

Touring belly dance troupe shimmies into WOW tonight

The Bellydance Superstars and Desert Roses will start at 7:30 p.m. accompanied by locals Americanistan

By **Natasha Chilingirian**
Pulse Reporter

Until now, belly dancing exhibitions have been limited to regional, non-traveling shows and interludes in Middle Eastern restaurants. But last year, manager and record label owner Miles Copeland created the first-ever bellydance-based touring spectacle: the Bellydance Superstars and Desert Roses.

The troupe will present its mix of traditional hip-shaking and Hollywood glamour at WOW Hall tonight.

Copeland, who has managed clients such as Sting and R.E.M., calls his introduction of a touring belly dance troupe a "phenomenon."

"Belly dance has existed a long time in America, but it wasn't on the radar screen," he said. "I put it on the radar screen. I went out to find dancers who had the potential for stardom and who appeal to a broad audience."

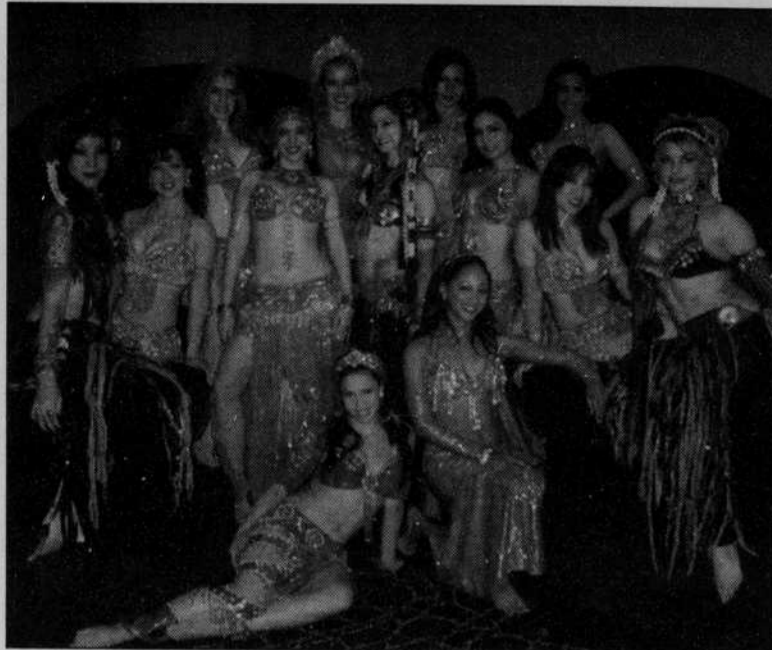
He said the dance form is attractive because it is appreciated by both genders and is accessible to learn.

"It's sexy from a male point of view, and it can be watched without feeling voyeuristic," he said. "At the same time, women get off on it because the dance celebrates the woman. It has a different vibe than ballet. Teens can't decide to be ballerinas because they have to start so young, but belly dancing can be picked up at any age. It's also a big health activity, and anyone can do the moves."

Copeland formed his belly dance troupe for the 2003 Lollapalooza tour, an alternative rock festival that circulates around North America. The dancers, who use contemporary influences in their productions, cater to big audiences. They present two-hour programs consisting of both solo and group pieces, and perform in such venues as rock clubs, civic centers and theaters.

"They have the ability to project the art on stage so the person in row 20 can see it," Copeland said.

The troupe primarily focuses on the Egyptian or "Cabaret" style of belly dance, a traditional form originating in the Middle East. A few members focus on the American Tribal style of belly dance, a new innovation that



Courtesy

The Bellydance Superstars and Desert Roses, the first touring dance troupe specializing in belly dancing, will exhibit an ethnic, glittering show Hollywood-style at WOW Hall tonight.

mixes many ethnic styles and features outlandish costuming.

The Bellydance Superstars and Desert Roses will be accompanied by local Middle Eastern band Americanistan. The group caters its music for belly dancers. Band director Denise Gilbertson, who also has studied belly dance extensively, explained the difference between the two main dance styles practiced by The Bellydance Superstars and Desert Roses.

"The Egyptian style is internal, delicate and subtle," Gilbertson said. "American Tribal originated flat-footed and group belly dances, and dancers wear ethnic costumes such as big jeweled turbans."

The troupe's dancers incorporate their artistic training — such as jazz, Polynesian dance, bagpipe playing and Scottish dance — into the show. One dancer performs a number as Marilyn Monroe.

"We're going to push the envelope and you'll see things you won't expect," Copeland said.

Americanistan, which formed more than a decade ago, exhibits a variety of music from the Middle East on a number of unusual instruments, such as the harmonium, frame drums and Mediterranean bagpipes. Flute player John Marzicola said he was attracted to setting the stage for belly dancers for the uniqueness of the Middle Eastern dance and art forms.

"I like how different it is," he said. "Most Western music uses a 4/4 rhythm, but Middle Eastern music uses asymmetrical rhythms. It is very moody; it can go from high energy to mystical, slow and sensual within one song."

Local dance instructor and performer Elena Villa will join Americanistan and perform a belly dance incorporating Spanish-derived moves.

WOW Hall is located at 291 W. Eighth Ave. Tickets are available at the EMU Ticket Office for \$18 and at the door for \$20. The doors open at 7 p.m. and the show will begin at 7:30 p.m.

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