



Bellydance with Nicola

Quick & Effective Warm-ups for Dance

Phone: 957-7520

Email: nicolaraks@mts.net
OR belydans@mts.net

www.nicola-bellydance.com

It can be a challenge to warm up effectively and sufficiently before a performance. You may be restricted by time, space, costuming, or you may just forget. It is absolutely worth doing, and it's something you can do in limited space, limited time, and in your full costuming.

Safety first!

Be polite and considerate of space. It would be rude to knock or bump someone, and dangerous to bump something--you would not want to get hurt or hurt someone right before you are supposed to dance.

Also, make sure you are not tuning out directions from your teacher, the stage manager, your troupe director, the restaurant owner, the patron who booked you, or the show organizer--it would be embarrassing to miss the beginning of your number.

Be mindful of standing in a passageway or in front of or behind a door--it's unsafe. I attended a show once where a troupe of students and their teacher (about 8 in all) stood in a circle blocking the only door in and out of the dressing room, as well as access to the mirror and garment rack, for nearly 10 minutes. This allowed many members of the audience, who were making their way to their seats, a full view into the dressing room area. They then knocked a table, sending a pitcher of water careening to the floor, soaking a dancer's carry-all case and several pairs of shoes.

No one should have to give you a reminder to behave, or have to safeguard their costuming, clothing and other gear.

Keep your shoes on until it is time to dance--this will help keep your feet warm and prevent injuries.

Start from the top down.

(Continued on page 2)



Bellydance with Nicola

Quick & Effective Warm-ups for Dance

(Continued from page 1)

Choose to focus on your upper body, which tends to lose energy first and is the most difficult to loosen up, as most of us store tension in our shoulders, neck, face and hands. When we are nervous, the eyes and head tend to droop, then the shoulders followed quickly by the arms, closing into the body, in the basic primate stance of submission and self-protection. You are absolutely vulnerable as a performer--accept that and learn to be aware of that inborn instinct, and eventually you will override it to stay open and lifted.

Use your judgement

Not every venue will support these warm-ups--if you are visible or may be walked in on, choose to do the ones that are more dance-like. You don't want a patron to catch you making goofy faces or silly noises right before you go on.

The How-To's:

1. **Breathe.** Start by taking very full, slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. Keep your face relaxed, and when you exhale, hold your mouth the way you would if you were making the "oo" sound, holding your upper lip slightly over your lower lip. Focus on letting the breaths expand down and out into your diaphragm. Make your exhalation slightly longer than your inhalation. Try timing it as 10 seconds in, 12 seconds out.
2. **Breath plus arms.** As you keep breathing in the above manner, begin to slowly move your arms in a circle out and up, about 10 times, then down and out, about 10 times. If you don't have room, do one arm at a time and alternate. Then breath while your extend your arms out at shoulder height with your exhalation. Double up and add some hand ripples or circles to the arms.

(Continued on page 3)

Phone: 957-7520

Email: nicolaraks@mts.net
OR belydans@mts.net

www.nicola-bellydance.com



Bellydance with Nicola

Quick & Effective Warm-ups for Dance

(Continued from page 2)

Phone: 957-7520

Email: nicolaraks@mts.net
OR belydans@mts.net

www.nicola-bellydance.com

3. **Warm-up your joints.** Do slow, full rolls of the shoulders (backwards only--most of us are not tight in the back but in the chest). Then, take your elbows and move them like you are rowing a boat--again, do one arm at a time if you are short on space. Do wrist/hand circles and hand ripples. Close and open your hands one joint or finger at a time. Do it all very slowly and evenly, focussing on the movements being consistent. If you have time, do some pelvic rotations and some "o" hips in each direction, gently. Roll your ankles gently both ways, then move from flat foot to the balls of the feet and back very slowly.
4. **Rise and Shine.** Open your mouth as if in a big yawn, reaching hard and as far as you can with your arms, including extending the fingers as far as you can. Imagine sending all your tension out into the far reaches of the room. Do one arm at a time if you can't do both. Repeat, reaching straight up.
5. **5) Shimmy.** Big, loose, thigh shimmies get your heart pumping and your little hearts (your quads) pumping too. Shimmy till your legs are tingly and warm. Bounce gently on the spot--you don't have to lift off the floor.
6. **Shake.** Shake out your hands, feet, arms and legs, as a sprinter would do just before taking mark in the starting blocks. This is more for dispelling tension than actually warming anything. It will boost circulation.
7. **Face and eyes.** If you must do so, close your eyes--but tip your head slightly up so that you don't get droopy. Otherwise look intently at something at eye level or slightly above. Let some long, slow breaths

(Continued on page 4)



Bellydance with Nicola

Quick & Effective Warm-ups for Dance

(Continued from page 3)

Phone: 957-7520

Email: nicolaraks@mts.net
OR belydans@mts.net

www.nicola-bellydance.com

out through your lips so that they vibrate (horse lips). Smack your lips. Lift your eyebrows as wide as you can while you open your eyes as wide as you can. Smile fully, relax, and repeat. Hum loudly with your lips closed in an “m” sound.

8. **Pre-dance.** Sways, shimmies, shoulder rolls, arm and hand movements and hip circles all work as warm-ups. Do as many as you need to in each area of the body until that area is warm and tingly. This is especially true of the hands.
9. **Attitude.** Find a mantra, prayer, saying, spell, whatever you want to call it, to say to yourself before you go out there. Anything that helps you get your “game” on, your heart lifted, and your eyes twinkly. All eyes will be on you--try to enjoy the gift of attention and energy that your audience is giving you, and recognize you are giving them the same. If you say the same thing to yourself before each performance, it actually become a ritualized act that cues the brain and body--it's called an association, and it will work to calm and ready you, even if your conscious thinking is racing along.
10. **Helping hands.** Rubbing, squeezing, patting, and jiggling muscles with the hands can help bring blood to the area and override the tension that comes with increase adrenaline in the body.
11. **Remember**, you are often visible before you begin to dance. Stand, move, and sit with the knowledge that you may already be judged for your gracefulness and carriage. Sit and stand up straight, head lifted and neck long, and try to come across as pleasant and intelligent, which will make most people feel comfortable and receptive in most

(Continued on page 5)



Bellydance with Nicola

Quick & Effective Warm-ups for Dance

(Continued from page 4)

situations.

Phone: 957-7520

Email: nicolaraks@mts.net
OR belydans@mts.net

www.nicola-bellydance.com

What doesn't work? Several major studies in the past 2 years in sports and dance found that stretching does little to nothing for most people to improve performance and prevent injury. Stretching may actually cause injury if done before muscles are properly warm. Stretching should come afterwards. If you are chronically tight in an area and it limits your ability to move or causes you pain, warm-up thoroughly and then stretch that area. Don't feel that you have to stretch out everything--this takes a long time and is not usually necessary unless you have danced for a prolonged period of time or been doing very difficult technique.

Author: Nicola

Copyright: © January 2008 Nicola, Last updated: 2009/01/06