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Fluid



Photo by Keith Allen

Varvara Weinstein has been belly dancing for six years, and she says the movements turn back into the body. She also says her art is "a very beautiful, very sensual, very earthy kind of dance with strong spiritual roots."

Modern belly dancing turns artistic flow inward

By MIKE LEE
Of the Emerald

The Sultan enters his ornately furnished desert tent and sits on a giant pillow surrounded by a couple of his wives, who fan him with giant ostrich feathers. He claps his hands and 40 more belly dancing wives appear, clad in the sheerest of scarves. The Sultan selects one of the dancers and the two enter a smaller tent.

This is the old b-movie image of belly dancing. Although there is some truth in it, Varvara Weinstein says, "Belly dancing is different things, too."

Weinstein, who will only admit to being "over 21," teaches a belly dancing class at the WOW Hall. She has been belly dancing for six years and teaching for three.

"I know that it has roots in very ancient and ritualistic movements or dances," explains Weinstein of the dances that date back 1,000 years. "I think that ancient cultures from the Near East and the Far East used them for religious or fertility ceremonies."

Referring to the harem, Weinstein says "There was the tradition of the sultan who had 200-300 wives. There were, of course, a lot of lesser rulers. In the harem, there were all of these women, and so the story goes, they had a lot of time on their hands. They developed many things that they could pass the time doing." One of these was belly dancing.

"The dancer does represent sexuality," Weinstein says. "They accept this in an Arabic culture as normal, and they're open about it."

To describe modern belly dancing, Weinstein likes to compare it to ballet. Belly dancing is "natural," she says, while ballet is "artificial." She says that "belly dancing is a lot more down to earth — it's closer to what people naturally do in certain societies."

In belly dancing, "The movements turn inward, they turn back into the body," Weinstein says. "You can do a belly dance in a very small space, and yet you say so much. Ballet is based on flying away from that — you make the energy go out, rather than keeping it in."

Weinstein calls her art "a very beautiful, very sensual, very earthy kind of dance with strong spiritual roots." She adds, "It's a feminine dance in that the movements have to do with the feminine body."

But it was feminine bodies and not the spiritual plane American soldiers enjoyed when they coined the name "belly dancing" for what Weinstein calls dances of the Middle East.

Before she began belly dancing, Weinstein says she was interested in Middle-Eastern music and folk dancing for a number of years. Her background in dancing goes back to her childhood in New York, where she "did the usual ballet and stuff."

She teaches belly dancing part-time, spending her days with her husband Larry running a local pastry shop.

"I like to teach because it's a way of keeping up my dancing and my enthusiasm for it by putting out energy towards other people; then I get something back, too," Weinstein says.

Her class of seven intermediate to advanced dancers practices in the WOW Hall's basement. The dirty, used rugs on a cold cement floor, the dim lighting and the din of rush-hour traffic on adjacent Washington Street provide a sharp contrast to the exotic movie image.

Weinstein's husband, who plays Arabic drum, accompanies her as she instructs the class. "It's the type of dancing where you have to learn to isolate different parts of your body so that you can move your upper torso as opposed to your lower torso, or just your shoulders, or just your right hip," she says. She tells her class to strive for a "fluid" motion.

Her classes usually consist of young women who enjoy dancing or want to stay in shape, says Weinstein. "It's at least as good as jogging, and it's more fun," she believes. "The people I have the most fun with are the ones who go beyond the point of exercise and really get into it."

Belly dancing became popular in the United States seven or eight years ago and peaked last year, says Weinstein. As a result, she says, "Now you find 'Shariba's School of Belly Dancing' in Oshkosh, Wis."

Judge hears defense in Willard suit

A discrimination suit filed last summer against the State System of Higher Education and the University by Affirmative Action Director Myra Willard continues to make its way through the courts.

U.S. District Court Judge George Juba Monday heard arguments on a defense motion to strike certain legal theories from the \$4 million class-action civil suit filed by Willard in July.

Juba took the arguments "under advisement," according to defense attorney Tim Norwood of the state Department of Justice. The Portland judge will probably rule on them soon.

Norwood represents the state system, the University, Chancellor Roy Lieuallen, University Pres. William Boyd, and Vice Presidents Ray Hawk and Paul Olum. All are defendants in the suit, which Willard says she filed because she and others have been deprived of their civil rights on the basis of sex and race.

The suit asks for \$2 million for "mental distress" and another \$2 million for "punitive damages." If Willard wins, the court could order the University to grant her administrative tenure, and legally block further instances of what Willard has called "harassment, coercion, threats, and intimidation."

The case stems from the University's refusal to grant Willard tenure last June, when a five-member faculty review board examined Willard's performance and called it adequate but not exceptional.

Based on interviews, written opinions and other evaluative factors, the board recommended that Willard not be granted tenure but be allowed to continue on a "fixed-term" contract.

Willard's suit charges that the University pressured her not to seek administrative tenure, consequently denying her tenure when she failed to yield to intimidation.

today

Legislative correspondent Dana Tims reports on the new legislative bills regarding lobbyists. In action yesterday, the Senate passed a bill limiting expenditures by lobbyists. The bill now goes to the House. **Story on Page 5A.**

In today's sports supplement, Jock Hatfield describes the ins and outs of arm wrestling, and how one group has accrued hand-over-fist success. **Story begins on Page 1B.**

A proposal to build a new dam on the South Fork of the McKenzie River came under fire in a public hearing yesterday. **See Page 8A.**