

One favorite quote?

"The artist is the opposite of the politically minded individual, the opposite of the reformer, the opposite of the idealist. The artist does not tinker with the universe; he recreates it out of his own experience and understanding of life." - Henry Miller

If you weren't a dancer, what do you believe you'll be doing right now?

I'm very certain that music would be my field of work. When I was 19 yrs old I was an apprentice/beginner drummer (4 piece drum kit) for 4 years before I began belly dancing and was learning jazz based rudiments while practicing playing in a punk rock band. I also taught myself how to play piano when I was a kid with the help of my sister and dabbled with guitar here and there. In fact, before I ever began belly dancing I was very serious about getting into audio engineering / sound design; unfortunately those courses were VERY expensive and because they were not accredited, I could not get any financial aid. However I continued to stay very immersed in the subject and continue to learn and use my audio skills for my performance sets; though I am no expert, I can get around and get what I need done with the few programs I've taught myself.

You think that it is different the way that you face life now and the way you were before the dance came into your life?

Absolutely... I am more confident, I have more self respect, self esteem, and honor, I also value the arts so much more than I ever did.

Tribal, Tribal Fusion, ATS, ITS, Burlesque, Gothic... How do you define your personal dance style?

That is a complicated question... I've only studied ATS back in the late 90's however as a pioneer of the tribal fusion movement, back then, I tried to call it 'urban tribal style' instead of 'American tribal style' because that was Carolena's gig and I was no longer doing this exact style however I also was not well known at that point so the name 'urban tribal style' never stuck. As well, there was a troupe already with this name (Urban Tribal Dance Co) so it was, or could have been confusing. Tribal fusion was never my preference in what I liked to call my style however because of its vast popularity, if I didn't call it that, belly dancers would not understand what I do. In recent years I've decided to go with 'avant-garde belly dance theatre' because it is the most fitting for what I do.

One unforgettable moment in your life.

This is a hard question, I have so many! I suppose I should pick one that relates to dance... One unforgettable moment that was also defining was/is quite simple actually; I realized that all I ever need to do when ever I'm frustrated about my stagnation, nervous before a performance, or annoyed about trivial dance drama is to remember *why* I dance; I dance because it is part of my soul, it is my creative outlet, I love it so much, and it comes from a very pure place that surpasses these inconsequential social idiosyncrasies and ego/self esteem related affairs. I don't dance because I want to be frustrated, nervous, or annoyed... That simple realization has (most of the time) freed me from the bonds of all those negative thoughts and allows me to continue to reach deep inside and wash away those creatively restricting considerations so that I can continue to create.

Talk about the present, about how you're feeling. What are your expectations in the results of your work?

At present I'm happy to say that I've just come out of a few months of stagnation; patiently waiting for the next chapter and it has finally arrived. YAY! I'm pushing myself hard these days and challenging myself in fundamental ways. I expect new, vibrant, and redefining improvements in all areas of my work; it's always exciting when I am revitalized by life which motivates and inspires me.

What do you love to see in people who work with art?

I love to see different things from people who work with art but most importantly I like to see passion. To comment specifically about belly dancers I like to see the maturing artist being inspired, and pushing hard technically before they try to find their own voice. For the matured artist, I like to see them pushing their personal envelope, knowing themselves through their art and expressing it, not simply cloning (not to be confused with 'inspired by') someone else's artistic values because at that point, they can not be called an Artist.

How is the process of creation of your clothes? Did they have any influence at the creation of a new choreography?

To be clear, I have never choreographed; I have spent my career improvising my solo performances, however I've recently decided that it is time to try choreography as I see it as a new challenge, but that is another topic. Music can sometimes be where the idea begins for costuming; through the music I begin to see a picture / theme and create the costume accordingly. Sometimes however I find pieces that I collect for costuming and find a common ground between them which in turn gives me a themed idea and I create that way first; so I suppose in a way, costuming can influence my next performance. Most of the time though, I just keep my eye out for things that catch my interest for costuming and I buy it; over time, I go though it all and create from colors, embellishments, and textures and it begins from there. I don't have any specific formula or process that I use, I just 'go with it' (for a lack of better terms), what ever catches my interest first from music, colors, embellishments, themes is where the creative process begins and somewhere in that line up will be the creation of costuming.

An important person in your life would be... And why?

My husband Jason; he has been so supportive of my art and career in so many areas. He's taught me a lot about the business side of things that I've always been bad at. I'm foremost an artist; unfortunately after that, it turns into a mushy gray area...hahaha...but with his help, I've really come a long way at managing myself. I also love that I can run concepts by him in any manor of ways concerning music mixes, costuming, themes, dance moves...he's totally there and willing to give me his critique and opinion; it helps that he is an artist as well. Most of all though I love that he 'gets it', he understands my vision and that validity really makes me feel fulfilled.

Talk about the feeling of dance to other people?

Dance is the third most important thing in my life next to my family first, and music second. When I started dancing I had no idea I would have come so far in gaining a new view on life and a deeper appreciation for it as well. I have a greater self esteem and am more confident yet I have been also humbled because of dance which has allowed me to see things more realistically. It's nourishing and fulfilling and has taught me a great deal of patience; it's my companion for life that no one can ever take away from me or change. It's a great feeling.

At least but not less important: why dance?

Dance next to music is a perfect creative outlet for me. However, in all honesty, I never meant to go this far with it, it just happened, but it makes obvious sense to me because I've always been a physical person with a separate passion for music. I can remember dancing in my room or around the house as far back as I can remember, I also played a lot of sports when I was younger, was a prodigy figure skater, and perhaps having ADHD and not being able to sit still had a hand to play in all of this. At the end of the day though I don't believe I chose dance, I believe dance chose me.