



Bellydance with Nicola

Care Recommendations for Costuming

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The following information is based on my experience not only as a professional dancer who has sewn, repaired, and worn a wide variety of costuming, but also as someone who has worked with historic clothing and artifacts in the university and museum setting. I volunteered and worked in several settings, cleaning, labeling, and repairing costuming, as well as cataloguing artifacts and creating displays.

I always found it so sad to see a garment that had been put away with the best of intentions, hung in a closet or folded in a drawer, that left too long came out rusty, stained, stinking, mildewy, or pulling itself apart. The elements that most affect the condition and longevity of your costuming are dirt, oils, smells/ fragrances, chemical residues (including detergents), sunlight, heat, friction, storage, maintenance/repair, gravity, and moisture.

- Start by using the best-quality components you can afford. Better-made fabrics, notions, thread, beads, and coins will last longer, look better and require less care and repair.
- Fit your costumes properly--the less you have to use pins and the less tug and gaping on your costume, the less wear and tear on it. -Learn the correct and appropriate techniques for sewing, embellishing, and repairing your costuming.
- Spot clean or hand wash, in cold water, on occasion, ONLY AS NEEDED. Spot cleaning is preferable. Do not, EVER soak. Use liquid detergent for delicates, or museum-grade textile wash. Do not use stain removers, bleach, fabric softeners, or enzyme (stain-lifting) detergents or additives. Be wary of "delicates" detergents--read all labels carefully. Some have odour lifting ingredients that may eat away finishes on fabrics and trims.

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- Avoid machine washing. Never machine wash anything with any decoration.
- Hang to dry. Avoid the dryer. It will cook and melt metallic and destroy all glue-based finishes, shrink and tear fibers, and result in pulls and splits. You may open your dryer to find it full of beads and sequins.
- Occasionally, you may want to hang your costume piece outside to deodorize. Keep it out of direct sunlight, as the sun will bleach and discolour fabrics, as well as degrade the fibers.
- Make sure all costuming is dry before you put it away.
- Do not store costuming in plastic unless you are trying to avoid tarnish on coins, and are absolutely certain there is no moisture trapped in the fibers. It can lead to build up of odours, and will encourage mold and mildew.
- Store anything heavily decorated or fringed flat, in a drawer. Gravity will eventually undo and wear out the threads holding dangling and raised decoration together.
- Do not use sachets or any other product for deodorizing in proximity to costuming. If you must, use something natural such as baking soda or herbs, located on a shelf above or below, but not touching, costuming. All products, including lavender and cedar, contain oils, enzymes and/or out-gassing chemicals that may stain and will eat away at metals, dyes, finishes, and threads.

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- Wrap bras and belts that tend to absorb sweat in clean, unbleached cotton, or acid-free tissue.
- Avoid dry cleaning, as this process will damage and discolour fabrics and notions over time (especially metals finishes on coins and beads). This affect is cumulative, and unless the residues are removed by museum-grade textile wash via archival-grade washing techniques, they will eat away at the costuming. Damage done by dry cleaning starts with the first time you do it. Dry cleaning is also toxic to you and to the environment.
- Use a cool iron or steam in a shower to de-crease, and only when necessary. Hanging up your costuming on proper hangers with enough air space will prevent creasing.
- Check the state of your costume several days before you wear it. Fix/clean problems ASAP.
- If you are using pins to improve the fit of a costume, or to make sure it stays fastened, remove all pins before washing and storing to reduce stress on the costume.
- Never , ever use moth balls. They contain toxic, cancer-causing chemicals that are very dangerous for children and pets, in particular. They also stink and make you unpleasant to be around. Moths are attracted to wool and silk. Store your costumes clean and dry, and check them regularly.
- Prevention is the best course of action. Do not wear your costuming around food, drink, and smoke unless it is necessary. Consider having separate costumes for restaurant gigs. Do not eat, drink, cook, drive, or

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lay down in your costuming if at all possible. Protect your gear from lit candles, sparklers, fireworks, fire poi, incense burners, pets, and children.

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