



The Austin Belly Dance Convention

Sponsored by Stacey Lizette in association with Bahaia & HOT Seminars
June 4-6, 2010 Williamson Conference Center (behind the Wingate), 1209 N. I-35, Round Rock, Texas 78664
www.stacevlizette.com <<http://www.stacevlizette.com>> <<http://www.theabdc.com>>

The Austin Belly Dance Convention was the vision and creation of Bahaia & HOT Seminars. With over 30 successful events since 1996, Bahaia has now "passed the torch" of ABDC to fellow Austin dancer, Stacey Lizette, so that the tradition of master level instruction and high quality personal service can continue. The Open Stage at the Austin Belly Dance Convention is an opportunity for dancers of all skill levels to showcase their skill for an appreciative and supportive audience. It is an opportunity to show the diversity of the dancers themselves and the diversity of the dance styles that fall under the umbrella of Belly Dance.

Comments (mostly) by Sahlira !

The weekend was all about studying belly dance, whether it was by taking workshops, watching performances on stage, or networking with like-minded people. Instructors were: Ava Fleming and her assistant Lisa Zahiya, Bahaia, Lily, Sa'diyya, Lauren Checchio and Stacey Lizette! Since I was vending in the main ballroom, I only got to see Ava & Lisa workshops and those Raq-ed!

All the shows were fantastic! Ava Fleming and her assistant, Lisa, were amazing, as were ALL the other performers! The Friday Show was the "Instructor Showcase" with a lineup of instructors and/or their troupes. "Open Stage" on Saturday afternoon consisted of three sets of pre-registered wonderful dancers from all skill levels and was very well attended by audience members! The live band on Saturday night for the Happy Hour show was "Wind and Fingers" and they were awesome as were the dancers, and was a special bonus for folks who purchased the Saturday night show ticket...they got to come in for an extra two hours (6-8pm) of wonderful belly dancing and great live band music! Delicious Sangria and home-made guacamole and dips, compliments of El Chile Cafe' y Cantina was served during the Happy Hour. The Austin Bellydance Association was well represented by Phillip, Shelagh, and Rick who stocked and ran the table and provided beverages for a donation. Thanks guys !

The "After-Show Party" on Saturday was fun (it was Lebanese Simon's birthday, too!) and the Rio Grande Restaurant (service was great!) stayed open late for two long banquet-size tables of performers and show patrons! It was not hard for Simon to be talked into an impromptu birthday dance and he selected sponsor Stacey Lizette as his partner for a very informal mini performance! I want to give special recognition to Stacey Lizette for putting on such an awesome weekend! Everything ran perfectly on schedule, thanks to her very talented and hard-working staff: Ginger, Helen, James, Julie, Lee Ann, Lily, Maribel, Marlene, Najla, Phillip, Rania, Roxanne, Vance, and Yasmin! Her staff even helped the vendors pack up on Sunday afternoon! Awesome!

The ballroom was full with vendors who represented a wide-range of merchandise. They were: Gypsy Witch Productions/Sahlira's Souk, Gitane's Treasures, Bahaia, Tatika's Treasures, Roberta Belly Dance, Magical Fashions, Wholeness Therapeutic Massage, Vance Strickland Photography, Sabaya Belly Dance Collective, The Gypsy Palmist, Hot Mama's Cafe, Calico Digital Media Productions, and Hip Mix.

It was a grand weekend! I am so looking forward to next year! The ABDC keeps getting better and better...special thanks to Bahaia for creating this event and to Stacey Lizette for keeping and building on this central Texas tradition!

Comments by Valerie !

The Austin Belly Dance Convention started off on Friday night with an Instructors' showcase. The first half included dancers from Austin, Houston, Edinburg and North Carolina. The second half included many Austin area teachers as well as teachers from as far away as Arizona and North Carolina. There were performances in traditional belly dance, tribal and fusion. When I saw how athletic and strong the two main teachers were in their performances I knew we were going to get quite a work-out in their workshops. And I was SO right. On Saturday, during the first part of the workshop Ava Fleming discussed the evolution of Cabaret, ATS and tribal fusion. Then she started off the movement part of the workshop with instructions to do 10 pushups - and she said I am NOT kidding! She kept us moving for the whole rest of the workshop. I had to really stay focused to keep up with her but it was great workout. After the workshop, I grabbed a vegan wrap from Hot Mama's in the lobby and headed to my room to get ready to dance on the open stage. I was definitely warmed up and ready to go after the workshop. The audience during the open stage was very warm and supportive of all the dancers. There was plenty of time to shop with the vendors that had everything a belly dancer could want; even Wholeness Therapeutic Massage offered by owner Gilda Hart, LMT. I took the mini-class "How to Choreograph" with Sa'diyya. She went through the process she uses to break down songs so you can organize your dance. She had a handout that we used for an outline so it was very organized. I will try out some of her tips as I prepare for my next solo. All the dancers brought their "A" game for the Saturday night show! Performers included Gitane and the Indigo Rose Dancers, Yasmin, Lebanese Simon, Sa'diyya, Ava Fleming, Stacey Lizette, Amartia, Nadirah Johara and the Johara Dancer Ensemble. Then it was off to the after-show party for food and drinks as well as a birthday celebration. Sunday's zill class was a mixture of drills and giggles. Then we had a Q and A with Ava and Lisa. I find the sharing of tidbits by the instructor and other dancers at these kind of gatherings invaluable in my dance journey. The whole weekend was well run and an enjoyable experience.

Comments by Lebanese Simon !

Simon says, "It was risky, yet I proved I could be versatile and still win the heart of the audience. With every jump came a wave of applause, with every hip lock came an eyebrow-lift (How can a guy move like that?). The audience was surprised that a Tamaraod Belladonna student, raised in Lebanon, put on a nice show with class, authenticity, charisma, and a true Lebanese feel! Thanks to Stacey as the producer who made this a success! This has not been the first time I have visited Austin to dance, yet it was the first time that I brought my personal Lebanese Tupan Drum with me. It was also the first time a great friend and a wonderful artist (Fared Shafinoury of Austin) drummed for me. I started by twirling the bead bracelet in my hand then pulled the mean sword on a jump and twist. Shortly after the Dabkeh solo, the music dimmed while I transitioned into a classical Orientale to one of my favorite songs by Warda. Together, the set lasted 6 minutes, but I felt like time flew in 3 seconds... as I so wanted to dance more...and more... and more. My next appearance shall be on October 2nd at Dance Unlimited in Buda and I can't stop thinking about it!"

Comments by Stacey Lizette !

The ABDC this year was another great learning experience for me in many ways – both as an event organizer and a dancer. My heartfelt thanks go to Lily for all the help and support she provided in the months leading up to the event. Without her help, and the help of all the wonderful volunteer staff, performers and vendors, none of this would have been possible. The teamwork was simply amazing! How many times can I say "thank you"? Those words aren't strong enough to impart the gratitude in my heart. There were so many great moments through the weekend – inspirational performances, QA sessions, last minute lighting arrangements, live music, lamb wraps, El Chile's sangria...

I know the rest of 2010 is going to fly by, and before we know it ABDC 2011 will be just around the corner, featuring Suhaila Salimpour. We are "going old school" with some Jamila Salimpour technique, combos and choreography. I encourage everyone to take advantage of the open stage next year.



This picture was taken after the workshops on Sunday and attempting to “tag” everyone would be a real tasksee how many you can name !

... judging by the various comments on Facebook, all of the workshops were interesting and well worth the effort and cost; some “survivors” took the whole 17+ hours !

There are so many opportunities in Austin, right now for training...there is no reason not to improve as a dancer !

Every year the ABDC offers drumming classes along with dance classes, which I think is a valuable opportunity for our dance community. So, I've been slowly learning to drum because I say, "You can't dance all of the time, so in between dances, make the music so others can dance." Also, drumming gives "non-dancers" a way to participate in their dancer's hobby. My significant other Ira, has been coming to the workshops for a while, and this year I met Victoria's mother (College Station) there too- her very first drum instruction so she can play with her daughters!

The classes are open to all levels but the teachers try hard to make sure there's some take-away for every skill level. This year our workshop had a LOT of new, never-hit-a-drum-before participants. Every drum instructor I've had has been particular about starting with good technique, and Lauren was no exception. I was impressed that the whole class was able to produce a decent sound, and I think that a lot of it was Lauren's clear instruction and her un-intimidating encouragement.



In addition to striking the drum correctly and the names for the sounds, Lauren taught that rhythms can be played as their bare bones pattern, a semi-filled-in pattern, and a fully-filled-in pattern. The basic pattern is the absolute minimum sounds (drum beats) that make the rhythm. A partially-filled-in pattern adds some beats for interest and variety. The fully filled-in pattern means that every beat of the measure is hit and the drummer must accent (make louder) the beats that are part of the rhythm so the rhythm stands out. She had us switch between these three as a learning exercise.

We learned a couple of basic Arabic rhythms, which is about all a new drummer's brain can hold. We had a senior drummer in there too, and he commented that it was challenging for him to drum slowly and deliberately and remember the basics.

I would encourage every dancer to take a drumming class at some point, just to learn a little about what it's like on the other side of the drum and get an understanding of the mechanics of Arabic music.

Picture of Lauren and her daughter Lily taken from Facebook by M'lilah

ABDC Choreography Workshop with Sa'diyya

by Lori of the Damali Troupe

I enjoy Sa'diyya's spectacular presentations and was curious to know if she had some secrets or techniques that I don't use when creating choreography. She came well prepared to present her method for developing dance steps and I was pleased (relieved?) to find that it basically parallels what I do and have written about in past OPA articles. If you missed the past issues, you can see my postings here: http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2511887/how_to_develop_belly_dance_choreography.html?cat=2 and http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2755363/belly_dance_choreography_specifics.html?cat=2

However, reading about it is not as clear as watching someone actually do it, and Sa'diyya did a sample of her method for us in class. The technique relies on counting out the measures of the music. Several of the workshop participants noted that they hadn't studied music and were unsure about 'when to stop counting'. She then spent a little time explaining the basics of listening for a 'measure' of music, which she compared to a sentence of language.



If you are uncertain about this too, here was the take-away: Most dances we do are counted in 8s but there can be half-measures, or a count of 4 mixed in there, which can throw you off. You may certainly count in 4s to avoid that problem, you'll just have more of them. Note that some rhythms are counted in 5s or 9s or 13s even, but these are rare. (If you stumble across one and try to count it with even numbers, you'll find yourself periodically trying to step hard when the music doesn't tell you to, and then you'll know you've got a different time signature.)

She lead the class in an exercise designed to teach how to make choreographies more interesting. She gave us several measures of a basic dance, perfectly appropriate for the music, but nothing special. Then she asked the class how to fancy it up. People came up with all sorts of different ways to add interest to the movements- you could see how different personalities were expressed in the different moves. It reminded me that most people find a blank sheet of paper intimidating, but if you have a few lines down to 'edit', you can come up with a good written article. I hope the exercise encouraged newer dancers to just get something going then pretty it up at their leisure, instead of trying to select a dazzling move with every measure.

Picture of Sa'diyya taken from her website by M'lilah

The shows on Friday night, Saturday afternoon and Saturday night were filled with the event's sponsors, workshop instructors, various troupes and soloists.

Too bad we do not have more pictures but there was a "no cameras" rule during all the shows except the Open Stage. During the Friday and Saturday night shows, Vance Strickland took lots of photos and those can be purchased by the performers and submitted to the OPA!



After the Show Dinner at the Rio Grande Mex Restaurant ! Well attended and a lot of fun.



It was also a special occasion for Lebanese Simon (male dancer from Houston) as it was also his birthday... it was not difficult to get him to do an impromptu performance...but how did they get him to wear that hat !



The Austin Belly Dance Convention for 2010 was a lot of success and everyone is looking forward to next year !

Editor's Comments: If some events appear to have more coverage than others, it is because those sponsors have provided the a lot more information...otherwise, what is available is what gets published.