

Belly dancing: an art form that's fun

By Jennifer Barr

Belly dancers are girls who twiddle their tums, according to the Readers Digest. There's a group of Acton women who are discovering that not only is 'twiddling their tums' excellent exercise and good fun, but it's also a graceful absorbing art form.

The Acton "Y" is sponsoring a belly dance class for the first time this season and is finding such enthusiasm that two more classes will commence on March 31.

Folk dancing
Helen McLarty of Acton is the teacher for all three classes and has strong opinions about the dance as a type of folk dancing rather than an erotic bump and grind. The 11 women nearing the end of the first course agree with her.

Although the origins of middle-eastern belly dancing are somewhat vague, Helen says most histories of the dance tout it is a woman's dance done by women for other women in the harems. The elaborate pelvic movements and muscle rolls were taught to young girls by their mothers to prepare them for child birth. The rhythmic movements were gracefully put to music as the women, with little else to do but await the Sultan's pleasure, amused themselves dancing for each other. Naturally the sultan was quick to catch on to the enjoyment of watching his wives exercise and the sensuous exotic dance was born.

The name 'belly dancing' is an appropriate abbreviation of Balledy dancing (sometimes spelled 'Belledy'). The French in North Africa nicknamed the dance "danse du ventre"—dance of the belly.

Full dress was used originally in North Africa, Egypt and Turkey, women wearing a caftan type garment with a sash around the hips. Forms of the dance are still done in long flowing garments. However, the most popular costume for cabaret work is the hip level chiffon skirt or harem pants and a jewelled bra top. A Veil is used as cover

and dance prop. Egyptian belly dancers still aren't allowed to show any midriff skin. Since Nasser's rein, torso must be covered or the show is closed.

Tremendously popular
The popularity of belly dancing has increased tremendously in the last few years. Most women start out explaining the dance is an excellent form of exercise for them, but few will admit it's the idea of the sensuous femininity of the dance that appeals to them. "Make your husband into a Sultan," "The Joy of Belly Dancing" shriek the covers of the many records available.

Every "Y" from Kitchener to Georgetown, from Burlington to Oakville, from all parts of Toronto, Brampton to Cambridge are offering belly dance courses of eight to ten lessons for a nominal fee.

Besides the flexibility exercises and basic dance steps, students are taught one or two simple dance routines at the end of each beginners' course. Serious students find they can progress to more demanding levels and eventually may join one of the several Middle-Eastern dance schools in Toronto.

Teacher still learns

That's what happened to Helen McLarty. She found she enjoyed her first course at Georgetown "Y" so much that when a teacher training course was offered to staff the many classes springing up all over, she enrolled.

In the two years since then Helen has taught in Kitchener, Burlington, Georgetown and now Acton. She studies herself on a higher level at Dance Oriental, a Toronto school, where she is learning classical Egyptian.

She says she first took up belly dancing "because I'm lazy". She felt that because she didn't play sports, dancing was a novel way to exercise.

Some restaurants cater to belly dance students and encourage them to dance for one another. The Stone Cottage Inn in Toronto puts on a



BELLY DANCE graduates of the Y course pose in costume. They are: front r. to l. Ruth Steinfatt, Christel Shumacker, Betty Cole. Back r. to

l. Irena Raju, Wannetta Smith, Carolynne Bullough, Audrey Pendleton, Carla Wood, Melanie Hardie, and Jenny Barr also graduated.

student night once a month featuring Arabic food and a chance to get up and show their stuff.

Each course graduating class attends such a night. The women graduating from the Acton class this Thursday will be attending a student night in early April.

"Terrific for tension"

The Acton students seem to have thoroughly enjoyed their ten week course and most are going on for the intermediate classes offered in April. They all agree Helen has been a most encouraging and amusing teacher, dishing out instructions for making costumes, record buying advice, and quaint gaelic stories in her soft Scottish brogue.

Betty Cole initiated the Acton course after seeing a demonstration and finds belly dancing "terrific for tension." "No matter how tired I feel at the end of the day, I feel marvellous after this class," she says.

Carla Wood took the course because she "already knew how to play volleyball and basketball" and thought it would be "something different." "You've got to work hard at it," says Melanie Hardie who is very "glad I took it."

After watching her talented

cousin belly dance at Christmas Irena Raju just had to try it too. She thinks it's "really

fun and good exercise".

Whether just good exercise

or an ancient art, belly dancing is taking the continent by storm, much to the delight of many a suburban sultan.

Free Press

Personals

A group of four young people from Acton, Jane Higgins, Rob Widmont, Debbie Brown and Oscar Peenstra visited the C.N. Tower in Toronto, on Sunday, March 13. They had a lovely dinner while enjoying the magnificent view. The occasion was in celebration of Jane's 19th birthday.

Chronological age means nothing! Old-timers kicked up their heels for hours to the music of sisters Miss Marjorie Hall and Mrs. Nellie Merkle at the Acton Rest Home. The residents could out sing and out dance the younger participants of the party.

The occasion was a double birthday party Tuesday of last week for two lovely ladies, Gladys Hoffman and Lillian Eaton, both well-known residents of Acton. The evening was an hilarious affair enjoyed by all.

Mrs. Eaton is leaving Saturday to be united with a life-long friend and live with her at St. Luke's Cambridge, and to be closer to her family. Friends will miss her; they wish her much happiness and hope she will return for her next birthday.

Mr. and Mrs. Roy Shultis of Ottawa spent Saturday with his parents Mr. and Mrs. Chuck Shultis after returning from a Caribbean cruise to South American and nine other islands.

Seven families were welcomed into the area by Hi-Neighbour Welcome Service hostess Marlene Steckley in February.

Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Gregory, son Paul and daughter Melissa from Australia are living in the home of Mr. and Mrs. James Mc'ulloch, R. R. 3, Acton, while on a teacher exchange for a year.

Two Mississauga families have made their homes in town. They are Mr. and Mrs. Gary Allard and sons Christopher and Michael and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Macdonald and family Graham, Gregory and Terry.

Mr. and Mrs. Allen Flindall and family Brian and Tracy have pulled up stakes in Brampton to settle in Acton, and Mr. and Mrs. Hans Hunord and daughter Mechelle have done likewise from West Hill.

Mr. and Mrs. Branko Perak from Toronto and Mr. and Mrs. Harry Rider and daughters Deborah and Lisa from Agincourt are also new residents in town.

Save-help sale soon

The Cancer Society is planning a garage sale at the end of April in St. Joseph's church. They're asking people to save books, toys and small appliances for them, when housecleaning time comes.

Bike gone

An Acton district man was taking his motorcycle to Milton this week on his truck when the truck broke down. He went for help, and on his return found his motorcycle had been stolen. The incident occurred on Bronte road.



EXPERT and instructor in the art of middle eastern folk dancing is Helen McLarty currently teaching several courses at the Acton Y.



A BOOK WAS presented to Acton Library Thursday in memory of Mrs. Josephine Whitham by members of the Duke of Devonshire chapter of the I.O.D.E. Mrs. Ann Mowat (left) and Mrs. H.R. Force (right) present a copy of The Royal Family at Home and Abroad to librarian Esther Taylor. The late Mrs. Whitham was a former regent of the chapter.

C.W.L. election

The executive of the Catholic Women's League for 1977-78 was elected at the March Meeting.

President is Mrs. Pauline Gordon; vice-president Mrs. Ruth Peekhouse; treasurer Mrs. Verna Arbie; secretary Mrs. Pat Garton; luncheon convener Mrs. Marg Murray; membership convener Mrs. Rena Arbie; program convener Mrs. Louise Papillon; Mrs. Brozic and Mrs. Rowe; sick convener Mrs. Shirley Braida.

Sunday, May 29 has been decided upon as the day for Open House at St. Joseph's church in celebration of 120 years as a parish.

Final arrangements are being made for a social time after Masses March 19 and March 20 in celebration of the Feast of St. Joseph.

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