



AHLAM ACADEMY 
MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE 

THE
ART & BUSINESS
OF
BELLY DANCE
ENTERTAINMENT

An Essential Guide for Belly Dancers

by
Anna L. Schkade-Siytangco

AHLAMACADEMY.COM

This is a work of creative nonfiction. Names and details have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

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Email: info@AhlamAcademy.com

Mailing Address: Oriental Phoenix Arts - 17440 FM 529 #107B Houston, TX 77095

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Photo by Diego Valenzuela

THE AUTHOR
ANNA L. SCHKADE-SIYTANGCO
FOUNDER / LEAD INSTRUCTOR
AHLAM ACADEMY OF MIDDLE EASTERN DANCE

A LITTLE ABOUT ME

I was born and raised in the Southeast Texas town of Port Arthur. My childhood was mostly uneventful, but things got much more interesting when I moved to Washington state and began my adult life, working in the information technology (IT) industry.

During an office holiday party at a Greek restaurant, while working as a Network Administrator / Database Developer for a charitable organization, I discovered belly dancing. Soon after seeing my first belly dance show, I decided to try a few classes. As luck would have it, the closest teacher – Jaleh - was the same dancer I saw at the Greek Restaurant.

From day one, I was obsessed. It wasn't long until I was asked to join Jaleh's student troupe, and started performing at recitals and local events, despite having terrible stage fright. Soon after that, I began creating my own choreography. Sadly, after my first choreography's debut, stage fright got the best of me and I quit dancing for a time.

But I kept taking lessons and learning all I could from many different award-winning teachers. After watching my dance friends continue to perform, I eventually mustered up the courage to try again. Deciding to dance through the fear by performing in 20 shows no matter how frightened I was. By the 18th show, while still fearful, yet courageous, I had felt I'd gained enough comfort on stage to continue performing.

Since overcoming my fears, I have continued to study with many master teachers from the US, Egypt, and around the world. In 2005, I began teaching and by 2007, I quit my career in IT to focus on studying dance full time. I continued to performed at many different venues like, restaurants, dance events, and stage shows.

In 2008, I moved back to Texas (Houston) and started teaching full time, gaining lots of experience teaching the art, as well as producing dance shows. Eventually, I opened a studio *Oriental Phoenix Arts* with my husband (a martial arts instructor) and created the Ahlam Academy program.

In addition, I have been a guest and teacher at belly dance conventions, as well as a featured artist in two Keti Sharif productions.

I love food-travel shows, day-tripping, and hanging out with my cats.



DEDICATION

To my parents Glenn and Doris Schkade
for always supporting me.

To my husband Blue
for taking this picture and partnering
with me in making our dreams come true.

To my brother and sisters Michael, Marlaina, and Tiffany
for inspiring me and being equally unstoppable.

P R E F A C E

When a new dancer begins belly dance lessons, they usually have no idea of the potential vastness of the art form known as *belly dance* in the west and as *Raqs Sharqi* or *Oriental dance* in the Middle East. Thanks to the west's long history of Orientalism, portraying the middle east in media and entertainment as the home of savage religious zealots and harem girls dancing seductively for the sultan's attention, women of the west often have an inaccurate view of what belly dancing is and what it could offer them when they first consider taking lessons. This is an unfortunate reality for all involved, both those interested in learning dance, as well as for those who teach it.

As a teacher, I often feel that it is an uphill battle to meet the expectations of those who come to learn a dance that often exists in their minds as an orientalist fantasy. While some new students are disappointed with what they find, quite a few are pleasantly surprised that belly dance is an art that offers limitless opportunity for those wanting community, knowledge and personal development.

This *first taste* of the real thing is only the beginning. As dancers continue their education, there is indeed even more knowledge to be learned and experiences to be had. A dancer's education never stops for those who wish to present this folkloric dance on the performance stage, and especially for those that want to make dance performance a career.

Over the last 5 years, I've created the most comprehensive belly dance program I could conceive. Despite my earnest efforts, I knew there was still important knowledge left to be shared about the world of belly dance performance and business that didn't fit easily elsewhere within the Ahlam Academy program, to the depth and breadth that I felt would do the subject justice. This book was created to fill in those gaps for my own students and to aid anyone else who wishes to become a better dance performer or professional dancer.

"A dancer's education never stops"

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