

Dancing for Drummers - by Arwa al-Jinniyya (Jennifer Siegel)

Dancers! Build a repertoire of dance moves and cues and learn to communicate with drummers and other dancers!

Drummers! Build on what you learned in Drumming for Dancers by interacting with the dancers!

Rule #1: **Have fun.** Congratulations! You are now a dancer. Keep dancing!

Rule #2: **Be safe.** Respect the craft. Be aware of your environment! Be supportive of your brothers and sisters in dance.

Rule #3: **Technique is more important than flash.** You do not have to bend yourself in half to be an excellent dancer.

Types of Middle Eastern Dance:

Introduced to America in 1893 at the Chicago World Fair, what many Westerners call bellydance is known in the Middle East as Raqs Sharqi, which translates literally to “oriental dance.” The origin of Raqs Sharqi is a subject of much debate. Some popular theories include:

- Religious fertility rituals practiced by temple priestesses as early as 1000 BC in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece.
- A method of preparing girls for labor and used as part of the childbirth delivery ritual.
- Ancient Egyptian social dances.
- Founded in India over 5000 years ago and spread throughout the Middle East with the migrations of the Roma tribes in Europe, Ghawazee in Egypt, and Nawar in India.

Clearly, dance has always been an important part of Arabic culture. The styles vary greatly by region, but in the modern world can be boiled down to two basic forms: cabaret and tribal.

Cabaret – Emphasizes isolations involving core muscles (especially the hip area). Group dancing is usually choreographed. Movements and music typically involve orchestras or tabla drum solos and have a bouncy, upbeat feel. Uses props such as finger cymbals, sword, cane, fanveils, isis wings, and veils. Typical costume is a beaded bra and belt with skirt and veil. Dancers are usually smiling.

Tribal – Also emphasizes isolations involving core muscles, but puts added importance on upper body posture and placement of arms and hands. Group dancing is usually based on short combinations learned along with specific cues so that a group can perform a completely improvised set based on those combination elements. Movements and music have a more grounded, earthier feel. Uses props such as finger cymbals, sword, veil, fans, veil poi and fire props. Costumes are more folkloric. Dancer expressions are usually more introspective.

Taking Care of Your Body:

Keep your body loose and relaxed. This is crucial. If your muscles are clenched tightly, you can easily hurt yourself while dancing. Be soft. Be flexible. Stay relaxed. Warm your body up before you dance. Not only will you be preventing injury, but your technique will dramatically improve and you will have far more stamina since you aren't wasting energy clenching those muscles.

Build muscles and improve flexibility gradually. It takes time and repetition to strengthen and condition the muscles and ligaments in your body to accept the workout they get during a performance. If you are only dancing a couple times a year and then you dance a forty minute set, you have a much greater chance of injuring yourself than if you are conditioned by practicing regularly. For new dancers, start with 30 minutes a day, three times a week. Supplementing your dance practice with yoga is an excellent way to improve flexibility. Don't overextend your body's limits. Tired and sloppy practice is not helpful.

Learn, develop, and practice good technique. Learn to isolate your muscles so that you can move a specific part of your body with precision while keeping the rest of it relatively still. This is what dancers mean when they talk about technique. Precision creates good and deliberate technique. Make the movements you want to make, on purpose, consistently. But of equal, if not greater importance, is that good technique prevents injuries. Precision matters.

Respect your body's limits. Everybody wants to do the Turkish drop. I get it. It's impressive and dramatic. But deep backbends are not worth doing if you hurt yourself in the effort and it's very easy to hurt yourself with that move. Amazing performances can be created out of as few as three distinct movements when applied with good technique. Master the movements that make your body happy and you will be rewarded by being able to dance longer and with more joy, a joy that will be reflected by your audience. More advanced movements can be added as your muscle tone and flexibility grow. You may never be able to do the Turkish drop. And that's okay.

Dancer's Posture:

Good posture is essential to both great dancing and avoiding injury. With your feet flat, bring your heels together. Soften your knees, shift your weight back into your heels and release the tailbone to take the tension out of your lower back. Next, roll your shoulders back and down and lift your ribcage in the front using the muscles in the middle of your back. Your arms will form a soft C at your sides with the elbows slightly forward.

"The human spine is designed in such a way as to support the weight of the body without putting an additional strain on the muscles which would inhibit movement. However, your daily posture favors your upper body, relying on a slight curve at your tailbone for stability. For this kind of dance, we want to shift that stability to the ribcage, leaving the tailbone free to move. This ribcage lift is sometimes mistaken for an arch in the low back. This is not the case. In lifting the rib cage and releasing the tailbone, we are trying to spare the low back by taking the tension out of it. This dance posture may feel awkward at first, but the more you use it and get used to the support, the better your back will feel." – Carolena Nericcio, Fat Chance Belly Dance

Warm up:

1. Let your head fall to the side, roll forward to the other side, then back again. Repeat. (Do not roll your head around the back.)
2. Bring your arms overhead, lower yourself to one side, then the other side. Repeat. (Use your oblique muscles so you don't put pressure on the lower back.)
3. Pull one arm across the front, wiggle your fingers keeping the shoulder back, then the other side.
4. Put your arms out to the sides with palms facing forward, flatten your palms back, then forward, keeping the shoulders down. Repeat.
5. Lift your ribcage with the muscles in the mid-back, then release. Do this 12 times.
6. Pull your gut in and lift it into the ribs with the diaphragm (don't hold your breath), hold and release, deep breath, release. Do this 3 times.
7. Take a wide stance and do squats with a flat back, sweeping your arms out and up as you rise and back down as you descend. (Squeeze your buns at the top and don't let your feet and ankles roll). Do this 12 times.
8. Grab the top of one foot from behind and stretch the quads, then do the other side.
9. Slide one foot forward, lift your toes up, bend over, then roll up. Do the other side. Repeat.
10. Roll your ankles in both directions three times, then flex and point three times.

Puja (Moving Meditation)

1. Bring arms up and link fingers overhead, turning the palms up.
2. Look up, take a deep breath, release.
3. Lower arms to shoulder height in front of you.
4. Turn right hand over and sweep to the side and back with your head following, then the left side (to acknowledge the space in which you are dancing.)
5. Bring both hands up, let the left fall forward and the right fall back, bring wrists together and rotate to swap the hand position (lotus blossom – important in Indian culture.)
6. Sit down on one heel, look down and touch the floor (to acknowledge the dancing surface.)
7. Touch your ears (to acknowledge the music.)
8. Touch the floor again.
9. Bring your palms together and touch your forehead (to acknowledge your teachers.)
10. Look up and bring your hands to your heart (to acknowledge your ancestors.)
11. Bring arms to shoulder height, turn right hand over and sweep to the side and back with your head following, then the left side (to acknowledge your audience.)
12. Stand up, sweep arms over head, then palms together over the heart.

Slow Movements:

Taxeem – Feet flat, arms low. Lateral (vertical) figure 8, down, over, and up. Weight shifts from right to left. Arms can be brought to shoulder height or higher and sweep from side to side following the hips.

Maya – Reverse Taxeem, up, over, and down.

Ummi – Horizontal figure 8, side, pelvis, side, release.

Hand Floreo – Think about turning over a fancy teacup or tiny hourglass.

Snake Arms

Ribcage Slides – Think Taxeem, Maya, and Ummi with the rib cage.

Body Wave / Belly Roll**Fast Movements:**

$\frac{3}{4}$ Shimmy (half time) – Feet flat, arms shoulder height. Begin by just walking to the beat. Notice how your weight and hips shift to the weighted foot. Now add the $\frac{1}{2}$ time shimmy. Right-left-right-pause.

$\frac{3}{4}$ Shimmy – On the balls of the feet, arms shoulder height. Right-left-right-left-right-left. Arms brush from side to side.

Shoulder Shimmy – As with the hips, but at the shoulders.

Egyptian Basic – Feet flat, arms high. 90% of your weight on the left foot. Twist the right foot and raise the right hip, reaching back with the right arm (keep shoulders even). Repeat on the left side.

Arabic – On the balls of the feet, arms low. Body rocks from front right foot to left back foot while the arms sweep up to high in four counts.

Pivot Bump – One arm high, the other at shoulder level. Weight on left flat foot, bounce right hip with right foot. (“Choo-choo” is the walking version.)

Basic Rhythms:

Beledi (4/4) – Generally the first rhythm a drummer learns. Other versions in the family include Ghawazee, Maqsum, Nawari, Saidi, and Sombati.

Ayoub (2/4) – A bouncy rhythm that’s easy to run away with. Other versions in the family include Bayouk and Kartachi.

Malfuf (2/4) – Another 2/4 groove. Other versions in the family include Kahleegi.

Deliberate Rhythms:

Masmoudi (8/4) – An excellent rhythm for slow movements. There is a three doum version and a two doum version, which is slightly groovier.

Chiftitelli (8/4) – Another excellent rhythm for slow movements.

Cues for Slowing Down:

- Make eye contact with the lead drummer/dancer. Throw a saucy look or a slow eye blink.
- Continue your movements, but cut the speed in half and hit every other beat.
- Make your movements more sinuous.
- Make your movements more subtle.

Cues for Speeding Up:

- Make eye contact with the lead drummer/dancer. Give a wink or a big grin.
- Put a bounce in your step.
- Make your movements more exaggerated.

Cues for I Need a Break (without just walking off the floor):

- Make eye contact with the lead drummer/dancer. Widen your eyes or dramatically pass a hand across your forehead. (Keep dancing.)
- One-Two shimmies. (This is a great finale move.)