



The Flavors of Tribal Fusion

BY HILARY GIOVALE

FOR THIS COLUMN I EXPLORED THE VAST WORLD OF TRIBAL FUSION ONLINE. THIS WAS A FUN AND EYE-OPENING ADVENTURE—TRIBAL FUSION HAS ABSOLUTELY EXPLODED OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS.

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hat is Tribal Fusion anyway?

There are now so many terms that apply to Tribal dance, it's hard to keep track of them all. There are those that fit under the umbrella of Tribal Style; these include what I think of as "The Big Three": Gypsy Caravan, BlackSheep BellyDance, and Fat-ChanceBellyDance.

The dances pioneered by these groups are the original Tribal Style dances; they rely on group improvisation instead of choreography and use a shared language of movement to dance together. Many acronyms have been created to describe this style of dance, including: ATS (this refers specifically to Carolena Nericcio's Fat Chance style), ITS (Improvisational Tribal Style or International Tribal Style), SGI (Synchronized Group Improvisation) and TGI (Tribal Group Improv). Whatever it's called, the key here is that all these dances use group improvisation instead of choreography.

Now we move into the genre of Tribal Fusion. My research indicated that the most widely accepted description of "Tribal Fusion" refers to dances that pull aesthetic inspiration, some movement, costuming, and musical styles from Tribal Style, but they diverge to include solo dances, choreographed dances, and dances that bring even more fusion into the mix. It seems almost everyone is familiar with Rachel Brice – her beautiful, snaky, sensual style of dance pioneered the world of Tribal Fusion when she started The Indigo in 2003. This signature style has become overwhelmingly popular around the world with dancers and audiences alike. (For a detailed description of the nuances



Ariellah

MOX



Darshan

of Tribal Style and Tribal Fusion style dances, I highly recommend *The Elusive Definition of Tribal Bellydance*, by Sharon Moore, on www.tribalbellydance.org).

In my online research, I found several new interpretations that are taking place in the world of Tribal Fusion. Here are some voices from Tribal Fusion artists describing their dance.

EAST COAST TRIBAL: New York City

As a presence in the Gypsy Caravan instructional DVD's, Darshan unknowingly helped teach me these movements! I was delighted to find her online in her new path as a Tribal Fusion artist. In email correspondence, Darshan writes, I would say that East Coast Tribal is a strong expression of futuristic urban sensibility with the warm underlying pulse of the ancient community connection of dance. Many dancers include el-

ements of hip hop and popping as part of their urban sway. Also the East Coast and NY in particular lends itself to a strong vein of Modern dance influence.

I think that as Tribal Fusion emerged as a distinct style, a huge influence was yoga. Flexibility and precise physicality can be seen as increasingly important in the style from its first steps onto the scene. Also a more precise musicality came into play as the style became more tightly choreographed to intricate music selections.

As for myself, I have been influenced a lot by the world's trance dances, as well as by my experience with Gypsy Caravan Dance Company and with the spectrum of Cabaret/Oriental bel-



Ariellah

lydance, as well as studies in many other dances and some martial arts. There is something about living in the urban environment that cannot be explained, but that affects the character of one's dance and movement. Truly though, in 10 years if I look at footage, I doubt I will be able to tell you if a dancer was from the East or West coast or elsewhere. The style is expanding now at such a rate, everyone is innovative and taking artistic risks, so much is possible. I am always excited to see something done well, that I have not seen done before. The frontiers in dance are limitless.

To see examples of East Coast Tribal Fusion, check out Darshan or Sera Solstice on YouTube. You'll be able to see the yoga and modern dance influences Darshan mentions here.

PIN-UP BELLYDANCE: Austin, TX

When I went to the website for Tribal Fest (a huge Tribal workshop that is enjoying its 10th year this May!) I discovered darling Michelle Manx. In email correspondence, Michelle writes: "I have always admired old Hollywood glamour and the concept of the classic pin-up girl. As I was growing as a Tribal Fusion artist, I started incorporating elements of from my wardrobe into my costuming, as well as utilizing music which I enjoyed (such as old jazz and rock-a-billy). I started to substitute the Indian poses, which were extremely popular in Tribal Fusion at the time, with pin-up poses. I also started incorporating the facial expressions of the pin-up girls of the 40's and 50's into my performances. I coined my personal stylization of Tribal Fusion Bellydance "Pin-up Bellydance."

Not only did I study old pin-up photos to learn the expressions, I also spent a lot of time viewing video clips of the Egyptian Golden Era



Michelle Manx

of Bellydance star, Samia Gamal. There's even one scene where she is striking a pin-up pose in an adorable pair of high-waisted shorts from one of her films. She's the original dancing pin-up girl, as far as I'm concerned. In addition, there are quite a few old pin-up paintings by artists such as Gil Elvgren, Earl Moran, and Billy Devorss which feature bellydancers as their subjects. Just as the classic pin-up artists were inspired by bellydancers, my dancing is inspired by classic pin-up artists. There's even a segment on an Irving Klaw film of my number one artistic inspiration, Bettie Page, dancing in a bellydance costume!

When I first developed Pin-up Bellydance, it was for a tattoo convention here in Texas. But when I started to perform my new act for bellydance audiences my friends told me that I had finally found my calling. Finding my path through the world of Tribal Fusion has been so much fun and has really been a dream come true!

I'm happily on my way to Tribal Fest this May. I hope to catch a Pin-up Bellydance performance by Michelle Manx then!



Ariellah



Michelle Manx



Darshan

DARK FUSION: Berkeley, CA

When I saw Ariellah perform several years ago, her dance was beautiful, delicate, and dark. Here she describes Dark Fusion Bellydance:

Dark fusion belly dance taps into the more theatrical, dramatic, passionate and emotional side of belly dance. It utilizes the basic elemental movements of belly dance and mixes them with the dancer's darker stylizations, music and costuming. In my case as a dancer, I infused my belly dance movements with my own personal character and personality, which contains much of the gothic subculture lifestyle, attitude, styling and tastes.

Dark fusion belly dance is a mental and physical aesthetic that a dancer has inside her being, which manifests

through her dance. I have noted that in dark fusion belly dance performances, a deep emotion is invoked in the audience and there is a sense of the audience being brought into the performance. The energy that flows from the dancer is strong and piercing and draws the audience in with its expressiveness.

How is this accomplished? Well, for one, the hands are most expressive and the energy conveyed and released in the hands and fingertips can be powerful and far reaching. Facial expressions and stage presence play a great role in dark fusion belly dance. It can be done with the eyes, gazing right into the eyes of the audience, imploring them to feel your feelings, as well as a tilt of the head this way or that way to express a thought or emotion

or storyline or simply to command attention or engage or capture the surprise of the audience. I also find that in dark fusion belly dance storylines can range from fantasy type stories invoking dark shadows or snakes or myths, or invoking deities or ritual, or simply the dancer's own story, emotion and expression.

OTHER FLAVORS

Some of the other flavors emerging in Tribal Fusion include Hula/Tropical, Ballet, Circus, Burlesque and Hip Hop. To see an immensely entertaining group that incorporates many of these flavors, check out the TriBellas performing their "Tiny Big Top Part 2" at www.myspace.com/tribellas. Enjoy!