



Bellydance with Nicola

The Bellydance Problem Solver A Compendium of Practical Advice

PROBLEM: Your hip belt or skirt begins to slide down while you are performing.

Possible Solutions:

- Try to lift it up discretely. If it falls just step over it and move on. Hopefully you are wearing another layer of costuming!
- While pulling it up distract with a dance movement.
- Be careful not to step on the belt or skirt if they are sliding and you cannot fix this problem immediately.

Nicola's perspective

All of the above may work, depending on the speed of the slide and where you are in your dance, as well as how far down the item has slid before you have noticed.

If it is a belt and it is not going to expose you to let it slide off, then let it. Or, turn your back and fidget with the front, then face folks and back up, using one or both hands to fidget with the back. If you can retie the belt, then do it, if the clasps have come open then see if you can re-clasp the belt.

The skirt **must** be pulled back up as best you can, as you do not want to be dancing in just your panties.

I recommend using ribbon ties in the waistband instead of elastic for full skirts and pantaloons. tie firmly and jump around a bit before you go on. Some dancers pin their belts as a stop-gap in addition to clasps or ties. others will pin the belt to the skirt for that same reason-- you will feel it sliding sooner.

I know of a case where a heavy coin belt (chain style) was falling but then got stuck around the dancer's thighs. She danced on the spot until she noticed a woman in the crowd (at a wedding) understood what was happening. She

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backed up to the woman who then undid the coin belt and handed it to her. She put it back on while dancing--which you have to try to do without looking--and did it up tighter.

I remember stepping on the back of a skirt at the Fat Angel Bistro one night and feeling it migrate down under my bottom. I was luckily wearing 3 skirts that night, so no one really noticed. It made dancing difficult and dangerous. I whispered to someone I knew as I did a backbend to him-- "is my underwear showing?" and he shook his head "no".

If it is a chronic problem, the costume does not fit properly so deal with that. This happens even after you think you have fixed the issue. I watched video of a recent show at which I could feel my hip belt and skirt sliding downwards. I could tell from the video where my concentration was---in my feet. I was up as high as I could be to avoid stepping on the edge of the skirt, feeling my skirt slide ever-downward---I am assuming there was not enough friction between the body stocking and the satin skirt, as the skirt and belt fit perfectly and are not especially heavy. I was worried about turning too much, to accelerate the droop, I was worried to shimmy, and there was a noticeable level of distraction and droop in my upper body. I was so worried that the skirt was going to pop right down under my bum that I made several obvious adjustments to it, not even bothering to try to disguise my action! Now I remember another reason so many dancers sew a cotton casing onto the top of their satin circle skirts--it may look ugly but it grabs on better than something silky. The maker of the skirt, a nondancer, thought she was doing me a favour by making such a lovely casing.

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PROBLEM: You hurt yourself.

Possible Solutions:

- If you can tolerate the pain and it is minor keep dancing and pretend it doesn't hurt.
- Keep going unless it is a major injury.
- If the injury is major start dancing off the stage.

Nicola's perspective

Most likely you will be dealing with a pulled muscle or a foot injury (e.g. you stepped on something). If you can keep going, avoid movements that use the injured muscles. Keep off the foot if you can.

If there is blood, you feel faint or queasy, or you are dealing with an acute illness (e.g. food poisoning) **no one** wants to watch you bleed or barf. Get off the stage or out of the performance area, cuing the dj and/or host if you can.

Politely explain what has happened. Avoid dramatics. Ask for first aid if you need it. If you can recover you may be allowed to dance again that night, e.g. if it is a stage show--do not try to recover if this is a private party or the like.

If you are choosing to keep going, you will have to overcompensate by really shining and being genuinely expressive. This is usually only successful when you are in touch with your happy place and can call up that joy when you want to.

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If you have stepped on something and you think it is in your foot, get medical attention. Make sure your tetanus vaccination is up to date. (Hepatitis and septicemia are also a concern...) Clean the wound and get a bandage on it ASAP. A bottle of salt water can help clean out the gunk and kill infection. Hydrogen peroxide is best put to use if you need to debride the wound-- if there is gravel or the like embedded, the h.p. will dissolve away the foreign matter as well as some tissue.

I have stepped on rocks, lit cigarette butts, french fries, ice cubes, broken beads, mud, gum, slivers, you name it. This is why I wear shoes when I dance outside, almost without fail, and why I ask if the stage has been swept at a show. I always wear shoes backstage---other dancers may shed bits of costume, hairpins or safety pins, plus there may be screws, nails, tape, slivers and so on from theatre work.

PROBLEM: The lights come on late or go off early in your dance.

Possible Solutions:

- See if the lighting/tech person notices in the first 5 seconds. If not work with it.
- Keep dancing until the problem is rectified.

Nicola's perspective

If they have also cut your music, then leave the stage area. Do some semblance of an exit so that if the lights do come back on without your music, you look prepared.

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If your music is still playing, keep dancing as you meant to.

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This happened to me in Regina--twice in the same dance--first they came on late then went out early--I did what I should do, and when they came back on, it was kind of cool and surprising to the audience because I was in a totally different part of the stage than I had been. I actually startled a woman in the front row, as the stage and first row were on the same level, and when the lights came back on suddenly, I was dancing right in front of her. Boo!

PROBLEM: Your music skips.

Possible Solutions:

- Keep on smiling and dancing as best you can, especially if no one is there to help with the music.
- Keep dancing and catch up/skip to the place in the music.

Nicola's perspective

Keep going. Beware of how you catch up--best to pause and pose, figure out where you are but do this calmly and with a smile, don't look down or up or distressed or confused---you know what is happening, if not why, and you know what to do.

Unless it is really bad...

... in which case, stop and pose and look to the dj or sound person, with the look of "please fix this" calmly on your face. You can gesture "I don't know" (hands out and shrug) to your audience with a smile. If the music is

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totally garbled, leave the performance area and go talk to the dj, sound person or stage manager. This is the time for your back-up copy. If you re-use cd's for dancing, check them regularly on several different systems and have back-up. If you burn them, make sure you listen to the cd before show night. Find out if the system will take burned CD's. Bring the original(s) as backup.

I also bring several CD's that have complete sets on them--*Jalilah's Raks Sharqi Volume 5* and Mohammed Ali's *1002 Nachts*. Old Eddie the Sheik and George Abdo albums have complete sets on them as well. I try not to worry that this will totally alter what I planned to do- -if the system won't play your CD's then you don't really have a choice--change music or don't dance at all.

PROBLEM: One portion of the theatre/room is much less full than the other(s).

Possible Solutions:

- Still dance to all areas.
- Spend a bit more time looking at that side.

Nicola's perspective

I would give a little more or at least the same amount of attention to that space. Otherwise it will act as an energy vacuum for you. Everyone has paid to come and see, so make them feel like you care.

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PROBLEM: Your veil is stuck in your costume.

Possible Solutions:

- Tuck in the other side again and keep dancing if possible.
- Tug gently until it is free or tuck it into your costume and don't use it anymore.

Nicola's perspective

This is an "it depends" moment. If the veil began tucked and you can't untuck it with a gentle pull, then don't keep yanking--something will rip or let go. Put the veil back in, ideally into the hips--this is another reason why I like the double hip tuck. If it is caught in your earring or a bit of costuming, tucking it in near the catch is important. In the case of an earring, if you can also take off your earring and then tuck the veil back in, great. Let the earring fall where it may and go get it later.

I had to do this one night at the Fat Angel. The veil had become wrapped around my earring and a sequin on my bra strap. I had to undo the earring, tuck the veil up higher into the strap and then draped the rest across my neck so it fell to the back. Eventually the earring fell to the floor. I kicked it quietly aside and found it an hour later. Many patrons will be very kind and pick things up for you, holding them until later or passing them to venue staff to give back. I used to wear an extra veil in cases like that, or in case the first one made contact with food. This is why we do all our tucks and checks backstage, to make sure nothing is loose, unraveling, rough, or stuck.

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PROBLEM: Your music isn't starting, or it's the wrong music.

Possible Solutions:

- Indicate the song is incorrect and/or wait for the correct song to begin.
- Shake your head "no" and point to your ear.

Nicola's perspective

If onstage, I would pose and point to my ear and shake my head and then just smile and wait. If backstage, or, if the problem is not corrected, I would go backstage and talk to the stage manager. If you are in an open area to dance and there is a dj, do the same to the dj.

Try not to get flustered or angry, just stay calm and keep smiling. If it is truly hopeless-- e.g. after a minute or so the music keeps playing, then consider dancing. This is a big reason why you are asked to provide your music by itself on one cd, labeled clearly, and why sound people number the cd's at ensemble shows.

If there has been a chronic problem throughout a show, trust that the organizer will speak to the sound person about it.

This is a common occurrence at ensemble shows and haflahs. Be prepared.

This is YET another reason why I like to start offstage.

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PROBLEM: Your music isn't loud enough.

Possible Solutions:

- If the tech can see you, signal a sound increase (discretely if possible) while starting to dance.
- Signal to increase volume or do the best you can.

Nicola's perspective

Keep dancing, don't delay that. This is why we have sound checks, but problems still occur. Look at the sound person, point to your ear and point up or use your hands to make an lifting gesture. Be persistent or repetitive. Nod when it is okay.

Also recognize that in some theatres, you may think it is not loud enough, but the folks on the other side of the speakers find it loud enough.

If you were planning to play zills but can't hear the music, and the problem isn't corrected, play quietly or not at all. Smile and shrug to your audience and do the best you can. Try not to look pissed off-- great dancers roll with it!

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PROBLEM: You fall.

Possible Solutions:

- Start a floor dance like you meant to do it.
- Laugh it off and get up.

Nicola's perspective

If the music works you can dance down there. Otherwise, get up as gracefully as you can, dust yourself off with a smile, and keep going. People will remember how well you deal with these things and admire your composure and calm. Be like a duck--water off your back!

I fell at a 1999/Millennium New Year's party in someone's house. Luckily I was in a hallway so not too many people saw it--I had stepped onto my organza veil by accident, while trying to avoid someone's drink. I landed hard on my a\$\$\$. I know I looked shocked, and it did hurt a whole lot, but I got up, laughed hard, and kept dancing. It was very funny. The poor guy who I had dodged was more upset than I was.

This is truly very rare, although we all fear it. Be aware of the edges of your stage. Don't dance in new shoes without testing them at home. An old showgirl trick is to dip the soles in cola and let them dry--they will be sticky but you won't slip!! Stages that are built of composite parts/sections tied together can be tricky as they have seams and shaky sections---another reason to take small, soft steps when you dance and adapt to your conditions.

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PROBLEM: You forget your choreography.

Possible Solutions:

- Don't freeze up--keep going with the music until you remember or recognize where you are.
- Keep moving and come up with 2 or 3 default moves to fall on.

Nicola's perspective

Solo choreography is best used as a structure to start from and come back to--don't chain yourself to it because I guarantee that if you panic and freeze when you "forget" it, that you never knew it that well to begin with!

If you know your rhythms and listen to what you are taught in class, and you understand the style you are doing, you should also know a half dozen "default" steps that serve as improv steps and things to fall back on if you forget what you planned to do. No one but you and the choreographer will truly know what you intended to do---don't let "forgetting" show in your face or be visible in your posture or attitude.

If you are in a troupe/group dance, take a peripheral peek at someone else, get your feet back into the dance ASAP and then pick it up with gusto once you figure out where you are. This usually happens when you either don't know the dance well or you panic and your brain and body are shutting down. Your teacher/troupe director will have a chosen method to deal with this issue.

If it truly awful, and it probably isn't, exit. But it is best to cope, keep going and

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do your best. I can count on one hand the number of times I have seen dancing **so bad** that I thought they should leave the stage. Most, especially at ensemble shows, passes. It may not be great, or even good, but it usually isn't terrible.

PROBLEM: Your prop has fallen.

Possible Solutions:

- Bend down gracefully and pick it up.
- Abandon the prop if you can go without it.

Nicola's perspective

If you bend down, turn to the side so you are not sticking out your butt, then dip in your knees, try not to look, smile and get back in the swing of things.

If it has fallen and slid or skittered out of reach, you may be able to ask someone to pass it to you, or, it may be best to just abandon it, calmly and serenely keep going and have a plan b.

Sufficient practice with a prop usually prevents this, as does wearing the right costuming- -no giant rings or bracelets when you don't usually wear them, remembering a head scarf or headband for sword and cane.

Dropped veils are sometimes best left dropped, unless it is only one side that has dropped. Lift the other end high and turn into that hand. take hold of the veil high up with the other hand, then slide it down along the edge back into place, reverse with another turn and twirl the veil to balance it out and make sure it is not caught. Do a toss and walk away from it to get rid of static or dirt.

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My hardwood cane smashed (exploded into 4 pieces) 15 seconds into a cane dance in front of Yousry Sharif. This was in Saskatoon the very first time I had solo'd in a stage show outside of Winnipeg. One piece actually went sliding across the stage right for him. I thought "good god, it's going to kill him!" One piece flew off and stuck to the curtain. I made an "oh-oh" face, laughed, shrugged and kept going, holding the largest piece but it turned into a comedy routine. It helped that I could hear all the Winnipeg dancers laughing the hardest in the back. Stopping, crying, and running off were not options for me, I had something to prove to myself and my teacher, and I had too many years in sports to crumble and give up. It was, after all, really, really funny.

I believe very strongly in humbleness and the ability to laugh at oneself.

OK, so what if it is a finger cymbal?? Pick it up and put it back on if you can, or just take the rest off and put them down gently, or keep holding them. Some dancers have enough cleavage that they can turn their back and drop the zills down their dress, or I have heard of dancers having a pouch fastened to their belts.

Nothing should be more important than the act of dancing. Remember that.

PROBLEM: Your bra strap has fallen or opened.

Possible Solutions:

- Do a turn and slide it up while turning.
- Pull it up inconspicuously or if it the back strap smile and get someone you know in

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- the audience to help.
- Keep dancing if it's a shoulder strap and the rest of your costume is secure.

Nicola's perspective

This is why many dancers prefer dresses and crop tops!

Turning or lifting up the arm of the fallen strap will often correct it discretely. The back strap can be a lot harder. Ask for help if you can, or exit the stage and get help there--- usually it will be no or little problem to restart your dance.

This is the reason behind an impeccably fitted costume. It is also the reason most of us have 2 sets of clasps, sewn in opposite directions, on our bras.

PROBLEM: Your earring has become stuck in your costume or hair, and you can't free it. It hurts and you can't upright your head.

Possible Solutions:

- Tug hard enough to get it to let go or just leave it and continue.
- Take out the earring and distract with a dance move.

Nicola's perspective

When this has happened to me, I have found that undoing the earring and letting it hang or fall is best. Turn away or turn your back to the audience, reach up while doing something showy with your hips. Do it as quickly as possible.

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Someone may notice that you have an earring hanging off your costume, but it will be much more noticeable if you continue to suffer like a snared rabbit, your head cocked to the side, wincing!

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