



## Bellydance with Nicola

### What Should You Expect from a Professional Performer? (Are you truly ready to call yourself a professional?)

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The following checklist should be used as a guideline, both for the student who is considering taking their dancing further and for the potential patron wanting more information about hiring a dancer.

Any performer calling themselves a "professional" should be able to meet a **minimum** set of standards and expectations for a show, be it a 10 minute bellygram, or a couple of sets at a restaurant.

The professional-calibre, experienced dancer should:

- Have been dancing at an "advanced" level for at least 2 years;
- Be able to provide references from other teachers, dancers and clients;
- Be well-groomed and made up;
- Wear a costume that fits well, is not too revealing or transparent, and is professional-looking. [Examples of professional costumes](#);
- Quote and insist upon the going rate before confirming an engagement - you get what you pay for with dancers! (see: *Article: Standard rates for bellydancers*);
- Arrive on time (which often means 15 minutes early) prepared to dance and leave soon after finishing her set and being paid;
- Avoid drinking alcohol, smoking, eating, and socializing with patrons before dancing and especially while still in costume;
- Bring cards and perhaps brochures for distribution;
- Provide a short bio/introduction;
- Have her music with her, as well as a back-up copy, and be ready for an encore if applicable;
- Dance a set that includes a variety of music, with her dancing changing to suit the tempo, rhythms, mood and origin of the music; perhaps use props and changes in costuming (if multiple sets have been booked);
- Engage playfully with a person or people (ex. the birthday boy) in a tasteful and profes-

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sional manner, by involving them in the dancing, draping her veil around them (you'll want it back!), or offering well-wishes/congratulations; Not sitting on laps, shaking her breasts in someone's face or rubbing up against patrons;

- Leave an audience feeling happy, entertained, and impressed with her abilities, talent, and presentation, NOT embarrassed, uncomfortable, or shocked.

A dancer may ask:

- For a private place to change before and after dancing (but a pro will cope without one);
- For water to drink in the changing area (but a pro will bring her own);
- To be paid the full and exact amount agreed to immediately after dancing (and it's nice not to have to bug a patron for our fee); tips are a welcome addition;
- For a reasonable dancing space to be clear of obstructions and hazards (but a pro can dance in a relatively small area);
- That the patron to provide and operate the stereo system, and to announce her intro/bio;
- That an escort or apprentice come along;
- If the patron would be interested in references and contact information for fellow dancers if she herself is not available for the job.

A dancer should NEVER:

- Write messages on her body;
- Carry a birthday cake (especially one with candles!), or balance one on her head;
- Sit on anyone's lap;
- Serve food or drinks;
- Walk around in costume as "eye candy";
- Take off her clothes;
- Sing a song;
- Kiss or hug someone she does not know.
- Most professional dancers will not dance for all male crowds, nor will they perform in a venue or at a time when the patrons are drinking heavily. We provide artful, cultural en-

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tainment. Most professionals will ask a series of questions to make sure they can provide you with an entertaining and enjoyable show without compromising our living, our safety, or our dignity. For more information see *Going Pro* by Shira.

What to ask a potential patron:

When discussing a gig with a potential patron, I usually ask:

- How many people;
- The kind of gathering (staff party, birthday, etc.);
- The space of the room;
- Amount of dancing space;
- If it is a surprise or not;
- If they have seen bellydance before;
- What is expected;
- What kind of flooring and how high the ceiling is (especially important if the gathering is in someone's home).

If it sounds to me like someone is looking for an exotic dancer (stripper) or servant, rather than performer of bellydance, then I will politely decline the job without referrals to other professional dancers.

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