

MUSIC FOR TRIBAL STYLE BELLY DANCE
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Welcome to the much anticipated Music for Tribal Style Belly Dance edition!

For years I've been trying to be brief in my descriptions of CDs, only to find out that 'less is not more' in this regard. I've had lots of requests for profiles of each CD's songs and more importantly, how to use the music for dancing Tribal Style.

How are CDs selected for inclusion in the FCBD Catalog?

Each CD is selected because it contains at least one piece that really gets us moving. Many CDs have more than one useful piece. Obviously, our customized CDs, Tribal Dance Tribal Drums and Itneen have the most 'bang for your buck' because we were able to work with the musicians to create exactly what we want to dance to.

What is 'slow' and what is 'fast'?

The concepts of 'slow' and 'fast' are both tempo and feeling. In the simplest sense, a slow song for Tribal Dance could be just a melody instrument played at a meditative tempo, like the "Ulvi" nai flute solo from Passion Sources. It sounds like a sigh, which it sort of is, because the only thing driving the flute is the artists breath. It's a slow-moving song with no drum beat, the tempo is slow and the feeling is slow. It gets a bit more complicated when a drum is added.

Just because you hear a rhythm being played doesn't mean it's a fast song. If the tempo of the drum is slow, you guessed it, it's a slow song. A few good examples are "Ciftetelli Unplugged" from Itneen and "Frame Drum" from Tribal Dance Tribal Drums. There's a rhythm but it's not up-tempo enough to be considered a fast song. 'Dramatic slow' is another concept; a driving 6/8 like "Stash Magrebi" from Tribal Dance Tribal Drums is moving pretty quickly tempo-wise, but it's not a fast song (see next topic), the feel of the piece is as if you are swimming against a current and it's very exciting. 'Fast' is a bit simpler. If you can do a Shimmy, Arabic or Egyptian Basic without feeling like you are going to lose your balance, it's a fast song. A good rule of thumb is that it feels like a 'trot' more than a 'walk.' You are bound to the beat with a fast song, you are either on the beat or you aren't-no interpretation here and all measures start with the right foot on one. The most common up-tempo rhythms for Tribal Style are the fast to very fast 2/4's; Fellahi, Malfuf, Ayoub and Karachi. And the medium fast to fast Saaidi, Maqsoum and Masmoudi Saghira (aka Baladi.) Just to make things really complicated, there are sometimes slow melodies during fast songs and fast rhythms during slow songs; in that case you have to go by 'feel' and make an artistic decision (or call me!)

What about 6/8 and 9/8 rhythms?

In terms of 'slow' songs, it makes no difference. In fact, an aggressive 6/8 can make a terrific dramatic slow piece paired with the Moroccan Six zil pattern (see Vol. 3 Zils.) But in terms of 'fast' it doesn't work. In the very beginning of developing ATS I tried dancing to fast rhythms other than 2/4 and 4/4. What I realized was the the steps are all in counts of two, four or eight, so the concept of a measure of music that is six or nine counts long means that you keep ending on the wrong foot every few measures. The alternative would be to create new steps for 6/8's and 9/8's. I chose to perfect the steps that we had and leave the creation of steps to my next lifetime. There is one exception however, since six can be divided by two, you can us a simple two count step like a shimmy or basic Arabic for some songs. But, you have to make sure it 'feels' fast as well. The RLR zil pattern will not work however because it is a count of four.

How do you use classical Egyptian songs?

Most of the time you don't. One of the biggest mistakes that has gone uncorrected in the evolution of Tribal Style is the idea that we can dance to any piece of music. Some songs are just not right for ATS, there are too many quick changes and tempo shifts. It's meant for a solo dancer, not a group of dancers. Also, classical Egyptian music is usually expecting the dancer to show emotion during certain phrases, something that Tribal doesn't do. We show a consistent emotion of happiness by smiling, but not flirtatiousness by tipping the head to the side, or intensity by gazing down at the floor or up to the ceiling. We are keeping ourselves open to pick up cues from the other dancers by not making prolonged eye contact with the audience. But this way of dancing to a classical song will appear 'flat' to someone who is familiar with Raqs Sharqi or Beledi dance. However, some classical pieces will work for Tribal Style, especially if the slow and fast parts are clearly defined. Don't disregard a piece that I've labeled as Classical. You can learn a lot from listening to and watching Classical Egyptian music and dance. If you try to apply Tribal moves, you'll see why they don't work, but it's always worth listening to.

Can you perform to a Call to Prayer?

Not a great idea, but differing circumstances can effect the outcome of this question. It's always good to know what a piece of music is about, and who you will be performing for. On the one hand I feel that if a religious piece of music has been released on a commercial recording, someone is making a profit off of it and it should be up for grabs. However, I do respect the cultures that the pieces come from so wouldn't want to offend anyone. You can certainly listen to it and be inspired by it, but use with caution.

What about techno and electronica?

Some of it is great! But too much takes away from the flavor of the dance. I would recommend using electronic music sparingly, as specialty songs.

What are the instruments?

Some instruments have various names and spellings. I have used the name that was supplied by the artist.

Doumbec, Darbukka or Arabic Tabla; a goblet shaped drum made of clay or metal.

Def, Duff or Tar; a shallow frame drum, similar in look to a tambourine without cymbals.

Bendir; a frame drum similar to the Def but with strings suspended across the inside to create a reverberation.

Riqq; an Arabic tambourine with a fish skin or Mylar head.

Muzhar; a large, deep frame drum with cymbals.

Tabla Beledi, Tapan, Davul; a base drum.

Zils, Sagat, Finger Cymbals; four small circles of brass, usually 2-3" in diameter.

Mizmar, Zourna, Ghaita; a double reed instrument similar to an Oboe.

Nai, Ney, Nay; a flute made from reeds that grow along the Nile.

Accordion; although not originally from Egypt, the Accordion has become a standard instrument.

Oud, Ud; a stringed instrument, played with a plectrum (similar to a pick.)

Rebaba; A stick fiddle, played vertically with a bow.

Argchool, Arghul; two reed pipes bound together played at the same time.

Appendix of steps:

Slow moves:

posture
puja

taxeem
reverse taxeem
hand floreo
arm undulations
bodywave
torso twist
circle step
walking taxeem
walking bodywave
reverse turn
propeller turn
corkscrew turn
camel walk
ribcage rotation
head slides
belly rolls
flutters
wrap around turn
barrel turn
sahra turn
laybacks
floorwork

Fast steps:

egyptian step
arabic step
pivot bump-choo choo
 w/arm 1, w/arm 2
shimmy
turkish shimmy
 w/quarter turn + half turn
turkish shimmy
 w/arms and turn
 w/arms and circle
reach and sit
arc arms
up2 down3
double bump
single bump
 w/half turn
arabic shimmy
arabic 123
waterpot
arabic hip twist
 w/half turn+flourish
arabic orbit
shoulder shimmy-hip drop combo
ghawazee shimmy combo
sunanda
re-shamka
reverse shimmy
chico four corners
wet dog
egyptian full turn
double back w/half turn
spins
arabic shimmy
 w/arms and turn and fade
 w/arms and turn and fade and circle