



# Belly Dance

New England

## If I Can't Dance...I'm Not Coming!

*by Samantha Selig*

The New England bellydance community is an amazing one, and I'm so grateful to be a part of it. There are a wealth of fabulous teachers, events, workshops etc. nearly every weekend from Vermont to Rhode Island and everywhere in between! However, in the last few months I have noticed an alarming epidemic sweeping the community...so alarming that I felt compelled to pen an article about it. Am I speaking of a glitter shortage? No...it's the "If I can't dance, I'm taking my ball and leaving" trend sweeping halfas across the region.

In the last few months I have seen countless events announced on Facebook, LiveJournal, and BDNE, and realized that people are eager to go until...there are no dance spots left. Then suddenly, "something has come up". Now, I understand family commitments, work commitments, or illnesses (I've had all of those in one month even!). I mean the blatant attitude of "If I can't dance, I'm not going to support the event". It truly saddens me. I started dancing five years ago and have suffered from severe stage fright for most of my dance career. I am usually more comfortable emceeing, stage managing, or just watching the show than I am dancing in it. But I am the minority.

I have seen dancers flat out say "Oh I'm not dancing, so I won't be there." Was it because of another commitment or gig? Nope. It was merely the idea that if they were not sharing the stage, they would not attend. I can tell you how many events I danced at last year without looking - nine. How many did I attend? 32. I had to go back and count. Did I take something away from each of those events? Absolutely! A costume idea, a new song, a move, an idea sparked from something I saw...inspiration is everywhere in dance - not just on the stage.

It seems in New England that unless you're contributing your gift of dance to a hafla, you're not "part of it". I recently co-hosted the 5th Annual Shimmies with my best friend and parter-in-crime, Baseema. We had a FULL roster and had to turn away many friends looking for dance spots. However, I was TOUCHED to see many famous local dancers in the audience, supporting our show. BDNE's own Amy Smith was spotted taking on ballet in Aurel's workshop and then shaking it on the dance floor during the hafla. Aslahan and Nadira Jamal shared a table and enjoyed workshops as well. Looking around the room, I was honored to be in the company of such amazing people.

One of the most touching moments of the night happened because of Tempest. If you don't know her, she's an amazing person and I urge you to meet her at an upcoming event. Not only did she offer to teach a workshop (but we were full), dance during the hafla (but we were full), and vend...but at the last minute when we had cancellations, she graciously stepped up to dance and offered to be "stuck in any set that works". This woman has taught belly dance on a GLOBAL SCALE and yet she was not "too good" to come and vend at a little hafla north of Boston.

Every event needs dancers, but it also needs people to be the backbone: vendors, raffle mavens, emcees, DJs, and most of all - audience members! I was recently at the "Shimmies from the Heart"

hafla and was both touched and humbled to see Ela Rogers and her husband Jim in the audience. Ela was not performing, she was just there to support her friend and this wonderful event. New England belly dance needs more members to step up and say "There are no dance spots left? Ok, I'll be there to support my friends!" We're not in competition, and we should be operating more like a family unit. One giant extended family of belly dance. :)

*\*Samantha Selig\* has been belly dancing for 6-ish years and writing for as long as she can remember. She once considered a career in journalism, until realizing she couldn't just write about her opinion. Thankfully she has found outlets like BDNE and her blog to fulfill this need.*

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