

Baraka: For the Love of the Dance

by Ayshah

A crowd of 700 people hushed as the music started and Baraka danced her first solo steps as a professional bellydancer. The positive response from the audience not only was overwhelming, but also was an inspiration. That was in 1998, on a ship sailing the waters of Turkey, and from that moment Baraka knew her love affair with the art of bellydance would be eternal.



appearance. Bellydance is one of the only dances where your body type is immaterial (in fact, it is one of the few dance forms where voluptuousness is valuable). Whenever I dance, people seem to find me beautiful no matter where I am on the body-size continuum. After years of this positive reinforcement, I have finally found some peace with my body.” Baraka

I first met Baraka when she came to perform in a Hafla I hosted at the Casablanca Restaurant in Philadelphia, PA in October of 2005. We had been corresponding through e-mail for several months and I was thrilled when she said that she would be attending my Hafla show! I was impressed with Baraka’s grace, technique, and her ability. In addition to her talent as a dancer Baraka is more importantly an outstanding human being. She has a huge heart and cares about the well being of those around her. She gladly helped me prepare for my performances and gave me the extra push I needed to feel inspired to dance my best at the Hafla in spite of all the stress that often comes along with being a host.

Born in Harrisburg, PA, Baraka currently lives in New York City. She has a BA degree in History and Anthropology, and a MS degree in Library Science. She has been studying Bellydance since 1997 with such teachers as Anahid Sofian, Morocco, Tayyar Akdeniz, Artemis Mourat, Aisha Ali, AVAZ Dance Company (Dr. Anthony Shay), and Ghawazee. Baraka also studies bellydance and the cultures of the Middle East through scholarly research and international travel (including trips to Morocco, Turkey, Israel, and most recently Egypt). Baraka performs American Tribal, Oriental, Egyptian, Turkish, Moroccan, and Tunisian styles of Bellydance.

An aspect of Bellydance that attracted Baraka is the fact that women of all shapes and sizes are treasured and respected as beautiful dancers. “I always have suffered from low self-esteem, especially during the formative teenage years. The boys in high school didn’t know what to do with me (intelligent, tall, and attractive), but I didn’t understand that and blamed the absence of attention to physical flaws. I briefly became anorexic, and for many years thereafter I never felt comfortable with my physical

works to impart this vital salubrious aspect of bellydance to her students and fellow dancers.

In spite of the positive aspects Bellydancing brings to her life, Baraka has had her share of frustrating and disheartening experiences. She has been faced numerous times with the misunderstanding that Bellydancers are sex objects, she has dealt with mean spirited dancers who are self serving, she has known teachers who did not want to promote or help their students become solo artists, and she has come across a number of restaurant owners who pay their dancers disgustingly low rates. “You will have amazing experiences bellydancing, and meet many exemplary wonderful people, but there are times, as in all aspects of life, when the negative appears to loom larger than the good. At those moments it is the love of the dance, and your own personal self-satisfaction with it, that keeps you going,” Baraka said.

Shows that stand out to Baraka the most are those where she makes positive contact with her audience. Baraka describes one of her most special performance memories: “I was once dancing at a restaurant where a Palestinian woman and her little girl were eating. I love dancing with kids, so I started dancing next to the little girl. Well, she was being very shy, as children are apt to be, and was somewhere in between watching me ecstatically and hiding behind her chair. I will never forget the mother’s words to her daughter. She said, ‘Don’t be shy. What she is doing is beautiful. Her dancing is something to be celebrated and cherished.’ I hope some day to hear all mothers saying that to their children.” This moment has stayed with Baraka and is a rewarding experience that keeps her dancing!

Baraka’s Bellydance career goals are to learn as much ethno-historical information about the dance

as she can, to travel as much as possible, to keep educating people about the beauty and cultural value of Bellydance, and most of all to ENJOY her dancing!

Baraka's sincere heart and passion for the art truly shine through in her performances.

You may visit Baraka's web site at: www.barakadance.net.

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