

THE ART OF THE BELLY DANCE

By Shayne Niehaus (Goddess-in-the-making)

The Art of Living Festival is always such a vibrant affair and a confirmation that the planet is indeed peopled by many and varied life-forms of all manner of persuasions! It was at the 2004 festival during lunchtime that the sound of joyous Arabian music enticed me away from my post at the Aura-Soma stand to join a growing and appreciative audience. I'd never seen belly dancers in action before and was transfixed. *'Did Mother nature intend us to move like that?!'*, I mused to myself, idly entertaining a vision of *'Moi'* in similar sensual attire – only my audience was Mel Gibson! Another demonstration later in the year during Shape magazine's Wellness Day sealed the deal. I was well and truly hooked. I resolved then and there – come what may - I was going to find me an instructor and get in touch with my own Inner Sexpot.

Please, Dear Reader, bear in mind that my 'mortal vehicle' has not seen anything resembling exercise since long before the time when 'chips' meant deep-fried potatoes, and not electronic devices. My waistline is but a distant memory – something came along one night and stole that along with my hips, replacing the originals with miserable imitations. I recently did find them however; they were on Charlize Theron at the time. I console myself now with the belief that the weight problem stems solely from being disadvantaged in the *height department*.

Nevertheless, when I mentioned my desire to learn belly dance to my Significant Other, collapse did he into knee-slapping hysterical laughter, guffawing wildly at self-made, silly little puns about the idea being 'belly funny' to 'belly ridiculous' and thanks so much for the 'belly laugh!' *'And pray tell, dear wife, where are we to fit a 'blerry pole into our little boudoir?!' Pole? Pole?!?! Ooh boy....* at that point I could quite easily imagine at least one place I'd like to put it...

I have however always loved to dance, although my own personal version of this form of self-expression is a cross between a head-banging rock-and-roller and The Birdie Song. Having about as much bodily rhythm as four-hour *rigour mortis*, the art of dance has always eluded me. As a qualified Kinesiologist, I have noticed that clients who dance or enjoy yoga regularly, tend to have more stable meridians and energy centres and so I believe that if we are able to move our bodies with fluidity, rhythm, grace and with ease, we are then more able perhaps, to move in sync through our life's ebbs and flows. Aside from that, I knew that for personal reasons, I myself needed to get a serious exercise programme underway. Trouble was, the words 'exercise' and 'enjoy' are never uttered in the same sentence by Yours Truly. I also knew my programme had to be inherently 'fun' to have any chance of longevity. So, having determined that belly-dance was my ticket to an extreme makeover, the universe obliged my request when finally I found classes right on my doorstep as luck would have it, and the 4th June saw me arrive at my first class having dragged my daughter along for moral support (more like mortal support – would the knees stand the pressure?!)

So in walks Instructor Goddess and I'm thinking, *'Ye Gods, if this is what the 'sacral swing' does to the bod, bring it on!'* Tenille commenced with an explanation of the various stomach muscles and where to find them. Did I mention that I'd lost mine the same time as the hips and the waist?? I glanced surreptitiously across at my daughter - *where on earth did she inherit that rhythm from*, I thought? It defies explanation in the light of the fact that my Significant Other is less of a dancer than I – he opted for a cheese and wine to avoid all possibilities of a boogie at our wedding for Pete's sake. Then a demonstration on neck movements followed; she of the swan-like proportions moving her neck gracefully and elegantly side to side. Then it was everyone else's turn. The loud, very audible clicks emanating from my neck drew worried glances from my 14-year young offspring. I consoled myself in the knowledge that my chiropractic appointment was only a week away. Inner Sexpot?? You have got to be joking – an hour of this and I'll be no good for anything other than the *lie-back-and-think-of-England* position....

Shimmys?! Oh great, this was something I could surely do; I had all the right wobbly bits after all. Trouble was, it didn't quite look the same when I tried it. My ever-so tactful offspring whispers, *'the loo is next to the front door, Mum'*. Oh Lordy do I need help!!

'Right', says Instructor Goddess, *'we are going to put it all together now'*. This was all proving to be a co-ordination nightmare of note! All communication between brain and body was disintegrating fast and I was beginning to look more and more like a chicken with hemorrhoids. However I have to say that by the end of the lesson, both I and my body re-discovered parts of us long forgotten. Trying very hard to conceal extremely wobbly legs on the verge of critical collapse, I mustered a reasonably dignified exit. The following day was something else – any movement at all drew alarm and severe protest from all 600 muscles which belly-dancing is purported to use – trust me when I say I felt them *all*. A new respect for the belly dancers of the world was growing.

It's a week later and I've survived my second class. Whilst I have suffered the week-long, pitying gaze of my Boerboel as I practiced a still undignified 'shimmy', my bearing does has a lighter spring to it. I have a sense that somewhere, deep inside, is a Goddess-in-the making. So to the sisterhood I say – let us all be upstanding and raise our 'cups' heavenward in celebration of being Woman! The Sensual Revolution has just begun.

