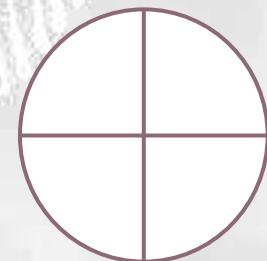
Chin and head circles

Shoulder rolls (one at a time or two at a time)



HORIZONTAL and VERTICAL CIRCLES on the COMPASS

North, horizontal forward or
vertical upward



East, Horizontal
and Vertical Right.

South, Horizontal Backward or
Vertical Downward.

Clockwise **Horizontal Circles**, practice by “sliding” to the “east” (right), then around to the “south”(back), and around to the “west”(left), then around to the “north”(front). To do a Counter-clockwise horizontal hip circle, go in the opposite direction.

Clockwise **Vertical Circles**, practice by “sliding” to the “east” (right), then UP and around to the “north”(up), and around to the “west”(left), then down and around to the “south”(down). To do a Counter-clockwise vertical hip circle, go in the opposite direction.

Waves and Figure 8's



Waves are found in Middle Eastern dance, from body waves, to figure 8 hips and ribs, snake arms and lotus hands. Waves are natural shapes, like water and sound waves for example.

Figure 8's are two waves moving together in opposites,



or the Infinity Symbol ∞

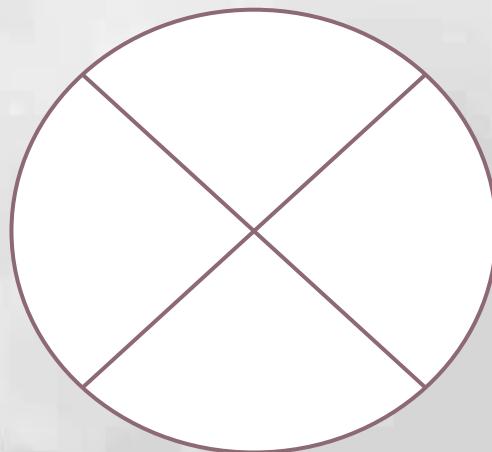
There are Horizontal and Vertical Figure 8 movements, easily seen with the hips and ribs.

Diagonal Moves on the COMPASS MODEL

Figure 8's on the Hips and Ribs can be easily mapped out with a compass model like the circles. The Difference is that the points of interest are the diagonals, rather than the four directions.

NorthWest,
Horizontal/Forward -Left,
Vertical/Upward-Left

NorthEast,
Horizontal/Forward -Right,
Vertical/Upward-Right

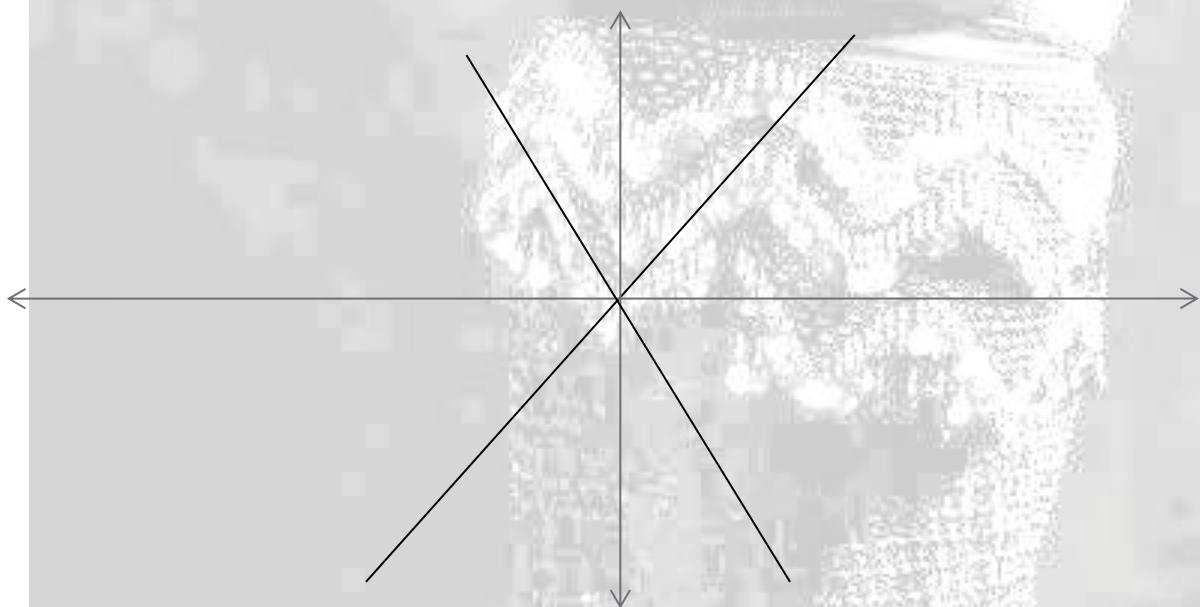


SouthWest,
Horizontal/Backward-Left,
Vertical/Downward-Left

SouthEast,
Horizontal/Backward-Right,
Vertical/Downward-Right

Lines

Lines are either diagonal, vertical or horizontal. Some common dance movements that are “on the lines” are hip and rib slides, hip and rib lifts and drops. Try to keep these movements on the “line” you intend (horizontal, Vertical) to keep them clean and precise.



Vibrations

Vibrations and shimmies can be slower or faster, most popular in belly dance is the hip shimmy. There are many kinds of shimmies. In Belly Dance , shimmies are often times layer on other movements such as hip circles. Layering can help the dancer express the intricacies of the music.

Control Hip Shimmies, $\frac{3}{4}$ shimmies and vibrations are covered in class, to read more about them continue reading.

Elegant Hip Movements

Finding the basic shapes and sacred jewels with our hips

- **Horizontal Hip Movements (Circles, Slides, Figure 8s)**
- **Vertical Hip Movements (Figure 8's, Circles, Lifts/Drops)**
- **Ummies, Hip Circles on the Wobble (Horizontal with a Tilt)**
- **Hip Combinations**

Practice all by standing in basic with both feet flat on the ground, then raise heels off floor, then back to basic, then lower by bending knees and raising heels off the ground to return upwards in standing. Also, try them with gorgeous Left and Right, with a walk, and turning slowly in different directions. Practice while kneeling as well and see what happens!

Horizontal

-Horizontal Hip Circles Practice: Remember the lower/center abdominal button when your hips are “back” on a circle. Keep hips on the horizontal plane, avoid any up/down movement or it will become an “ummy”. Practice making them big in the back with “straighter” knees and cutting across the front. For Raks Sharki Style, horizontal hip circles generally cut across the front to accommodate costuming.

-Horizontal Hip Slides are part of a circle. Thinking of a compass, South is behind you and North is in front of you; Left is West and then Right is East. When sliding hips horizontally to the left, engage diagonal right lower abdominal button, when sliding right you will engage the lower left button.

-Horizontal figure 8 hips are on the same “plane” as the horizontal hip circles, however the points to note are diagonals. Using the compass model, visualize NorthEast as Forward/Right, SouthEast as backward/right, Northwest as forward/left and southwest/as backward/left. In this class we are starting at northeast then around and back to southeast to slide diagonally forward to northwest and around the back to southwest; return back to northeast with a diagonal slide. Remember to stay on the horizontal “plane”.

To turn with the horizontal figure 8 hips, practice starting the “8” going forward, on the right (L),(R), (L), (R), then turn to the (R), follow this pattern around to do $\frac{1}{4}$ turns to face the 4 directions of Right,Back,Left,Front

Po-po turn is a horizontal hip circle AND you are turning around yourself in the opposite direction of the hip circle.

VERTICAL

Vertical Hip Circles

Standing in pedestal pose/gorgeous, present one hip and draw a vertical circle. Pretend a pencil is pointing from the hip to a piece of paper on the wall, and you are creating small circles. Practice in both directions and on both hips.

Vertical Figure 8's

Practice with feet flat and in basic posture at first then experiment.

- Mayas are vertical figure 8 hips, starting on the up to go down, alternating sides.
- “taxime hips” or opposite mayas, start by scooping from down to up, alternating sides.

Hip Lifts and Drops (vertical Line)

Practice in gorgeous, one hip at a time, then alternate hips in basic posture. To turn this movement into a pop, for the right hip, when it goes up, activate diagonal lower right jewel to create a “snap”. To create a downward drop/lock on the right, simply tighten the left glute as the right hip goes down.

Vertical, See Saw Hips, “up and down” hips: The opposite of horizontal slides, the hips “see-saw” down and up. This may be a movement done as an accent with a lock (by tightening the opposite glute) or slowly or even as a shimmy (experiment with fast (doubles) and slower controlled shimmies (singles). In this class we are using vertical hips with a $\frac{3}{4}$ shimmy called typewriter hips.

Typewriter Hips – This is a $\frac{3}{4}$ shimmy that comes from a combination of two layers (when not a traveling step).

SEE SAW HIPS are exactly what they sound like, the hips are alternating moving up and down like a see saw. This hip movement is seen in type writer hips, Arabic control hip shimmy, and piston hips for example.

-Arabic Control Hip Shimmy is a variation of See Saw Hips, the “lead” hip is the right hip and always goes “down” on the beat. Very important to practice standing on alternating feet and walking while not switching the lead hip.

On the Horizontal AND Vertical

Typewriter Hips are a combination of HIP SLIDES and SEE SAW HIPS. This is also a $\frac{3}{4}$ shimmy (based on the count). To execute, slide your hip right and go “down, up, down” then repeat alternating on each side. This can be done in any stance and with a walk for example.

Ummies- are horizontal hip circles that wobble upward on the vertical plane as well. Activating the lower jewels, keeping it tight and controlled are ways to create a beautiful ummy. This movement is rumored to be original to pacific dances, not middle eastern but commonly used in the belly dance community.

Mayas and Taxim Hips are vertical figure 8 hips. Mayas are downward and taxims are upward. Taxim is generally not a term for movement but is descriptive of the loooong dramatic introduction of a middle eastern song that has more harmony than rhythm (typically).

RIB MOVEMENTS

Finding the basic shapes and sacred jewels with our ribs

- **Horizontal Rib Movements (figure 8s, Circles, Slides)**
- **Vertical Rib Movements (circles, lifts/drops)**

Horizontal Hip and Rib Circles are similar, but the ribs are more difficult to isolate for beginners. Be sure to at least visualize the engagement of the upper central “button” when your ribs are lifted up. Practice horizontal rib slides independently to discover your upper diagonal/side buttons as well.

The horizontal hip and rib movements, with the buttons, help to develop the dancers’ core, thus gaining more control and intention in these movements. Bell posture enables the dancer to have a greater range of motion, and soft knees do so for a better range of hip movements. In bell posture, the ribs are open and the shoulders are rounded but rolled back/soft and the shoulder blades are draped down the back. The ribs are the outer casing, like the bell, and the spine is like the rod that is suspended within the bell casing and is free to move naturally. At the bottom of the ribs are the hips; the hips are like the clapper on any ball that rings the bell. The neck is lengthened by the rising of the head. The bottom of the skull is lined up with the top of the shoulders which are lined up with the top of the hips.

Horizontal Figure 8 Ribs, Follow the same rule of the jewels as the hips, but the upper jewels are engaged. Refer back to the model of the compass on the diagonals for the points of interest (ne,se,nw,sw).

Vertical Figure 8 Ribs, are best practiced with the arms crossed in front, covering the chest. Like Maya and Taxim hips, the ribs are moving from up to down or down to up. This movement also creates the sideways body undulations.

Rib Circles are similar in concept to the Hip Circles, regardless of horizontal or parallel.

Slides, Lifts and Drops of the ribs: Be sure not to collapse the upper frame when ribs are downward, no slouching. A drop is more of a release than a drop, a release of the upper central jewel. Or to lift, draw in on the jewel. Sliding side to side with ribs is similar to the mechanics of the hip slides. Engage the upper side button of the opposite side for the slide direction.

Traveling Steps

Double hip drop walk- This traveling step is done with “pigeon” toes, where each foot is placed down on the step with the toes pointing in towards the other foot. Using our hips to lift and place each foot on the ground, every other “drop”. The drop is a vertical “down” movement. In Egyptian influenced belly dance, the dancers “hit’s the beat” on the “down”, unlike in Turkish styles the dancer often hits the beat on the “up”.

To practice the double hip drop without the walk: *Start in “gorgeous” position, weight on the left foot...drop right hip two times, step on right foot and land in gorgeous....drop left hip two times, step on left foot and end in gorgeous.*

To practice double hip drop with the walk...

Start in “gorgeous” position, weight on the left foot...drop right hip, drop hip with step on right foot and land in gorgeous....drop left hip, drop hip with step on left foot and land in gorgeous.

“Step together Step” is a traditional entrance step for Egyptian dancers to enter at the beginning of their routine. Step Right,Left,Right AND Step Left,Right,Left AND.....

Tips: Practice it raks sharki style with very small steps and on the balls of your feet with soft knees, every 2nd step is very small and almost under the elevated heel of the first step. Try putting your hips into it, horizontal figure 8’s.

“step, point” just as it sounds step Right, point Left, step left, point right.... Embellish by sliding hip of the left with the point and do the same with the right,

Dramatic Pauses

The dancer make chose any moment in a movement to dramatically hold and build suspense.

The point at the stars for a long pause

...look to the right, up the arm to the hand extended “to the stars”.... Weight on right leg, left leg extended and shimmering, left arm pointing softly down towards left toes.... Look from the “stars” down “the line” to your extended left foot and hold.

Undulations and Body Waves

Camel, Duck, Side undulations

Camel is a roll up,

Duck is a roll down,

Side undulations may be generated from vertical rib figure 8s..

SHIMMIES

Knee Shimmies/Raks Sharki Style – Great for layering! In basic position, alternate knees, bringing then back, the faster the transition creates a faster shimmy/vibration. Great way to practice is sit on floor with legs extended and hit the floor with the back of the knees.

Then try in the standing position,

Hip Swish Shimmies/Ghawazee Style – Hips swish side/side, forward/back, on the horizontal plane.

Control Hip Shimmies/Arabic Style – see seesaw hips

Shuffle Shimmies/American Belly Dance- with tiny shuffles, move about the room.

Piston Hip Shimmies/Raks Sharki – see saw hips, but on the balls of the feet, foot touches floor as hip goes down on same side. Faster is easier.

Layering Shimmies on movements – practice each of these shimmies on a few hip movements, knee shimmies are often the easiest to layer with.

Shimmers- Tighten one arm and feel it tremble as the muscles contradict one another. Experiment on each arm, leg, entire body.



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