

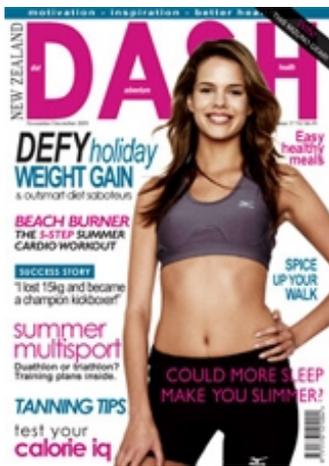


MOVERS AND SHAKERS

An overview of a class with Kimberley

from a beginner student/journalist with no prior knowledge of the dance.

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At a Turkish restaurant only a matter of weeks ago, under the rowdy encouragement of twenty or so friends, it was decided that as the 'Birthday Princess' I should be the one who had to 'shake her groove thing' with the Belly Dancer performing that night. As I've said before, after a couple of wines I'm convinced of my dancing legend status, so I wasn't too phased to follow the lead of the shimmying beauty and get my hips shaking. Apparently, as I found out when I ventured along to the Parnell Community Centre for my initiation into the world of belly dancing, my attempts at the restaurant were clearly not going to cut the mustard.

My friend Kim and I arrived at the Jubilee Building, in Auckland's Parnell, in fits of laughter as we nervously anticipated being caught on camera making complete fools of ourselves – yet again. I was pretty sure Belly Dancing was going to make me feel about as seductive as baked beans on toast, but as soon as Kimberley our instructor walked into the room my skepticism began to fade. When I later asked my dancing buddy Kim how she had found the class, her most resounding comment was that Kimberley was just so professional that you couldn't help but feel at ease and take this most alluring of dances seriously. Not only that, but the class which we attended had such a positive, warm vibe that it made you feel as though you could express yourself physically in a safe environment where no one would be judged.

Belly dancing is quite possibly one of the only physical activities that utterly embraces a woman's completely natural form. What I mean in saying this is that it doesn't matter what shape or size or age you are, you can appreciate your body and make the most of what it naturally is – and the more you jiggle the better! No matter who you are, you are going to leave that class feeling not only self-confident, sensual and feminine, but also empowered, centered and invigorated.

Our statuesque teacher started the evening by running us through the format the class would take that night. Kim and I came for the second class of the 8 week course that Kimberley runs. Evidently, there are classes throughout the country that you can attend on a casual basis if that suits you better, but this course sounds very comprehensive, covering areas of the dance such as dance walk and posture, arms, isolations, shimmies and veil work. Kimberley says that this means her students are provided with tools to not only enable them to perform the dance confidently but to also develop a 'stronger sense of rhythm and body awareness'.

The class for the evening was focused on arm movements, but started off recapping the dance walk and posture class from the week before. This probably doesn't sound that scintillating, but I can assure you that once the Middle Eastern music starts playing it's a good way to start feeling the undeniable rhythm of this very soulful music and to warm your body up. The walks and basic foot patterns set a firm base to build shimmies and arm movements onto, whilst ensuring you understand the importance of placing your body weight firmly through the different areas of your soles to give stability and support.



Actually, the arm movements were the most startling revelation of all – even after the half hour crash course in shimmies and hip movements Kimberley gave me following the class. What I had never realised is the strength you need to focus in your arms to produce the correct look. Kimberley explained that as you raise your arms the best thing to do is imagine you have someone standing behind you pushing your arms in the opposite direction. The result of this is to create tension and resistance in your arms as you raise them and therefore gives the movements definition and strength. A simple exercise of standing in front of the mirror and lifting your arms naturally and then again with this resistance will prove the point.

After half an hour of following Kimberley's lead you could see why she is in such good shape – this gives you one heck of a workout! Keep this up and your back will soon be sculptured and your arms toned. Not only that but your posture will improve and subsequently, I would imagine, so too your confidence. My favourite 'arms' were "Snake Arms" which involves holding your arms out to the sides at shoulder level and then rolling your shoulders back alternately with slightly bent elbows. Oo la la! The trickiest move for the night? 'Candles' – where you are supposed to work your way up to dancing with lit candles that you revolve around your body on your palms.

By the end of the two hour class we were working in pairs putting together our personalised arm sequences and mirroring each others actions. Kim and I dissolved into laughter as we decided the building would be on fire after our feeble attempts at the candle arms in the event that they were lit, but we finally managed to produce something that looked half way decent by the end of it all.

The exciting bit of the night for me was the overview of the course Kimberley ran me through at the end, as I got to use the 'props'! Kimberley provided me with a hip scarf with countless Turkish coins stitched to it – similar to what she had been wearing all evening. Then she led me through some shimmies that absolutely came to life with the rustling coins, followed by instruction for performing figures of eight with your hips. Very exotic. Next Kimberley gave me a veil and explained how to hold the ends between your fingers and use it to enhance all the arm movements we had learnt that evening. This was just fantastic. Apparently Kimberley dances with swords and finger cymbals as well.

So as Kim and I were driving home the subject of discussion was naturally whether or not to do the whole course in the future. The only real consideration is making time for this - because 2 hours each week for 8 weeks is quite a commitment. But about 50% of the class we attended were signed up for their second course, so the only conclusion can be that all of these very different women must be getting something pretty special out of it. If I were to hazard a guess at what that special thing would be, I'm hard pressed to know where to start. Confidence? Relaxation? Exercise? Rhythm? Or maybe it's just down to the fact that it makes you feel absolutely irresistible. If it's just one of these, or all of the above, it's gotta be good for you.

