

# What is bellydance?

## Come see for yourself!

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Correspondent

**W**hen I first started looking into bellydance, I learned vastly different stories and found myself confused about what the historical truth of this ancient art really is. One of my college professors told me that bellydancing began in the harems of the sultans, when hundreds of wives had to compete for their husband's affection.

A bellydance teacher told me it was a Gypsy tradition where women danced to get coins thrown at them by people passing by on the streets, hoping to collect enough money to have a significant dowry.

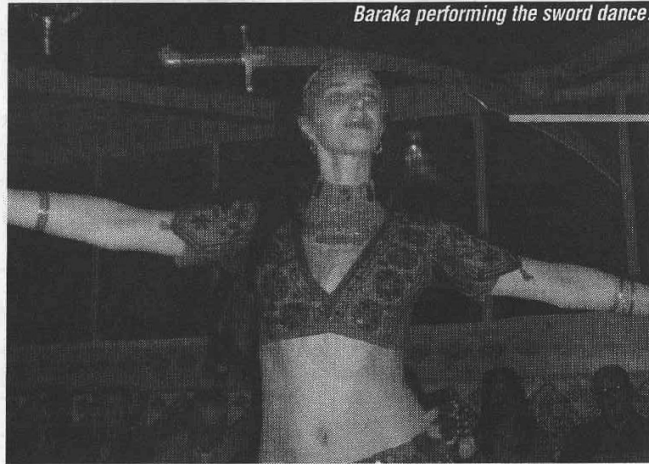
Some bellydancers have expressed to me with sheer passion and sincerity that bellydancing originated as a primitive birth ritual. Still others believe that this was the sacred dance of the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis. After all of these opinions and stories, I decided to focus on bellydance in America — for it seems that the

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*At right, Ayshah, organizer and principal dancer at Ayshah's Hafia, is all poetry in motion. Below, celebrated bellydancer Vasha Hatal, pictured here doing a difficult backbend, will also perform at Ayshah's Hafia.*



Baraka performing the sword dance.



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true origins of bellydancing will remain legend and theory.

One of the most famous bellydance shows in the history

of the country is the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. It was shocking to society at that time,

because people expected women's bodies to remain rigid in corsets and voluminous skirts that covered a lady's toes.

Although the bellydancers at the fair were fully clothed, it was startling to see sensual, snake-like movements

and obvious hip motions performed.

Bellydancers were often labeled "exotic dancers," which led to a common

misunderstanding about the dance and made it appear less than authentic.

This stereotype is based on the fact that bellydancing came from exotic lands, foreign to 19th century North American society.

Bellydancing is indeed an exotic dance, rich with

history and cultural beauty. However, it is not an erotic

dance, meant to be sexually enticing.

The timeless language of a bellydancer's movements is her art. If the dance is performed by an authentic artist of bellydance, it can be more sophisticated and profound and more infused with eloquence than the spoken word.

Those who would like to experience bellydancing for themselves can do so this weekend at Ayshah's Hafla at Casablanca Restaurant. Hafla means celebration, and Ayshah is the principal dancer and organizer of this festive event, whose purpose is to entertain the public with several variations on this ancient art. Various dancers including Ayshah plan to perform.

### IF YOU GO

#### Ayshah's Hafla

will take place at Casablanca Restaurant, 7557 Haverford Ave., Philadelphia, Saturday, Nov. 4, 7 p.m. Tickets: \$35, includes 7-course Moroccan dinner & bellydancing performances. Info: 215-878-1900 or info@ayshah.com or www.ayshah.com.

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