

'Almas Productions presents...' is the creation of



Emma

Emma is an experienced teacher and performer based in Berkshire, UK. She has many years of experience and enjoys passing on her knowledge through classes and workshops.

You can learn more about her by visiting www.emmapyke.co.uk or on Tribe at <http://people.tribe.net/emmapyke>



Kathryn

Kathryn is a UK based (Berkshire) teacher and performer of Egyptian Bellydance.

Kathryn loves sharing her knowledge and experience, especially within her classes and workshops. For more details about Kathryn please visit

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Editorial

Welcome to "What it takes" - which we hope will prove to be a useful addition to your current resources. We decided to concentrate on the performing aspect as it is a subject rarely taught and we will feature regular articles by guest writers on a wide range of subjects, aiming for 4 issues a year.

We are proud to support Just Because and although we are not subscription based, the profits from any adverts placed in future issues will all go to this worthwhile cause.

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Emma and Kathryn

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Dancing in Restaurants by Kathryn Dawes

Dancing in restaurants is a fun experience and it is a good opportunity to meet new people and network, but there are a few issues that surround this side of dance performance. More often than not you either have to change in the ladies toilets or the managers office, so you need to think about which costumes you will use. Personally I don't take my top professional costumes as the potential for something to be spilt on them is increased. Another potential area for disaster is the music system, as more often than not the systems can't cope with how loud you want the music! On several occasions I have had the music jump or stop altogether - on these occasions I just kept on dancing, you can make a little joke about it and encourage the customers to clap for you instead! It is also wise to carry your original CD's or an ipod and speakers in case your music doesn't play on their system.

You have to learn how to read people quite quickly, be aware of which table is interested in the dance and perform for them. Basically don't waste your time dancing your heart out for a table who are more interested in their dinner or conversation than your fantastic shimmies! Be prepared for the enthusiasts who you ask to get up and dance, as the potential for them to out stay their welcome is rather common, as is the case for people who just get up and join in. If this happens dance with them for a while then move on to dancing round the tables again.

Key points:

- 1) Always make sure that you have a chaperone as they can help with costume changes, music and your own personal safety.
- 2) Interact with the customers - give eye contact and verbal communication if needed.
- 3) Break your sets down into 10min slots - best time for performing is after the main course and after pudding, best to check with the restaurant when their busiest time is.
- 4) Encourage people to get up and dance but don't force anyone, carry a spare coin belt for them to wear.

- 5) Prepare to be flexible - when your sets start, getting out the way of the staff while dancing, or the customer enjoys dancing so much they take your limelight.
- 6) Don't take your dance too seriously (compared to a theatre or hafiah show) by all means have a loose choreography but be prepared for it to change at the last minute so you need to make sure your improvisations skills are good.
- 7) Agree a fee before you start work and never do "freebies", be aware of other local dancer's fees so you are in keeping with current prices (basically don't undercut or over charge).

In essence you are being paid to help create a party atmosphere, so towards the end of the evening really encourage the customers to get up and dance, this will leave a lasting impression on them and please the restaurant owners too!

DVD CORNER Review by Emma Pyke

Secrets of the Stage : Volume one by Michelle Joyce

No contest with this one - go and buy it! Michelle has once again seen the gap in the market and filled it admirably. Its unusual and informative way of delivering the information by getting selected dancers to talk over their performances on the By Dancers for Dancers series and seeing what was going through their heads, or how certain routines or feelings are portrayed. It aids in understanding how people cope with onstage disasters that could strike any one of us - and also deals with the age-old problem of pre-performance nerves. It also has useful exercises on using the upper body and also increasing improvisation skills. At the time of writing volume 2 was in the editing process and I look forward to its release!

Please visit www.cheekygirlproductions.com for purchasing information.

Make Up Magic

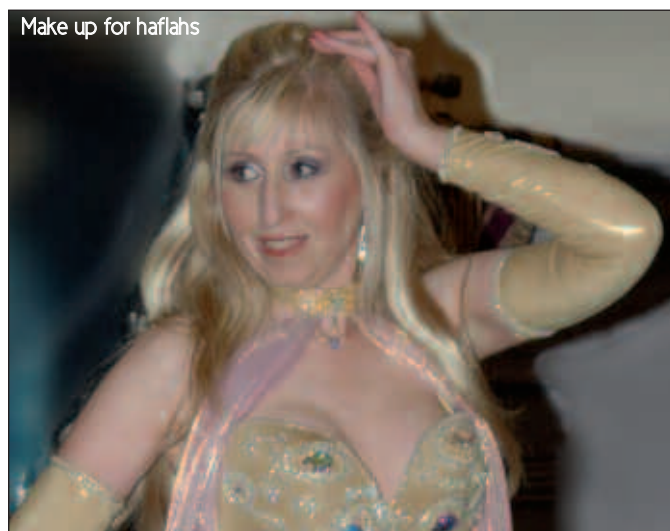
– an easy way to add polish to a performance!

In these days of the minimalist approach to day-to-day make up one of the most common mistakes that I see both for hafflah and stage performances is dancers not wearing any or anything like enough make up. As a result once those dancers take to the dance space only those that are very close can see all the expressions on the performer's face.

Why do we need make up?

Dancers should see make up as an extension of their costume – an essential part of what turns one into a performer. It is no use spending good money on a great-looking costume if it is let down by little or no make up and untidy hair. Properly applied make up will provide definition for the face, making it much easier for most of the audience to see the expressions on the dancer's face. It's no good having a cheeky smile or expressive eyes if only the front couple of rows can appreciate them! The same applies to hair – a nicely styled 'do' looks so much better than an unkempt mess that gives the impression you don't really care about it.

Most hafflahs are in relatively intimate settings with the audience fairly close by, so there is no need to apply make up with a trowel! However, there are some important elements that need addressing: many dancers make the fatal mistake of thinking that just because it's a hafflah a touch of gold or silver eye shadow, a quick lick of mascara, with a dab of blusher and a bit of lip gloss is all they need to apply. All you end up with is a very bland looking face that fades out under the lights.



Define those peepers!

Our eyes are one of the most important parts of our face – they can tell the audience so much about what we are feeling as we dance, so we need to be sure that everyone can see them. Make sure that you wear a fairly deep colour to add depth to your eyes and if you don't feel confident enough to wear false eye lashes there are some truly excellent mascara products out there. Don't forget your eyebrows either, they act as a frame for the eyes and we use them almost as much as our eyes to express ourselves. Balance it all off with a good lipstick that's not in a pale colour and there you have it – a much more finished and polished look for your hafflah performance.

When we graduate to performing in those big dance spaces before large audiences or on a stage, good make up is even more important. Faces that fade away under hafflah lighting become expressionless blobs on stage if proper attention isn't paid to make up and hair. You really do need to take the bold approach here! Fine details are lost so go for bold, dramatic colours, wear false eye lashes and make sure that not only have you really defined those peepers, but you have a good strong lipstick on as well. If you lack the confidence to choose what make-up to wear or how to apply it then consider a session with a professional make-up artist or spend an afternoon with your kit and a mirror and experiment. Just like your dancing, putting on your make-up gets easier with practise!



Most dancers don't realise just how much lighting can affect the audience's view of their face and even the minimum of brighter lights will lessen the impact that happy smile on your face is trying to make if you don't make the effort with your make up. This also applies to hair – if you don't have much of it or find it difficult to style consider a hairpiece or even a wig. There are some great ones on the market these days, many of which don't cost a fortune to buy and it's not hard to learn how to wear them. If you don't fancy that do make sure that you have at least styled your hair to give it a bit of oomph and even shorter styles can be brightened up with a sparkly slide or clip. I swear by two things – my trusty wig and my independent styling brush – they make the difference between looking like I just threw everything on and the statement that I care about what the audience will see.

I consider putting on my make up and styling my hair as almost a kind of ritual that helps me metamorphose into Afra al Kahira – Oriental Dancer. Without them it's like I only put part of my costume on! If you struggle with the concept of wearing make up or not wearing much then looking at it from this perspective is often a good way to overcome that barrier. Don't see putting on your costume as the moment when you turn into a performer, use putting on your make up as the start of the process (part of the psyching up process if you like) so that by the time you are in your costume you are ready to go and give it your all.

Afra al Kahira
International Teacher & Performer of Oriental Dance
Professional Make-up Artist
www.afraalkahira.com

Performing and Teaching when Pregnant – the pros and cons! by Emma Pyke

I am currently pregnant with my second child and this time around has been more a voyage of what I can do performance wise. I had my first in 2003 and at the time I was teaching 5 classes a week over 3 nights (2 beginners, 2 improvers and 1 advanced) and not performing anywhere as near as frequently as I do now. So first time around I was definitely more interested in teaching – which I did until about 7 months.

This time is a LOT different! Although I teach fewer classes they are at a higher level, and I also teach far more people privately. I'm also performing much more and with an earlier advent of baby mush brain, not helped by stresses of my day job, its been harder for me to plan and quite often articulate my thoughts. I've been teaching far more workshops too but I have found these focus the mind (well I hope they have!)

Performing has been a whole new kettle of fish. From the fatigue and sickness in the first trimester to my second where the fatigue hasn't abated and now in my third where stretching ligaments are starting to become more noticeable and my size has had more of a bearing on my costume choice – every outing has been a new experience! For instance at 20 weeks I danced at a local haflah. 6 days previously I had just managed to close my bedlah top on my own – yet in those 6 days my ribcage expanded and it took 2 people tugging to get the hooks fastened on the night (with me in the middle trying not to breathe!) So this had a major bearing on my performance – which happened to be high energy Lebanese – as I felt quite uncomfortable and I couldn't wait to get offstage so I could be released!! In hindsight Lebanese probably wasn't the best option! I performed recently at 26 weeks – doing shaabi (will I never learn?). I initially had opted for a Hanan which had a good 6 inch overlap in the bra strap – but on the night I discovered too much overspill and opted for the emergency pink Pharonics I had packed just in case! It has a bolero top and thus I felt more secure!

The other major issue is lack of energy in the evenings to practise – and also how tired I am now after performing. I was going to dance at 32 weeks but have decided I will stop now for the sake of my poor pelvic ligaments and muscle pain and concentrate on teaching. However I have had nothing but positive feedback on performing – a few people can't believe I'm pregnant and still dancing. I want to push the idea that pregnancy isn't an illness – and your life doesn't need to go on hold (that comes post birth!) and that its not a private affair – you shouldn't have to “confine” yourself to tents and dungarees.

Of course my next dilemma will be when to return to performing. I'll be definitely onstage 4 months post birth at Celebrating Dance and I'm looking forward to the fatigue and costume challenges that will supply – especially as I will be using new pieces of music and practise will be more difficult than it is now!!

STOP PRESS!!!

NEW 3 CD COMPILATION OUT!

Beginners Guide to Bellydance
(Traditional and Cabaret;
Drum solo and Tribal; Fusion)

Emma will be reviewing this in the next issue but its well worth the money - excellent selections of all types of music not just for beginners but for everyone!

SECRETS OF THE STAGE vol 2 ALSO RELEASED!!

Choosing the Right Music by Kathryn Dawes

This is such an important factor to your performance, yes you need to have good presentation, dance technique, choreography and improvisation skills. But if you pick an obscure piece of music no amount of skill and expertise will hold your audience.

Points to consider before choosing your music

- 1) Audience; are they joe public, peers/bellydancers, Arab etc
- 2) Venue; restaurant, theatre, hall, private venue (house etc), outside
- 3) Event; haflah, hen/birthday party, theatre show, restaurant, family
- 4) Music system

Bellydance Haflah:

You can chose any genre of Arabic music (and dance appropriately to it) because your audience will be made up of a good mixture of bellydancers and their friends and family who are used to the complexities within typical arab music. Haflah's also offer a great opportunity to try new dance styles (fusion or new props etc) or music out to an audience who are open-minded.

Commercial gigs:

Restaurant

Because your audience is 'Joe Public' it is wise to pick lively, upbeat Arabic pop songs. These songs have a familiar sounding beat so your audience can relate it. Drum solos are also popular as they naturally clap along, so this is perfect to end your final set. Most restaurant gigs tend to be 3 ten minute sets so you need to make sure your songs don't sound all the same, popular artists like Hakim, Nancy Ajram and Shereen are good starting points.

Hen night:

More often than not you are asked to teach a mini workshop so they can learn some basic moves, and there are a wide variety of cross over songs perfect for this e.g. Shakira, because the Hens are most probably going to know them. If you are also asked to perform I would take the same approach as I would for a restaurant – pick lively upbeat Arabic Pop songs.

Conferences or Large corporate events:

This type of event requires more thought compared to restaurant as you need to make huge impact in a short space of time. Again Arabic pop or modern Arabic fusion music is ideal to help you create a powerful and dynamic set. I would use a song similar to "Entrance of the Stars" from the BDSS album as an opener with choreography on a stage or dance floor then onto arabic pop to mingle within the audience. To ensure people remember your performance for the right reasons try to pick music, which has noticeable changes as this will demonstrate all your dance skills, good clear rhythms that they can relate to and a catchy melody. Try to use music which has been produced in a recording studio, there are some beautiful pieces which have been poorly recorded that they don't reproduce well on sound systems so they are lost and only suitable for small intimate settings. Also where possible take the original with you in case burnt CD's don't work – this also reduces the risk of your music jumping.

All the above is just a guideline, the most important note is to make sure you absolutely love the music you have chosen, otherwise this will come across when you are performing.

Stage Dynamics

by Emma Pyke

It should be a foregone conclusion that performing the same choreography in different situations requires a different energy, projection and even use of space. You also need to be aware of the different audience layouts and sound systems – they can all impact on the final outcome on how well you are received. If you find yourself thrown by a new lighting system or a different set up to what you were expecting it will show in your confidence level. Although most audiences are sympathetic to beginners and improvers they tend to be progressively less so to the more experienced they perceive you to be. Audiences are more aware than you think – can spot a fake smile never mind how wonderful your technique and how confident you appear.

So lets take a few different performance situations. Kathryn has written in this issue about dancing in restaurants but the main thing to bear in mind – your audience is close. Its intimate and there's nowhere to hide. You can make eye contact with most of your audience with instant feedback – apart from the ones who are too embarrassed to meet your eye – on how your performance is going. You should know when a table is a lost cause But also remember to move on from a good table. There's little space and any dance area will have serving staff and customers crossing it, food spillages – your awareness needs to be everywhere.

At the other end of the spectrum you have the stage based show. The audience may be lower than you – in which you need to lower your normal eye contact (so as not to appear "snotty"), but not too far else you may experience the awful double chin effect! If the audience is higher than you, you also need to lift your gaze from normal eye line but not too often else you get a rolling eye effect which can be off-putting for the audience.

The lights and sound will differ from stage to stage. Some which are proper theatres have spotlights which can "blind" or produce the "rabbit in headlights" effect and can make an inexperienced dancer appear startled. They are also very hot which doesn't help with "glow". Some stages don't have a feedback onto the stage – which means your audience is blasted with music but you can hardly hear it. Your moves and your smiles need to carry a lot further – intricate and subtle moves are lost – they need to be big and bold. Your travelling patters need to be less intricate as everyone should be able to see you all of the time.

In the middle of this are halfahs. These are the trickiest to ascertain as the dance area, audience layout etc will change dramatically from venue to venue. Even in the same venue the organiser can change the layout to perhaps try and achieve a different feel from event to event. So you definitely need to be more adaptable in your presentation (unless you have prior knowledge or some level of control). The level of connection to the audience is paramount her as is technical skill.

If you are used to restaurant dancing and travelling to visit clients at the front of the audience you will annoy those who are further back as well as annoy people because the dance area will be empty most of the time. At halfahs as opposed to onstage when you need to be able to project to the dark, you need to be able to connect throughout the audience, and this means not only visiting and greeting the front row but also staying more centre stage so that the non-raked generally level audience can see you.

So what's the answer? Just perform in one venue and stay in your comfort zone or put yourself out and experience a range of venues? I think that you become a more rounded performer if you do try all of the settings – you make it "harder" for yourself and this helps you grow as a performer and not get caught up with one means of thinking out and planning your choreography or improvisation for future events.

Chezarabie Hafilah in Support of...



Chezarabie will be hosting a fundraiser hafilah for the 'Just Because' charity.

27th September '08 (venue tbc) 7.30pm, tickets £7.50 (children welcome)

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Deposit holders will receive priority notice when wedding bookings become available. BT expires in 10th of 10th at the above address or Tel: 01237 424871 / 01239 757111 - dance@celebratingdance.com