



St Louis Belly Dance! Mid-east dance in the Mid-West!

About STLBD: Performers : Teachers : Venues : Events : Contact Links

May Dancer of the Month:
Sumaiya!



STLBD: What brought you to belly dance?

Sumaiya: I recently remembered that I had actually been invited up to dance by a belly dancer at an event during high school! However, I credit the defining moment to a later experience in college - I was awed by a belly dance troupe that performed at a Renaissance Faire in Sarasota, FL. I went to speak with them after their performance and grilled them on their history, available classes, etc. I then found a spectacular instructor in Sarasota who taught me for two years (see below). I have also been greatly inspired by my instructor in St. Louis, Diana of Simone's 7th Veil Dance Studio, and

have really appreciated her emphasis on traditional Egyptian-style belly dance and on dancing from the heart.

STLBD: What style of dance do you enjoy the most?

Sumaiya: Egyptian cabaret belly dancing, Latin salsa dancing, and just general groovin?!

STLBD: Who was your first teacher?



Sumaiya: Tahja, in Sarasota, FL, was my first teacher (www.tahja.com). Her style is cabaret with a Turkish flair. She is still performing up a storm there, dancing and teaching styles from the Middle East to Polynesia, including belly dance, Spanish Flamenco, Ukrainian and Russian dance, as well as dance and music for German Oktoberfest, Mardi Gras and Caribbean Carnival celebrations and Hawaiian luaus! And, just as in St. Louis, the number of talented troupes in Sarasota have blossomed in recent years, so that there are numerous belly dance events and festivals throughout the year.

STLBD: What inspired you to create the Girls Night In Belly Dance Party?

Sumaiya: About 2 years ago, some girl friends of mine and I started a monthly "Ladies Night" where we each "host" a party one Friday a month. Of course, for my month, I hosted a Middle Eastern-themed party with belly dance classes and hip scarves for everyone! It worked so well and I was convinced that other girls around town would also likely enjoy the idea. And, it has been a big hit! I have taught at other Girls Night events, at surprise one-time events, and birthday parties. The unique "women-only" atmosphere creates a truly inspiring and, at times, pretty wild event!

STLBD: You teach classes now. What are your hopes for your students?

Sumaiya: I have had a couple of students that knew from the beginning that they wanted to perform, and so focused their training on performance-level dance. However, for most of my students, I simply want them to feel comfortable with their bodies, feel sexy and free, get exercise, laugh, and have fun!

STLBD: Who is your favorite dancer?

Sumaiya: As I become interested in new styles and new music, I am always being amazed by new dancers. However, I would have to say that both Jillina and Aziza have been strong favorites for several years. Jillina's drum solos are quite impressive and Aziza's spirit is incredible. I have also recently been taken with Bozenka! She is so talented and graceful, you can't take your eyes off of her!



STLBD: You've written "The Birth of Belly Dance". Do you plan on writing more about belly dance in general?

Sumaiya: The Birth of Belly Dance is actually the first chapter of a 240-page thesis on the history of belly dancing! Writing that was a thoroughly exhilarating experience, and I learned a great deal. I've done a lot of writing over the years, and I think my focus lately has been more on telling stories through my dance rather than through the written word. In fact, I often compare my learning and performing of belly dance to speaking a different language. With dance, I am learning to draw an audience in, tell a story, communicate my emotions and share them with those around me.

STLBD: What do environmentally conscious building practices and belly dance have in common?

Sumaiya: My respect for nature and desire to help others understand and protect it has been heavily influenced by my exposure as a child to the Native American way of respecting and honoring Mother Earth. Belly dance, a dance that celebrates the body and its life-giving capabilities, has allowed me to experience myself as a part of nature. This is the story of the very essence of life: its creation, its cessation, its part on the Great Wheel of life!

STLBD: How was your thesis accepted? Hopefully, the scholarly approach was taken seriously.

Sumaiya: The thesis was received very well. My sponsoring professor was an expert in Greek classics, and so really appreciated the research into the culture of ancient goddess worship and ritual. The larger community was simply fascinated with the hypothesis of belly dancing roots going back to the dawn of humanity!

From the thesis:

Women, "the carriers of life" were naturally associated with fertility and birth from the beginning. The primary cyclic ritual, closely tied to the survival of a community was that of planting and harvest. Women were linked with this cycle as they were typically the ones that cultivated and prepared the food, but more significantly, their very own bodies responded to their own cycles and were a source of food and life. The dance of women, therefore, was rooted in these primal functions. Women were entrusted with the dances for planting cycles, with rain dances, harvest dances, birth dances, girls' puberty ceremonies, mourning rituals, and moon worship, and were often the only participants.

STLBD: What are your plans for the future?

Sumaiya: Hopefully lots of dancing!



www.sumaiyadance.com