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Being A Sensual Belly Dancer: Finding The Art Through Intuition

April 26, 2016

by Brittany Capozzi (BellaBianca)

We all shed and layer identities; it's a growth process. At the start of my belly dance journey I thought that by simply immersing my body in movement with music I understood my new identity in its entirety. I only saw one dimension within the dance while studying my reflection, but now, choosing to dance by intuition instead of sight, I explore its unseen dimensions.

A mirror is needed in the beginning; one needs to see how the body cooperates with technique but dance is not only about watching oneself develop using the mirror. It is equally important to learn and grow without that tool as well, after all, the man-made object did not come first, movement did. We need to remind ourselves of that. My reminder is visiting a routine where not only do I strip the reflection from the mirror, but I strip the music, time, and in turn I strip the art to make it become what it needs to be on its own. The process of rearranging the atmosphere allows me to be more genuine in the dance.

This practice is the answer to a question I asked my instructor, who specializes in expressive therapies with a concentration in Dance Movement Therapy: "How can I become more grounded, more balanced?" She smiled, took my hand, and told me to close my eyes. Noticing a neighbor who was outside on his lawn, I smirked, feeling a bit embarrassed but my curiosity was stronger than my feeling of vulnerability. From the sidewalk, she led me a few feet up and around the tree in front of her house. Though initially unsteady and unsure, my small steps grew bigger and more relaxed as I went along. The pressure on my eyelids from the sun lessened. I didn't realize how liberating it had been until we stopped moving and I opened my eyes. The key is to trust what is present.

Since that afternoon, I've put time aside to dance by touch only, continuing to learn with this new perspective. As my fingers knead the air, the space constantly reminds me that this insignificant action requires an open mind; I must be patient as the fingers on my right hand open and close around soft curtains and sharp furniture edges. The flow of energy and grace on this side of my body is hidden under muscle tension from cerebral palsy. But I inhale and exhale slowly. My muscles begin to soften. I am calm and patient; this is what it feels like not to be timed by music.

Time, like the space in my room, is open. Naturally, as many would do, I fear pain if I step out of my

comfort level so by habit I've danced in one corner, close to the door frame. But by reaching forward and embracing obstacles, I accept the idea of learning from and through any hurt. As I push the wall away with each palm, I think about the walls outside this room, limitations that challenge my passion and mental strength. Even I have imposed limitations upon myself. The soles of my feet are magnetized to the ground. Each hand drops just as each heel lifts. The upper parts of my feet remain strong. In the dark I give myself permission to trust my own support.

Staying in this pose for longer than anticipated, I deepen my balance as I bend my knees more. Now I can no longer limit, but surprise myself. It's in my nature to play with contrast so I experiment with high and low space. I rotate my shoulders while leveling halfway to the ground. I pull at the tension in my shoulder blades and push them back. Burdens from the day roll off my body. As I move to the right my wrist taps a leaf on a bamboo plant; I'm now in front of the mirror. I've emerged from the corner to the center of my room. I'm not hiding in or around frames anymore. I lift my heels off the ground once more and turn my back to the mirror.

I turn away from practicing for an audience, and away from any criticism in the mirror. If I stand with my chest facing my reflection, I'll feel the pressure in front of me even though I can't see it. Here I practice the Scissor step, a cross lateral movement with feet forward and back, and a few hip lifts. The weight of the coins around my hip scarf challenges me. Unsecure, I adjust the weight on the balls of my feet as I lift my head high. This alleviates the fear behind any what if questions: What if I fall? What if one day I can no longer use my right side, or worse, my dominant side? What happens with dance then? I hear the worries but concentrate on my breath. As my inner voice lowers, my energy climbs.

By feeling the art from the inside out I take it with me from day to day. For instance, if I dance with my eyes closed in the morning, my patience and the need to take it easy lingers throughout the afternoon. And I subconsciously add mobility to my right thumb and index finger as I do routine chores. What used to be dormant energy now stays active. I'm still the same dancer, still an artist outside the perimeters I dance in. Becoming aware of this I realize how we each must be grateful for our senses. We cannot take our bodies for granted but treat them with the utmost respect. Ironically this is when we understand who we are capable of being to ourselves before anyone else.



Brittany (BellaBianca) is celebrating her fifth year of belly dance by weaving the art onto her yoga mat. She teaches Yin and Vinyasa Yoga on the South Shore of Massachusetts. For more information, follow her on Facebook under BellaB Yoga and Dance.

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Getting The "Green Light": Permission, Consent, And Art

September 29, 2015

I was curious about the premise of Jaylee and Lulu Stone's upcoming show *Green Light Effect*. They both graciously agreed to be interviewed for BDNE about the unique and innovative origins of the show. - Amy Smith

BDNE: Could you elaborate on the show theme of "consensual art", and the various interactions