

WAMEDA

Washington Area Mid-East Dance Association, Inc.

Volume 39 Number 2

May – August 2016



WAMEDA

For membership information, please visit <http://www.wameda.org> or visit us on Facebook.

WAMEDA is an organization dedicated to preserving and promoting interest in Middle Eastern dance, dance culture, and music. Membership is open to all persons who share these interests.

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

Articles and ads: Your article or ad must be in Word (.doc) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) format. Photos must be in .jpg or .pdf format. Please email your article and any accompanying photos to Shagoura at sechallis@verizon.net. Include the name of your article; the author; the name(s) of person(s) in your photos; and the name of the photographer.

Please be aware that your articles may be edited for readability and to fit space limitations. The Editor (who is, in her everyday life, actually an editor) is willing to work with you to develop your draft into an article, but be warned: her patience is limited.

Note: Articles may be reprinted if credit is given to the newsletter and author. The views expressed by contributors do not reflect those of the editorial staff or Executive Board and in no case represent an official WAMEDA, Inc. position.

AD RATES per issue

Display ads must be camera ready. We must receive your payment before your ad is published.

Full page	\$30.00
Half (1/2) page	\$15.00
Quarter (1/4) page	\$8.00
Business card	\$8.00

COVER

Cover photo: Performer and teacher Antonia (Antonia Monokrousos) performs at the Art of the Belly convention in Ocean City, Maryland, in 2013.

See the Table of Contents for Antonia's article, "There Was a Little Girl Who Loved to Dance and Twirl."

2016 WAMEDA, Inc.

Officers

President: Susannah Challis (Shagoura)
VP Membership: Verna Thompson (Cha L'Mar)
VP Programming: open
Treasurer: Dorsey Vengrouskie (PegLeg Meg, Hadria Bajack)

Appointed Positions

Librarian: Joyce Jackson (Jamil Bient)
Newsletter Editor/Webmaster: Susannah Challis

Executive Board

Chair: Gerson Kuhr (The Fitness Pharaoh)
Board Members:
Gerson Kuhr
Dorsey Vengrouskie
Jerry Thompson
Susannah Challis

All WAMEDA Members are welcome to come to any WAMEDA meeting. To find out when the next meeting will be held, please email Gerson Kuhr at gekuhr@msn.com.



Samarra, Persia. Painting at Jausaq al-Khaqani Palace. From The Formation of Islamic Art by Oleg Grabar.

Table of Contents

Inside this issue:

A Novice Traveler in the Mideast (cont'd) by Zarifa Sa'id	2
There Was a Little Girl ... by Antonia	7
Excerpt from an Interview with Mary Ellen Donald by Bedia	9
“Has Anyone Seen My Harem Pants?” Cartoons by Carolyn Brown	10
What is <i>Tahtib</i> ?	11
Recipe: Egyptian Lentil Soup	11
Goodbye to Dancer	12
The Club Scene	13

Advertisements:

Doris Elias: Makeup Artist	6
Latifa – Classes/Lesson/Coaching	12
Mao Murakami: Belly Dance Costume Making 101	9



Message from the Editor

Dear WAMEDA Members:

My thanks and acknowledgement go to those whose contributions appear in this issue: Libby Parker (Zarifa Sa'id), Antonia Monokrousos, Bedia, Carolyn Brown, and Verna Thompson.

My apologies for the lateness of this issue: my home is in chaos due to a major renovation. Monitoring the progress of the work is so absorbing that I've found it difficult to concentrate on anything else!

Readers, the WAMEDA Newsletter is so much richer with YOUR contributions! Please contact me at sechallis@verizon.net with your ideas and articles. With your help, WAMEDA can continue to produce a quality newsletter.

-- Susannah Challis (Shagoura)



A Novice Traveler's Introduction to the Mideast

by Zarifa Sa'id (Libby Parker)

This is the conclusion of Libby's delightful adventures in Morocco and Egypt. This article is a reprint from the WAMEDA Newsletter of October 1981 through August 1983. It is reprinted with permission of the author. It has been slightly condensed from the original to fit the format of this magazine.

June 17, 1981. Today our van is waiting for us in an alley, so we get a fascinating glimpse of life off the main streets. There's a back alley market for tomatoes, bread and meat. We see an interesting example of interpersonal dynamics: our driver doesn't know how to back up the van, so after much discussion that includes our guide and several bystanders, two volunteers turn the van around for our driver, and then we're off! Our boat ride on the Nile is interesting. We see a variety of life along the riverbanks: thatched huts with water buffaloes stand in front of high rise apartment buildings. Near the outskirts of the city are brick-making plants. The slow pace of the boat ride is a relief from the hectic days so far.

By 1:00pm, we return to our hotel to check out. On our way to drop off our luggage at the Green Valley Tour office, we pass through an alley so lined with cars that there is only one lane for traffic. About halfway through, we come to an Egyptian standoff as our van comes face to face with a Mercedes travelling the opposite direction. By this time, there are cars following both our van and the Mercedes. After exchanging insults for a few minutes, the driver of the Mercedes makes it clear that under no condition will he back up his car. He steps out of the car and stands to one side, arms crossed and scowling. By now, an American passenger is sputtering and fuming and informing our driver that he is a fool to have come into this alley. Just then, the amazing – in our eyes – begins to happen: the cars behind the two vehicles begin to inch backward. Some manage to pull up on the curb or into small spaces, and a path is cleared for the Mercedes. Slowly, everyone passes through this maze, and traffic flows again. The other Americans on the bus grouse about the time that had been "wasted," but Diana, Al and I agree that the whole interchange was a fascinating example of another culture's dynamics. In the meantime, a policeman wanders upon the scene. Assessing that our driver was the underdog, the policeman writes him a ticket! Nonchalantly, we begin to unpack our luggage while the driver bribes the policeman to tear up the ticket.



Adapted from travel.nationalgeographic.com

Our guide takes us to a nearby restaurant for lunch. I have *babaghanouj* that tastes like peanut butter and good pita bread. I also order vegetables and an Egyptian specialty, grilled pigeon. The pigeon appears, head and feet intact, split in half and grilled for maybe 30 seconds on each side (in other words, raw). I enjoy the veggies! After lunch, we return to the travel agency, where we repack our bags so that we can leave most of them at the agency and not have to bring them with us to Luxor, Aswan and Abu Simbel.

Our guide hails us a taxi and gives directions to the driver, who speaks very little English. Al sits in front, and Diana and I sit in back. During the trip, the driver attempts conversation. It soon becomes clear that he is curious about the relationship among the three of us. We think we have succeeded in explaining that Al and Diana are married and that I am a friend. The driver suggests that he accompany us to Upper Egypt and then back home to the US. When that idea falls flat, he proposes that we all go to a hotel "sawa, sawa." We are more astonished than amused, and now we've learned a new expression: "sawa" means "together." When we refuse, he doubles his rate, drops us off, and drives away in a huff.

By 7:00pm, we're on a new German train, headed to Upper Egypt. We're delighted with the small seating compartments, like a train in a European movie. Diana and I share a compartment, and Al shares his with a Frenchman. The porter brings us dinner and wine, and later, returns to make up our beds. We spend the night in the best accommodations of the trip so far. Neighboring compartments house a bevy of American high school teachers on tour. The evening takes on the air of a slumber party.

June 18, 1981. We catch our first glimpse of Upper Egypt in the morning half-light. The countryside is beautiful – lush green fields with water standing in them; horizon framed by mountains; olive trees and date palms; and houses that are primitive but in good repair. Houses are tucked together and enclosed with a common wall in

the middle of fields. We are served our first good breakfast since leaving the US: real omelets and good coffee. How important these little things can become when you're travelling!

By 7:00am we arrive in Luxor, where we're met by horse-drawn carriages and our tour arranger. We're thrilled by the carriages. Only later do we find out that this is the primary mode of transportation in Luxor. We are driven through the dirt streets of the awakening town, to the Mina Hotel on the bank of the Nile. We'll be able to have coffee on the patio and gaze across the Nile at the Valley of the Kings.

After an hour's rest, we join other tourists to visit the west bank of the Nile. We stop at Queen Hatshepsut's temple, where I see friezes depicting a journey to Somaliland to acquire henna. Our next stop is at the Valley of the Kings. I am disappointed in the tiny valley. We go into Tutankhamen's small tomb and then the tombs of both Ramesses V and VI. I find the artwork here cruder and far less appealing than that at Saqqara. Here, the focus seems to be mainly on the afterlife.



Queen Hatshepsut's temple

At an ill-prepared rest stop in the Valley, we take a break from touring. Without ice, the Cokes are tepid and provide little relief from the heat. The last straw is the bathroom accommodations: the washroom attendant is a man! Since there's no running water, he follows us into the lavatory area with a can of water. He intends to wait near the sinks while we're in the toilet booth, and then he'll pour the water into the toilet after we use it. He'll do all this in

exchange for a gratuity. This is too much for my overdeveloped sense of modesty.

While waiting for the ferry, we're accosted by vendors. Boys and young men rub my arm, grab my hand, and expect me to kiss them. One informs me that I am worth six hundred camels. I'm definitely growing weary of this game. I'm not sure if I'm subjected to it because they think American women are stupid and loose or simply because I am too polite to them.

On the ferry trip across the Nile, we talk with our guide, Mr. Saleh. He is meticulously garbed in sparkling white and has the demeanor of a teacher. He becomes stern and impatient with tour members who ask questions that show they have not been listening. He has named me "*Nefer-n-nefer*," which he says means "most beautiful." We tell him that we're interested in dance, and he says he's a *tahtib* dancer in his village and works frequently with the Benat Maazin. He offers to arrange tea for us! We are excited, although a bit apprehensive, wondering what it will cost us.

We return to our rooms, which are not luxurious but are air conditioned, and we sleep until evening. It's the first good sleep we've had since arriving in Egypt. After a five-course dinner, Al returns to his room to sleep. Diana and I feel adventurous, so we decide to look for the markets. As we walk into town, away from the Nile and the tourist area, we meet a young rabbi from the DC area. He is touring with a group, but right now, he's out exploring on his own. We decide to explore together. It's fortunate that we do because it soon becomes obvious that no women are out and about. The young man's presence is only a small deterrent to the hordes of teenage boys who follow us, asking outrageous questions such as, "You like to f---? Egyptian f--- very good." One youth is so persistent that I grow angry enough to overcome my polite reserve. I threaten to go to the police and turn back toward a police station we have just passed. He is reluctantly convinced but is genuinely perplexed by my attitude. After this, a more sophisticated young man joins our company. He refrains from making lewd suggestions to Diana and me, but he is quite persistent in trying to get us to visit his store to buy goods. Later, we discover that he was also attempting to pimp for the rabbi, a suggestion that offers us a good deal of amusement as we close the evening by sitting on a veranda overlooking the Nile and drinking beer.

June 19, 1981. Diana and I have breakfast on the hotel patio and watch the boat landing directly across from us. This seems to be the landing spot for villagers bringing wares to market from the other side of the Nile. It's a fascinating potpourri of people: women swathed in black with sequins winking from underneath; girls wearing lengthy flowered dresses, pants and scarves; black carriages with brass hands of Fatima tinkling from their covers; men in jellabiyas; and the Nile moving blue and serene behind them all.

Diana and I spend the morning shopping. Prices are better off the main street, so we peruse the back alleys. The whole town is unpaved and dusty. Fabrics for sale are so dusty that they must be pounded before we can inspect them. We find some nice fabric and get very good prices. I buy a black net dress cut in typical Luxor style, with sequins all over the front and a long net shawl that has crocheted spangled fringe. From talking with

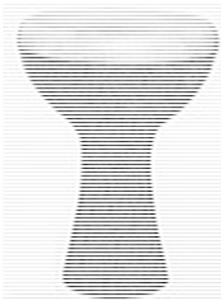
vendors, we learn that men often hold two jobs – day and evening. We are fascinated by evidence of encroaching Western culture, demonstrated by men carrying transistor radios that blare the call to prayer.

In the afternoon, we join the tour group to visit the Temples of Karnak and Luxor. Our guide, Mr. Saleh, tells us more about the *tahtib* (stick dance). He says it is a martial arts sport. Score is kept by a referee; blows to the head and armpit count as points. Every village, he said, has a *tahtib* “hero,” and he is pitted against the “heroes” from other villages. Finally, our scholarly guide takes me aside to point out a picture of the god of fertility with his thirty-centimeter penis and to inform me that his own is almost as long. Several sarcastic comments flit through my mind, but I am too astonished to seize upon any of them. As I stand speechless, Mr. Saleh laughs, and we return to our group.



Later that day, Mr. Saleh arranges a carriage to take us to the Benat Maazin’s house. We are amazed that it is so easy, and off we go. We pass through filthy streets alongside drainage ditches that are open sewers, into a dilapidated part of town. Finally, we stop in front of a door that is considerably nicer than the others on the street. Two beautiful women come out on the balcony, and our driver tells them that we want to meet Shadia Maazin. There are sounds of activity inside, and two more beautiful (although not svelte) women come out to our carriage. They call over a young man who is lounging on a bench by their door to translate. I tell them that we are dancers from the US. Shadia invites us to see her perform on the cruise ship Hotep at 10:00pm. We agree and return to our hotel after a lengthy harangue with our driver, who insists on giving us a tour of the city so that he can extract more money from us.

At 10:00pm, Diana and I arrive at the cruise ship. Shadia is accompanied by three *ribabs*, a *def*, a *dumbek*, and her mother, a singer. Her performance is folkloric style, although the costuming is more theatrical: a low-cut black *beledi* dress with rows of silver bugle bead fringe. Most of her performance is simple, and the style is very like that taught by Aisha Ali and Jamila Salimpour. Part of her performance consists of getting people up to dance with her. She spots me in the back of the room and drags me up front, laughing about me being an American dancer. As the style she dances happens to be my favorite, they are in for a surprise. I copy everything she does, including the “cho-cho” shimmies. Afterward, she and her musicians compliment me.



That night, we go to bed feeling that at last we’ve seen some of the dancing we have come to see!

June 20, 1981. We arrive at the Luxor train station at 8:30am only to find that our train will be an hour late. The wait on the train platform provides another fascinating glimpse into Egyptian life. Reminders of the Pharaonic era are everywhere, even in frescoes at the train station. There are no symbols of progress, no photos of modern factories in

Aswan. The whole country seems to look backward toward past glory. As the time for a train draws near, the platform becomes crowded with all levels of Egyptian society. Some people carry little crates of pigeons, baby goats and geese. Small children carry huge baskets of moldy bread on their heads. One child loses her balance and drops her basket on me. We help her gather the bread from the filthy pavement and return it to the basket. Three older women dressed in black meander across the track. I think they’re going to sit in the shade of some parked boxcars, but no. One at a time, they duck behind the boxcars to relieve themselves. Everyone ignores them, including me.

A train arrives and everyone scrambles to get on, some climbing through the windows. A family bids good-bye to a well-dressed daughter – school or wedding? The last thing we see is a heavyset woman in black waddling quickly toward the train, in one hand a basket stuffed with a squawking goose, and in the other, a huge transistor radio.

We board our train at 9:45am. Supposedly, we have first class tickets. This seems to mean air conditioning but no toilets. The seats are filthy and there is so much refuse on the floor that I clutch all my bags on my lap – for four hours!

From the window we see some of the countryside and villages. The farms appear well tended and fertile. We see goats, cattle, water buffalo, donkeys, and an occasional camel. Just before Esna, the train leaves the green Nile valley to travel along the edge of the Sahara. In some villages, the adobe architecture takes on the appearance of Quonset huts – a round roof with a square front. This is characteristic of Nubian design, reflecting the fact that many Nubians were displaced when their area was flooded behind the Aswan Dam. They moved from Upper Egypt farther down the Nile.

By early afternoon we arrive at our hotel in Aswan, the New Cataract. For the first time, we are in first class accommodations, complete with Olympic-size swimming pool.

We take our first tour in a *felucca*, one of the small sailing boats on the Nile. We sail around the lake and across it to visit the Aga Khan's mausoleum. We take a short walk into the desert behind it to see the Coptic Monastery, which consists of long, brown, smooth adobe buildings. Its strangeness would make it a prime location for a science fiction film.

We drift back across the lake in the *felucca*. The lake is clear and beautiful until you look closely and observe the fecal matter floating in it. Unfortunately, this does not keep children from swimming.

The city of Aswan, at least the resort area, appears beautiful and clean, much as we had expected Cairo to be.

Our guide is from Luxor. We mention that we're interested in dance and that we met Shadia Maazin in Luxor. He promises to find us some Nubian dancing to see that very night. After dinner, he arrives with a car and driver whom we'll have to pay since this is an extra service. We learn that our guide has found a wedding reception for us to attend. After driving through increasingly dismal parts of town and stopping several times to ask for directions, we arrive at our destination. Several rows of long wooden benches have been placed in the dirt front yard of a small mud house. Blankets hang across one end of the yard to mark a theater area in front of the benches. Women in black with gold crescent earrings sit like crows in a line along the wall of the house. Men sit on the long benches or mill around. Children of all ages play in the dirt. Our guide leads us to one of the front benches. I'm beginning to feel like an ugly American intruder with my camera. We are treated very cordially, almost as though it's an honor for us to be there. The party is sort of a neighborhood event – people drift in and out, and there's no telling when things will begin. Someone brings us three glasses of punch, a very sweet drink much like Hawaiian Punch, although it's probably made from Nile water! I grit my teeth, drink a little to be polite, and put it aside as soon as possible. Diana drinks hers down. I decide that we should greet the women, so we pass down the row and shake hands. The women appear flattered and pleased. Two of them are in Western dress and speak a little English; one is a maid at our hotel. They pull up chairs for us, and we sit with them for a while. They stare at us. We stare at them. The children decide we are a great source of amusement. Our guide becomes nervous because he thinks we are not being entertained.



Car horns sound, and everyone scurries around and begins to *zaghareet*. However, this is a false alarm, as no bride arrives. Our guide prevails upon someone to start some music and dancing, in spite of our protests not to intrude on the natural flow of events. People gather, and one woman begins to play a *tabla* and sing. Three of the children are pulled out to dance. Some of the women *zaghareet*, and to their astonishment, we join them. Everyone is enthusiastic and insisting that we dance.

We are spared by the blaring of car horns as the bride and groom arrive in a V-8 Chevy decorated with paper flowers. The groom wears a dark Western suit and the bride is in a white Western bridal gown with veil. She is escorted to a platform set at the corner of the house in front of the blankets. The bride and groom share a drink. Then the bride is placed on a chair set on the platform. Behind her "throne" for the evening are garlands of paper flowers and a tapestry. The women and children crowd around her, approaching her individually to wish her well. The guide suggests that we do the same, so we push our way through the crowd. The bride stretches out her palm to us. We touch her hennaed hand and look into her dark, unfathomable eyes. She is beautiful, but as we have no common language, we smile and then back off.

The music and dancing start again, and we become the focus of attention. This is not what we want, but everyone – men, women and children – want to dance with us. All are fascinated that we are willing to join them and can do their steps. Things begin to get a little wild. People are packed several deep in a tight circle, all shouting encouragement, clapping and singing. They take turns leaping into the air to dance with us, and they won't let us stop. I push my way out. A couple of children and an old woman ask me for money. The guide gets upset about this. It is clear that for us, the party is over. I look to where the bride sits, ignored on her throne, and the guide and I decide it's time to leave.

June 21, 1981. Our flight to Abu Simbel is early, and we land in a sea of golden sand. It is 7:00am and already 90 degrees! I can't see how humans survive here. The lake is huge and beautiful in the early morning, but this place is isolated. It is just mountains and sand, and more mountains and sand.

Actually, we are in Lower Nubia. Upper Nubia is in the Sudan to the south. Lake Nasser, which was formed by the Aswan Dam, covers many Nubian villages and many temples from the Ramesses II period. One wonders why the pharaoh chose this remote site for such grand temples. The hills beyond the river were sacred and this area contained gold mines, so presumably he wished to impress intruders with his power.

Five international companies labored to save the two main temples. They were carved off the face of the mountain and relocated on higher ground. The engineering feat of moving them was as difficult as the feat of building them. The relocation was so exact that the ray of light that filters in once a year to light Ramesses' statue in the inner sanctum is now only one day late!

The decorations on these temples are beautiful, fine works of art. The smaller temple, which was dedicated to Ramesses' favorite wife, is one of only two temples built for women. The other is Hatshepsut's temple at Luxor.

June 22, 1981. We arrive at Cairo in the early morning, refreshed by our overnight first class train ride. Strangely, we feel as though we're coming home.

After settling in our hotel, an upgrade from the last one in Cairo, Diana and I decide to brave the city on our own. We ask the desk clerk to hail a taxi for us, and then much to his surprise, I bargain the fare down a bit. We locate American University and walk around the bustling school. We feel ourselves a part of the city. The streets seem less dingy, and we notice plants on a few balconies. Hanging clean laundry to dry in the dusty air still seems pointless. We cross Liberty Square, running through wet tar on the street, and we join in the bystanders' laughter as we examine our shoes. We visit the Cairo Museum gift shop and then return to our hotel. The afternoon is spent lying by the rooftop pool. After a decent dinner at the hotel, we try without luck to find a club with a dancer. We spend our last night in Cairo having a drink in the hotel lounge and watching a TV show that switches from American to French to German to British performers.

Exiting Egypt is a snap. Everyone signs off, checks our bags, and points out the coffee shop, where we wait for our flight to Morocco. We're on our way home! From Morocco, we head to New York. As I wait there for the plane to Washington National, I am so woozy from all the flights that I drop a large soda on a baby in a stroller. I can't wait to fall in bed and recoup!



Zarifa Sa'id (Libby Parker) is the founder of WAMEDA. In July 1979, she invited dancers in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area to meet to discuss forming a volunteer organization. At that meeting, WAMEDA was formed. Its stated goal was – and still is -- to promote Middle Eastern dance as an art form and to further education in the dance. We love you, Libby!

Doris Elias: Makeup Artist

www.dorismakeupartist.com

Doris embodies a creative combination: she is a physician's assistant who is also a makeup artist! Art and science come together in a unique set of skills. Doris can tailor your makeup needs to your individual skin type and also provide you with professional skincare advice. From everyday needs to performing artists and special events, Doris' talent as a makeup artist will allow you to be yourself and to look your very best.

THERE WAS A LITTLE GIRL WHO LOVED TO DANCE AND TWIRL

by Antonia Monokrousos

I am Antonia -- a dancer of the '70s -- The Golden Age of Belly Dance. I worked mainly on the East Coast. I miss those days and often wish I could revisit and relive them.

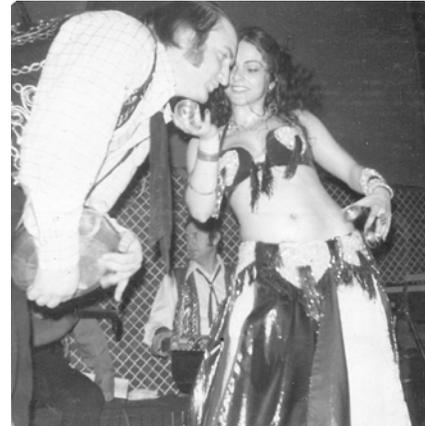
I am first generation Greek. My parents were from Greece, and we lived in a Greek neighborhood (of course), two blocks away from the Greek church. Our lives revolved around the church. All my friends had to be Greek. I could have "American" friends in school, but they were not allowed to come to my house. That's the way it was. I didn't like it but I didn't question it. My favorite Greek dance was the *chiftetelli*, wouldn't you know it (in Greek it's pronounced "tsiftetelli"). My dream was to become a dancer. I loved watching the old black and white musicals on TV and pictured myself up there on the silver screen. My favorite dancers were Fred Astaire, Cyd Charisse and Gene Kelly. When we were children, my friends and I played dress-up, and it was I who invented playing "Night Club." We would dress up and sing and dance. The mirror was our audience.

I saw my first belly dancer at a Greek dance when I was about 7 years old. It was a Turkish couple dancing — the woman in all her splendor and the man in harem pants, a turban and a sword strapped to his waist. I loved it. My parents also took us children to Greek nightclubs, and again I was enthralled and mesmerized by the beautiful belly dancers (yes, it was ok to take your kids to a smoke-filled nightclub surrounded by alcohol and drunken Greek sailors ... after all, we were Greek!). And Greeks love to dance. But it was anathema to have your child become a dancer.

It's fun being Greek, but back in those days it could be difficult and quite often, very frustrating. My parents were strict and very over-protective. I was not allowed to take dance lessons (among other things, e.g., hula hooping). But when I turned 18, they couldn't hold me back any longer. I was unstoppable and began studying every style of dance. I knew by that time it was too late to get to the Broadway stage, but the passion for dance could not be suppressed. I was dancing my heart out but with no place to go. Then someone suggested I become a belly dancer. It hadn't seriously even crossed my mind, but the more I thought of it, the better it sounded. Here was a dance that I was practically brought up on, a part of my culture (I'll talk about that more in Part 2) and at 23, I wasn't too old to pursue it. Needless to say, it was not taken well by my family. As hard as it was to take that huge step, at the age of 23 I went off to Washington, D.C. to fulfill my dream. It was quite a brave thing to do. (Note: My mother was furious, and if my father had been alive, he would have pulled me home by the hair—seriously.)

I started dancing professionally in clubs when I was 23. I loved it, but you had to be careful not to be led into the downward spiral of the night life scene — over drinking, over partying, drugs. You had to know when too much was too much. It could be quite wild, but what a ride!

At first, I remember just wanting to get on the stage and dance. I didn't care much about wearing a lot of makeup. But then I realized, "Hey, you're not the girl from Greektown getting up at a Greek dance and dancing a *chiftetelli* — this is show business!" I was happy getting up there and dancing and, well, just dancing. But in those years, the other "seasoned" dancers were getting more applause by introducing gimmicks into their routines. Bringing men on the stage and acting like they were your sultan -- chest shimmies being called "shaking your percolator," covering the customer with your skirt, was all part of the show. It wasn't just dance, it was *entertainment*. It took me a while to get used to that, but once I realized this was the road to



First job in 1974 at the Salaam Nightclub in DC. Antonia with musicians George and Emin Gunduz (background).



1975 Antonia with musician Taki Demetriou at the Astor nightclub

success, well, I went with it. I never really had a gimmick, per se, but I would go into the audience and flirt with the customers by putting the glass on the customer's head while doing chest shimmies, putting their hand on my hips and shimmying, challenging them to hold on, placing the turban on their head, and, most importantly, being flirtatious, yet coy. It worked. Yes, there was more applause ... after all, isn't that what we dancers longed for?

There was also a lot of competition amongst dancers. I personally never had a problem with any of the dancers, but there was always the chance someone would have you booted out. If you saw a dancer come into the club and start talking to your boss, you knew your position was in danger. I remember one time I was very sick and had to take off several days, almost a week. Another dancer stepped in while I was out. I had to force myself back on stage before I was ready so that my job wouldn't be taken away. I was still ill and very weak, but I knew I had to get back to work. It was often a harrowing experience.

And then there was dancing to live music. There was nothing like it. You felt the energy from the musicians and they felt yours, and you fed off each other. Often, we would all get into the same "zone" musically, and it was spellbinding and almost surreal. When that happened, it was magic. However, there was a downside to working with musicians. There was always the never-ending bickering about the dancer's tips. It was a constant battle: the musicians always wanted a cut of the dancer's tips. At one of the clubs where I worked, the owner came up with somewhat of a solution: if the dancer's tips were "on" her, they were hers, but if they were on the floor, they belonged to the musicians. It didn't always work out to either of our benefit. Oh, and don't forget the "house" also had to have a take.

As far as costumes, well, there were no "belly dance stores" back in the day like we have nowadays; we dancers learned how to make our own costumes. It took about 2 months to make a fully beaded costume. We had to string our own fringe, and the fringe alone took weeks to complete. I double strung my fringe to make it stronger and thicker. I still have many of my costumes from the '70s and the fringe is as strong as ever — much stronger than the costumes you see



Circa 1981 Antonia at an outdoor festival in Alexandria, VA.

nowadays. The style of fringe on the costumes at that time was short; the skirt always had two slits on each side. When the Turkish style came in, the slits on the sides of the skirt were further apart, and the belt of the costume's fringe stopped where the slits were, in order to expose more leg. (Not too much modesty back then.) Later on down the road, the longer fringe became the fashion, and I changed all my costumes to the longer fringe. Luckily, by that time, we had some stores where you could order already strung fringe. It was often difficult trying to match up the exact color to your costume, but it was fun and challenging. We were always competing against each other, each dancer trying to make her costume more stunning than the next.

It was no surprise, then, when I realized the spectacular gleam of the belly dance world had found its way under my skin.

To be continued in the next issue: "Becoming the Music"



Circa 1981, a restaurant ad featuring Antonia

Interview with Mary Ellen Donald

by Bedia

This article was originally published in the September-October 1981 issue of the WAMEDA Newsletter. It has been edited for the current issue.

During a trip to San Francisco, Bedia interviewed master drummer Mary Ellen Donald. This excerpt from that interview focuses on why it is important for dancers to understand different rhythms.

Mary Ellen Donald believes that dancers, in particular dance teachers, should study Middle Eastern music and percussion for several reasons.

During a performance, a dancer must be able to create an effective combination of zils, rhythms and body movements. Mary Ellen says, "If you know the different rhythms -- and you know what to listen for, what to expect -- and if you know how to execute steps and play zils, then as the rhythms change in your accompaniment, you can change your dance along with them. It's much more exciting for the audience to see and hear the alignment of rhythms, drummer, and body if the dancer can change her dance steps according to rhythm changes. If the dancer understands the rhythms, the dance becomes more exciting and more challenging for her. If she is not trained to understand the rhythms, she won't be able to handle music such as 'Leylet Hob,' which has eight rhythm changes in five minutes.

"Several changes in rhythm generate high energy. If you don't intuitively understand the changes in rhythm, then you must be trained in them. Certain complicated pieces of music may even require memorization. You have to know the structure of the rhythm so that you know what your choices are. But just knowing the rhythms alone won't bring that excitement and energy -- you must also dance from your soul and give to the audience. That combination can't be beat!"

Mary Ellen continues, "I'm not suggesting that a dancer should be on stage performing mechanically. I'm suggesting that you do the work, that is, that you gain the discipline of rhythm so that playing zils becomes second nature to you. The goal is to dance with feeling, confidence, and some know-how. You have to START by counting in order to discipline yourself and understand the rhythms. You have to push yourself to do something that you may initially resist. For example, you can't be part of a troupe and be unable to count your music."

WANT TO MAKE
THIS COSTUME
YOURSELF?



Sign up for FREE email course
Belly Dance Costume Making 101 at

[www.SparklyBelly.com/
Belly-Dance-Costume-Making-101](http://www.SparklyBelly.com/Belly-Dance-Costume-Making-101)

SPARKLY ♥ BELLY

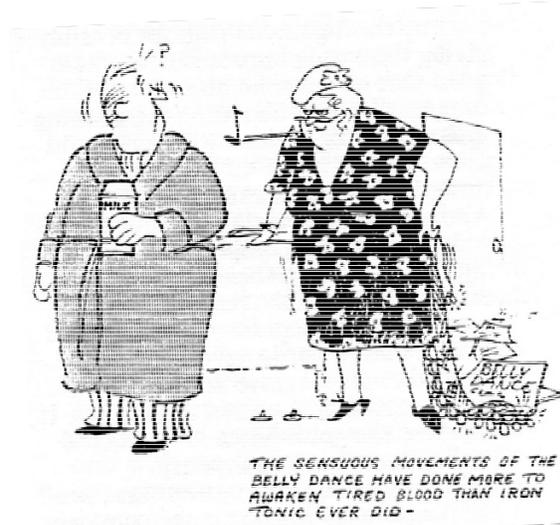


“*Harem Pants* is filled with honest moments of reflection that can’t help but amuse broader audiences than the Oriental dance community, and it can’t miss with us ...” (Habibi)

Has Anyone Seen My Harem Pants? was written and illustrated by WAMEDA member Carolyn Brown. This delightful book was released by Intergraphics Press in 1983.

Sadly, today it is out of print. Very few copies are available for online purchase as used paperback books. So if you already own a copy, treasure it!

With Carolyn Brown’s permission and for your enjoyment, here are a few of her cartoons. These were featured in WAMEDA Newsletters from 1989, 1991 and 1992.



What is *Tahtib*?

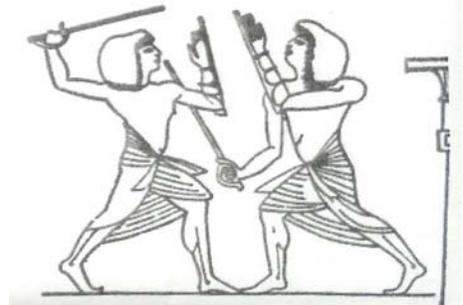
excerpted from Wikipedia article, "Tahtib"

"*Tahtib*" is mentioned in another article in this issue of the WAMEDA Newsletter, "A Novice Traveler in the Mideast" by Zarifa Sa'id. In that article, one of the author's guides tells her that he is a *tahtib* dancer in his village.

What exactly is *tahtib*?

"*Tahtib*" is the modern Egyptian Arabic term for a stick fighting martial art. Although the martial art is still practiced, it gave rise to a traditional Egyptian folk dance that uses a wooden stick in ritualized mock combat.

Scenes depicting men engaged in *tahtib* are known in Egypt from ancient times. On the Pyramid of Sahure from the Fifth Dynasty (circa 2500 BCE), there are images depicting combat training for the Egyptian military: *tahtib*, archery and wrestling. Scenes of *tahtib* also occur in tombs in the Beni Hassan necropolis of the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties (1900-1700 BCE), and at the Eighteenth Dynasty site, Tell el-Amarna (1350 BCE). The first known depictions in which *tahtib* is used during festive occasions occur during the New Empire (1500-1000 BCE), in engravings on the walls of Luxor and Saqqara. Early Christian writings describe *tahtib* as a leisure activity and a popular art performed by men during weddings and celebrations.



Ancient tahtib at the tomb of Merire II, Amarna, circa 1350 BCE.

Modern *tahtib* explores the sources of *tahtib* as a martial art. In a modern *tahtib* attack, the object is to reach your opponent's head with your stick while protecting your own head.

Egyptian Lentil Soup

by Astarte (Joyce Utmar)

Lentils are a Middle Eastern favorite. Many believe that lentil soup is the stew or pottage mentioned in the Bible story of Jacob and Esau: it smelled so good that Esau gave up his inheritance for a bowl!

1 large onion, chopped	1-1/2 cups brown lentils (or 1 cup brown lentils and 1/2 cup red lentils)
1 carrot, chopped	2 quarts water
2 - 3 oz ground beef or lamb (optional)	1 cup chopped green chard or spinach
2 tbsp olive oil	1 small dried chili pepper
1 tsp cumin	juice of 1/2 lemon
1 tsp fennel seeds	Salt and pepper, to taste

In a large pot, sauté onion, carrot and optional ground meat in olive oil for about 15 minutes.

Stir in cumin, fennel, chili, lentils, water and greens.

Cook until lentils are tender, about 30 minutes.

Remove the chili.

Add lemon juice, salt and pepper.

Serve with thinly-sliced onion and lemon wedge garnishes.

Serves 6 - 8.

Goodbye to Dancer!

What sad news for the dance community -- Dancer, the Unusual Store is closing its doors for good. Verna and Jerry Thompson have decided that the time has come for them to retire from running the store.

Dancer was founded in 1975. That year, Jerry was about to retire as an Air Force colonel. Verna says, "He bought me a little fabric store so that I could have a career." Because Jerry was in the military, they had moved a lot, so until now, Verna had never had anything permanent.

At first, Verna sold fabrics and taught sewing in the store. She had started belly dancing, and it wasn't long before she realized that she couldn't find fabrics for dance costumes. Other dancers wanted costume fabrics, too, so Verna began selling "fine fabrics" for costumes ("They were high-end fabrics," she notes).

"Pretty soon, people were coming in, looking for dance shoes," Verna says, "and then costumes." For a customer, she designed and made half a dozen flapper-style costumes for a party. When the party was over, the customer brought the costumes back to the store, so Verna began a costume rental business.

By 1989, the business had grown too big for the store building, so Verna and Jerry built the current store. For many years, the store continued to rent costumes, especially theatrical costumes and re-creations (which some call "period costumes"). Customers began requesting liturgical costumes, which Verna made to order. When the demand rose, she bought them readymade to stock the store.

By now, Verna was teaching bellydance. "Once a week," she said, "we moved the sewing machines out of the room so that there was a space for dancing." As the number of her classes increased, she and Jerry had to build a dedicated dance space, Studio B, across the parking lot from the store. At that point, Verna began holding dance shows and workshops. "We hosted Morocco," she said, "and Amira, and Jim Boz, and Aziza from California, to name a few."

Verna is not the only talented costume maker in the family. After Jerry retired, she taught him to make costumes, and their two sons can sew, too. "Among the many things our sons have done," she says, "they earned theatrical degrees. Part of a theatrical degree is that you know how to make costumes." For many years, she and Jerry made costumes for Little Theater. The entire family was in a production of Lillian Hellman's play, "The Little Foxes."

Now that Dancer is closing, the store will be sold, but Verna and Jerry will hold onto the building that contains Studio B. "I'll still make costumes," she says, "and I'll still hold classes, but all this will be after the first of the year."

"Over the years," says Verna, "we've had a lot of help and support, and we're grateful for it. No matter how self-reliant you are, you need support. There's no such thing as a truly self-made man." She mentions Dancer employees Raven, Viola, and Cici as "greatly appreciated" and "real jewels."

The dance community will sorely miss Dancer. It was a wonderful source for dance supplies, and for beautiful fabrics and trim for our costumes. We will miss perusing the racks of Verna and Jerry's one-of-a-kind costume creations.

An advertisement for Latifa's School of Middle Eastern Dance. The top half features the text "Oriental and Folkloric Dances of the Arab World" in a serif font. Below the text is a black and white photograph of a woman in a dark, sequined dress, smiling and holding a long, flowing white veil aloft. To the left of the woman, there are three bullet points: "Weekly Classes", "Private Lessons", and "Coaching", each preceded by a small circular icon. The bottom section of the advertisement is a dark banner with the "Latifa's" logo in a stylized script, followed by "School of Middle Eastern Dance" in a smaller font. On the right side of the banner, the website "www.bintbeled.com" and the phone number "410-544-4488" are listed.

*Oriental and Folkloric
Dances of the Arab World*

- Weekly Classes
- Private Lessons
- Coaching

Latifa's
School of Middle Eastern Dance

www.bintbeled.com
410-544-4488

The Club Scene

The following restaurants offer Middle Eastern dancing and/or music. Call ahead to confirm and to make reservations. If you know of other venues, please contact Shagoura at sechallis@verizon.net.

Washington, DC

Marrakech Moroccan Mediterranean Restaurant
(Dupont Circle) 2147 P Street, NW
Washington, DC
Phone: 202-775-1882
marrakechrestaurantdc.com

Maryland

All Seasons Hafra – 1st Sunday of every month
7 West Bistro & Grille
7 West Chesapeake Avenue
Towson, MD
Dancers, open dancing and drumming
Organized by Tydirah
Email: tydirah@comcast.net
Phone: 410-302-6064

Bombay Nights India Grill
5007 Honeygo Center Drive, #101
Perry Hall, MD 21128
Phone: 410-248-3131
bombaynights.net

Caspian House of Kabob at Kentlands
72 Market Street
Gaithersburg, MD 20878
Phone: 301-590-0007
www.caspiankentlands.com

Cazbar Authentic Turkish Taverna
316 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, MD
Phone: 410-528-1222
<http://www.cazbar.pro/>

Mem Sahib Indian Cuisine
4840 Boiling Brook Parkway
Rockville, MD 20852
Phone: 301-468-0098
www.memsahibrestaurant.com

New Deal Café (Lebanese cuisine)
113 Centerway (Roosevelt Center)
Greenbelt, MD 20770
Phone: 301-474-5642
Dancers: Check online calendar
www.newdealcafe.com

Pasha Land Restaurant (Moroccan cuisine)
Kentlands
644 Center Point Way
Gaithersburg, MD 20878
Phone: 301-216-2223
pashalandrestaurant.com

Tobacco Center & Café (Hookah bar)
1838 East Joppa Road
Parkville, MD 21234
Phone: 410-661-1399
www.tobaccocenters.com

Zeeba Lounge (Hookah Bar)
916 Light Street
Baltimore, MD 21230
Phone: 410-539-7900
www.zeebalounge.com

Virginia

Babylon Fotbol Café (World cuisine)
3501 South Jefferson Street
Falls Church, VA 22041
Phone: 703-820-3900
www.babylonfc.com

Sorrento Grill (Mediterranean cuisine)
Village Center at Dulles
2443 Centreville Road
Herndon, VA 20171
Phone: 703-793-8030
www.sorrentogrill.com

Turcuisine (Mediterranean cuisine)
13029 Worldgate Drive
Herndon, VA 20170
Phone: 571-323-3330
www.turcuisine.com

