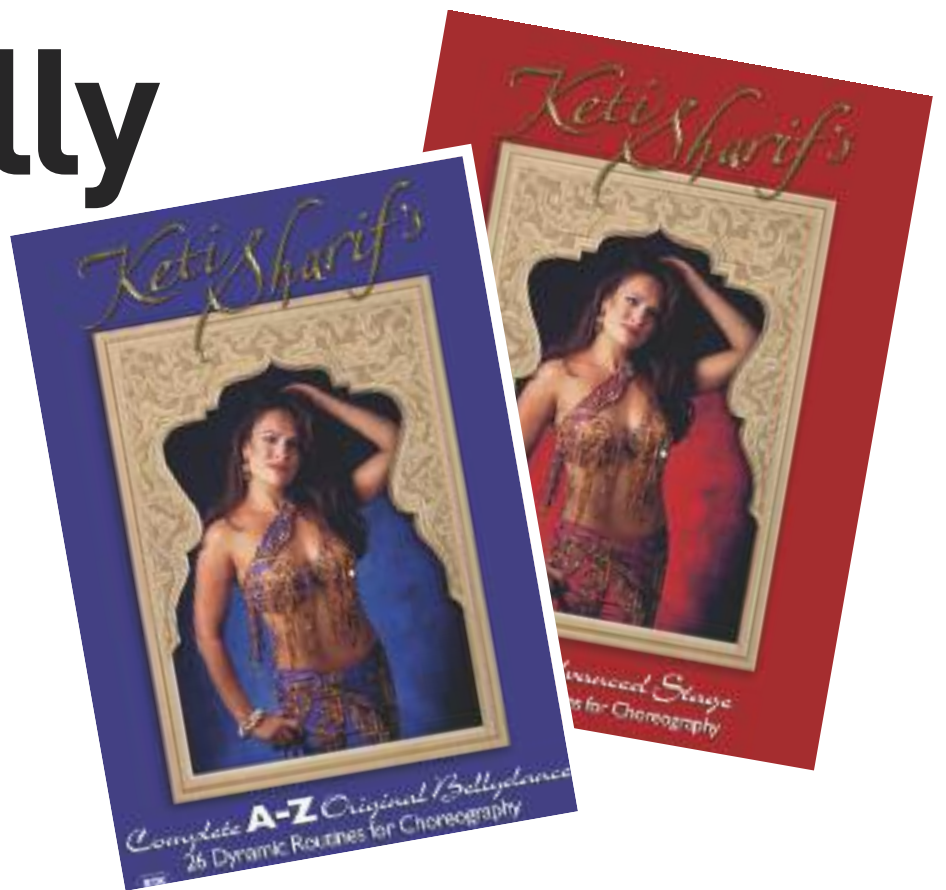


A-Z Belly Dance

Professional Belly
Dance Training for
Certification, Teaching
and Global Dance
Opportunities.

By Guinevere Clark



Belly Dance today enjoys a boom in popularity, cross over's and fusions. A-Z embraces the many influences in Belly Dance; its roots are in classical Egyptian cabaret and folkloric styles but can be enjoyed by tribal fusion belly dancers, ballet and contemporary dance artists.

The A-Z Belly Dance system was founded in 1999 by Ketis Sharif. The inspiration to form A-Z came from Ketis's years of study in Cairo and her attraction to the core principles of Egyptian dance and the various Egyptian dance genres, from folkloric to baladi to classical styles. Ketis studied with the famous Reda Troupe pioneer Mahmoud Reda in his Cairo studio and facilitated his Australian tour. His logical, yet aesthetic choreographic style, was a primary influence on the development of the A-Z system.



Ketis Sharif,
founder of
A-Z Belly Dance system.

Ketis is originally from Australia though for 15 years has based her Belly Dance business in the heart of Egypt, allowing her to offer Middle Eastern dance tours and A-Z Belly Dance courses located in Cairo and the Red Sea. Students from all over the world have attended Ketis's courses and taken A-Z back to their countries and dance groups.

The visual and descriptive cues help dancers to connect to the sequences in their imagination and to remember the lessons.

A-Z Belly Dance, now in its 11th year, is famous for its professional and structured approach, flexible training opportunities and progressive qualities. It is ideal for beginners, dancers of all disciplines and those wishing to study at home or make a full time career move into teaching Belly Dance. A-Z can be learnt informally via DVD or as part of a structured formal training programmes in Egypt, with in-depth assessments and professional development options.

The growth of Belly Dance worldwide reflects the interest in the arts of the Middle East, plus new ways of exploring feminine expression through dance. A-Z has gained popularity because it is an easy to remember system that embraces all core moves, styles and techniques whilst providing fast track learning.

"Dancers are often busy with other areas of their lives, but their lives are enhanced by the dance. Time wise, Belly Dance can take a long time to learn. So, if they have a system where they can learn more in less time, the concept works well for them!" says Ketis.

A-Z comes in two levels – Original and Advanced. The Original set of sequences covers 26 routines A-Z in various styles of Belly Dance. The original sequences introduce the learner to basic cabaret and folkloric steps and cover foundation Belly Dance moves including shimmies, accents, turns and flowing hip work. The Advanced A-Z involves emphasis on sacred geometry, floor patterns and more challenging phrases with detailed arm and hand work, quicker hip moves and influences from other dance styles including Indian dance, Salsa and Ballet.

The design of A-Z enables the dancer to learn the basic rhythms and footwork of Middle Eastern dance styles and to layer that with sumptuous hip and belly moves, graceful upper body work and travelling steps. It gives a fantastic menu of moves and, although they are prescriptive in terms of assessment for Personal Technique certification, they are made and shared by Ketī to inspire new works. The sequences are all in 16 parts, bringing variety and flow to training and performance. The phrases can be mixed and matched and make excellent building blocks for troupe or solo choreography work.

Two key skills for all dancers are developed through A-Z – improvisation and intuitive dance. In the Middle East – dance is often performed by women for women in the home or intimate communal spaces. It is not always a performative art in some areas - the dance is done to share experience, to bond and link families. For authenticity in its feel and effect Middle Eastern dance on some level must be relaxed, flowing and in the moment, free of choreography. A-Z encourages students to link moves together in seamless phrases and provides a backdrop for improvisations with its foundation structure and grounded rhythmic interpretation.

On a deeper level, Ketī's approach and other inspirations encourage a spiritual take on the dance that embraces holistic elements to movement and energy work. Ketī's AstroBelly series adds character and emotion into her training materials. In AstroBelly, like A-Z, fascinating and intricate dance routines are presented in sections. AstroBelly offers a short dance for each zodiac sign which can be grouped into the elemental categories of fire, earth, air and water.



Teacher Training with Paola Blanton in Cairo.

I have been studying, practicing, teaching and performing A-Z for seven years visiting workshops and intensive training courses in London, Cairo and the Red Sea to develop my knowledge and application of the system. I learnt A-Z after teaching in community settings for around six months following eight years of practicing and learning the art for my own pleasure. I felt that I needed extra input for myself and my students. A-Z certainly delivered what I was looking for.

My teaching has since been based predominantly in Wales. I have also taught A-Z for groups from Glasgow to Somerset and look forward to teaching a new oriental fusion

piece with veils based on A-Z in Cairo on the next A-Z Teacher Training course. A-Z has given me confidence, skill and a wonderful resource to share and work from. The first thing students comment on is the clarity and structure of the sequences. As each sequence is named; i.e. B for Baladi, C for Cairo Cabaret, M for Maya and P for Pharonic there is a visual key into the movement with an added description and background to the move, either geographically or historically. The visual and descriptive cues help dancers to connect to the sequences in their imagination and to remember the lessons. There is also a logical progression from A-Z and the Original course onto the Advanced sections.

The routines are accessible with the scope to make them easier for total beginners or more challenging for established dancers. I offer choreographies which have roots in A-Z and then decorate and adapt sequences to suit the music and style of the piece. It means I can give initial foundation sessions and workshops and expand on the moves for more experienced dancers or those actively building on A-Z skills, for example with prop work and troupe formations.

A-Z Belly Dance has created a whole dance community with a common language. For example, I could be dancing with a dancer from Croatia or New Zealand but we both know the essence of the movement and where it will go, thus we can explore how to work and dance it together into new formats. A-Z has been internationally successful and created a system that Belly Dancer's worldwide take many lessons from. The emphasis on certification and the resources that Ketī has created means that the learning materials are able to be drawn on at anytime for focus and updating.



Baubo Dancers

A-Z is ideal for dance teachers, as it offers certification for learning. The assessment process is in five logical and sequential parts and includes feedback on personal technique and a multiple choice questionnaire on the theory, culture and music that informs modern and traditional Middle Eastern dance.

The teacher training option allows you to formally teach the A-Z system and builds logically on the personal technique course. The course covers all the essential aspects of being a safe, informed and creative practitioner with a sound knowledge of how to deliver learning effectively. Prop work is covered and explored in relation to style. A-Z Teacher Training can be taken intensively in Cairo or done in flexible, part-time ways from your home training base or existing classes.

“A-Z has taught me the discipline required to memorize routines and as a consequence has improved my ability to choreograph and remember my own solo choreographies in front of an audience. The bite-size chunks of information make them fun to learn, teach, practice and perform.

A-Z has been applicable to me as a Tribal Fusion dancer wanting to understand the roots of Middle Eastern dance better. My A-Z Personal Technique and Teacher Training has been an invaluable experience to me as a dancer and teacher.”

Lyza Livesy, Aberystwyth, Wales

“A-Z has helped me to lay down a foundation of knowledge that I can build on. I feel a 100% rise in my confidence and therefore my enjoyment of dancing is greater.”

Rose Barter - Ceredigion, Wales

“I have been Belly Dancing for a few years and love dancing to choreographies. The only problem was that I felt really self conscious in free dance. A-Z Personal Techniques has come as a breath of fresh air, as I have learnt sets of moves which I can apply during my free dance - I'm no longer left wondering, I just go with the flow. It is really exciting to play around with the moves and give it my own personal twist. I would recommend A-Z training for beginners or advanced dancers, there is so much to learn and so much fun to be had! Enjoy.”

Julie Mathias, Pembroke shire, Wales

The issue of certification is becoming increasingly important as Belly Dance teachers are incorporated into educational, leisure and formal community learning settings. A-Z courses bolster up a dancers professional CV and also demonstrate accredited learning. It provides a sound, structured learning tool for students and really develops the material that a Belly Dance teacher and performer can offer. Here are some comments from students of A-Z Belly Dance.

The next A-Z courses are running in Egypt in Sept 2011 and nationally and internationally through a range of established accredited A-Z Belly Dance teachers. See the A-Z homepage on www.ketisharif.com for information and training resources. I also offer 1-1 classes and workshops in A-Z, as part of my professional Belly Dance business. Visit www.baubo.co.uk for more information.



Training with Isis Wings