

DANCE

A league of his own

Male belly dancer shakes his ass with the ladies

BY MICHAEL WAYNE KECK

Ever hear of a male belly dancer? Me neither. So when I went to meet one, I wasn't really sure what to expect. The first question that came to mind, as politically incorrect as it sounds: Isn't belly-dancing for chicks?

Well, if so, apparently not any more. Portlander Randy Brown is ready to shake his bon-bon for you in a way that would make Ricky Martin do a double take.

I recently caught up with him during a private rehearsal at his mentor's studio. Elinor Friedberg, who also goes by the name Sharita, met him through a class she instructs at Portland State University, and since January she's been teaching him all she knows about belly-dancing.

"He hasn't been dancing long, but he's a quick learner," the quirky New York native says. "I am amazed at how naturally it seems to come to him."

Brown isn't so surprised. "I've always been belly-dancing; I just didn't know that's what it was. When I dance, I'm theatrical with my body. But ultimately, for me, it's about the emotion of the music and what it is conveying."

He reveals he has loved to dance his whole life, dabbling in other forms including African and Irish before finding his niche in the ancient Middle Eastern form of dance. "It originally was

a form of dance in which women essentially seduced men," Brown says.

So, is this homo seducing men when he dances? "Well, yes, I suppose I am."

He often practices his art of seduction at Silverado. If you look past the strippers—I know it's tough—he's up on the back dance floor shaking his thing like a chicken wing.

However, to be honest, seduction isn't what comes to my mind when I watch him perform. It's more

like...how the hell do you do that?!

Logistically speaking, women are better equipped for all the hip and

chest shaking, but Brown insists it isn't uncomfortable. "I do have to adjust a little bit physically, but I don't feel in any way limited. I just do what feels right."

At this point Brown starts spouting some New Age riff like "dance is my vitamin...and I feel emotionally different when I don't dance." But it's kind of cute, and all of a sudden I feel like I'm in a scene from *Billy Elliot*. You can tell that he really loves what he's doing and that it's a true passion of his.

Brown is rehearsing with Sharita Productions for a performance combining belly-dancing with, of all things, the music of George Gersh-

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win's *Rhapsody in Blue*. "The slithery melodies and percussive qualities of jazz provide a natural counterpart to belly dance...to perform *Rhapsody in Blue* in this way is a complement to Gershwin's own taste for adventure," Sharita claims.

Well, I don't know how convincing that sounds, but combined with some fagacious costumes, seeing some homo shake his booty like he's in the "Thong Song" video is something I'll be there to check out.

Before I leave I finally ask Brown if he ever feels out of place as a man doing a form of dance traditionally meant for women. Spoken like a true flamer, he simply says, "No, I just love to dance." Right on! ☐

RHAPSODY IN BLUE will be performed 8 p.m. May 24 and 25 at the Scottish Rite Center, 709 S.W. Morrison St. Tickets are \$15 at the door for adults and \$9 for students, seniors and children younger than 12 or \$12 in advance from Fastixx.

MICHAEL WAYNE KECK thinks, if given the right amount of alcohol, he too would make an excellent belly dancer. E-mail him at michaelwaynekeck@hotmail.com.



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