

An Introduction to Belly Dance:

Belly Dance (*Raqs Sharqi* is Arabic for “Dance of the East” or “Oriental Dance”) is a term for a beautiful feminine dance form from the Middle East. Its movements are thousands of years old and are based on traditional folk dances. *Raqs Sharqi* today combines elements of dance from along the “Silk Road”— Persia, India, the Middle East and North Africa. Traditionally it was performed in the home by women for women at their women only parties. Today, though it has moved to the stage for public entertainment, it can still be found in its traditional setting of the home.

Belly Dance differs from Western dance forms in the use of the body by emphasizing the torso and using isolations to express the rhythmic and emotional qualities of Arabic music.

Traditionally, it is an improvised solo dance — a dancer’s personal interpretation of the music. Though there are traditional steps and movements associated with *Raqs Sharqi*, how the dancer uses these tools to interpret the music comes from her heart.

The term “Belly Dance” is a misnomer for a dance that involves the whole torso. *Raqs Sharqi* was first introduced to the United States at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. The Victorians first ignored the performances of the dancer named Little Egypt until the hawkker called it "Belly Dance," and then they came in droves!

To learn more about Belly Dance, visit www.zulaika.net/instruction.htm

Watch YouTube videos of:

Egyptian Dancers

- 1930-50: Tahia Carioca, Samya Gamal, Naima Akef
- 1950-80: Mona El Said, Soheir Zaki, Nagwa Fouad, Nelly, Hannan, Aza Sharif, Fifi Abdu, Nadia Hamdi, Aida Nour
- 1990 on: Dina, Lucy, Randa Kamal , Aziza, Camilia,

Lebanese Dancers:

- 1950-70: Nadia Gamal
- 1990 on: Amani, Samara

Egyptian Folk Dances:

- Mahmoud Reda Folkloric Troupe

Dance Videos

- Dances of Egypt, by Aisha Ali <http://www.aisha-ali.com/araf/index.html>
- Dances of North Africa, by Aisha Ali <http://www.aisha-ali.com/araf/index.html>
- National Geographic’s “Cairo Unveiled” (Belly Dance in Egypt) <http://www.natgeoeducationvideo.com/film/986/cairo-unveiled>

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