

**BEGINNER'S
CLASS #7**

**EGYPTIAN
GHAWAZII**

HANDS & ARMS

Framed Head slides
-one arm overhead &
other fist near chin

Zils

One arm held out forward
at about chest level, the
other arm is raised up &
out to the side in the
direction traveling. The
hands are graceful w/zils

RIB CAGE

Chest shimmies

TORSO

Torso Undulations

HIPS

The Relaxed Fanny "U"
or "Crescent"

Side to Side Shimmy

-in place
-traveling

Simple circle Debki
(loop the loop)

Giant Hip Circle
(Big Butt!)

Sharp Hip Drops

Sharp forward hip twist
on one hip

PRACTICE

Practice your zils as well
when you practice your
Ghawazii. The maqsoum
rhythm is very common!

REMEMBER

Remember Debki steps
are very popular in
Lebanon and the simple
Debki is great for line
dancing. Join hands with
a couple of friends and
see if you can turn in a
circle without breaking
the line.

Remember Ghawazii
style is a folkloric style
which is underscored by
the predominate use of
flat footed steps as
opposed to stepping on
the balls of the feet or
demi-toe which is in
Turkey is referred to as
Arabesque.

AYAZEIN

(an Egyptian folk song)

Ah ya Zein
Ah ya Zein
Ah ya Zein il' Abidin
Ya ward
Ya ward im fattah
Bain il basatin

Oh Zein (beautiful)
Oh Zein (beautiful)
Oh most beautiful of believers
Oh blossoming flower
Best among all the flower
gardens

Zein means beautiful and is
also a man's name. Abidin is
also a name, which translates
literally as believer or religious
follower.

From: *A Near Eastern Music
Primer*
By Mimi Spenser

The twist

The Twist twisting you in
a circle

Ghawazii Kick #1
- Hip twist w/kick

Ghawazii Kick #2
- Hip drop w/kick

Ghawazii pounding heel
shimmy traveling in a
circle

TRAVELING STEPS

Step – Toe Walk

Simple side-traveling
single Hip Circle
(repeat 2 or 3 times)

Step, Thrust

Washer Woman

Ghawazii Step
(cross step- pivot -
hip thrust)

**Two Dancers Dancing
Together**

Come together, and then
walk away facing each
other

Two dancer lean on each
other's shoulders while
using large hip shimmies
as they circle around.

2 or more dancers line up
and back bend towards
each other's chest while
executing a large hip
shimmy



**THE GHAWAZII
OF
EGYPT**

Turn of the Century Dance in Egypt

At the turn of century the term “**Ghawazii**,” referred to public dancers who ranged from the prolific common street performers, to the more rare “**Awalim**” who were educated and respected. Writers and painters immortalized these entertainers with vivid and often romanticized imagery. The “Ghawazii” still exist and turn of the century photographs illustrate how the dancers and the dance traditions continue in a strikingly similar vein.

In the nineteenth century the “Orient” was a vaguely defined geographical area encompassing the Middle East, India and China. Fueled by British Imperialism, Orientalism was a cultural reflection of the Western exploitation (think opium and tea), of these exotic and valuable regions. Pervasive in Victorian art and culture, Orientalism influenced religion and philosophy as well as lifestyle. It was a well-spring for literature, painting and sculpture, the performing arts, couture, cuisine, de’cor and architecture - like Victorian smoking rooms. The *grand obsession* was even reflected in perfumery, Shalimar is still a very popular scent even today! Victorian Orientalism was unfortunately a warped romantic view exposing a desperate need to justify the West’s domination and subversion of these wealthy ancient lands.



According to research Orientale dancers made their first public appearance in the West in 1851 at the Crystal Palace Exposition in London. This exposition traveled to New York in 1853 and Paris in 1867. Ten years later, in 1876, Tunisian dancers performed at the Columbia Exposition in Philadelphia, which was commemorating the centennial anniversary of independence of the United States. Late nineteenth century *great exhibitions* like the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair imported Middle Eastern musicians and dancers as well as other performers into Europe and America. At the Chicago World’s Fair these exotic entertainers were segregated to a separate section of the exhibitions, on a strip of land connecting two parks called the “midway”, a term still used at modern State/County Fairs and small carnivals.

Segregated, so as not to offend Victorian sensibilities, these wildly popular attractions surprisingly drew as many women as men. Carnivals, side shows and permanent “midways” like Coney Island helped continue the spread of Oriental dance as well as its darker shadow “exotic” dance. The American misnomer *Belly Dance* probably derived from the French “dans du ventre” (dance of the stomach) a descriptive term used commonly at the turn of the century. Some historians believe it was coined by the once famous American promoter Sol Bloom for the 1892 Colombian Exposition. Other French terms such as “Danse Orientale” or “Oriental Dance” have their origins in the Victorian era as well.



Raks al Baladi is the oldest form of women’s solo improvisational dance in Egypt. *Baladi* means “my country” or “countryfied” *Baladi* is also the urbanised folk music of Egypt. From the city ghettos to the *fallahin* (country people/farmers) *Baladi* is considered the dance of the Egyptian people by the Egyptians themselves. *Raks al Baladi* is most commonly associated with the *Al Saaeed* region or Upper Egypt. The *fallahin* who live there are referred to as *Sa’aidi*, as is their music and one of the more common rhythms.

As Ghawazii has come to mean simply dancing girl, it covers a wide range of performers. In the United States the term is most often used to refer to a specific group of entertainers found in upper Egypt near the temples of Luxor. These dancers have been described by travelers, writers, artists and soldiers for several hundred years. As early as the 1st century AD there are Roman descriptions of Egyptian dancers which appear to exactly match the style of the modern day Egyptian Ghawazii

The dance styles of the Ghawazii have changed little over time. They performed one hundred years ago much as today, playing sagat (finger cymbals), singing and dancing to a Sa’aidi *mizmar* orchestra on the banks of the Nile or on boats for private parties and *rebaba* orchestras at *Moulids* (religious festivals) and other *Sa’aidi Farahat* (rural celebrations). Most Egyptians refer to country performers who have little changed their style through out the centuries as Ghawazii.

In 1798 the Napoleonic army conquered Egypt and the Ghawazii became the main attractions for most travelers and soldiers. At that time the Ghawazii were settled in the lower Nile and Cairo regions. In 1801 Mohammed Ali helped oust the French and by 1817 there

were an estimated 6 to 8 thousand Ghawazii in the lower Nile and Cairo regions. To discourage interaction between foreigners and the extremely unrespectable dancers Mohammed Ali banished the Ghawazii from Cairo to Esna, Qena and Luxor in 1834. The male *Khawals* (female impersonators) take their place just like the Turkish Cengi did before them.



Haroon al-Rasheed reinforced that banishment in 1886 and most Ghawazii relocated to Luxor, Quena, Esna & Sumbat. Here they performed in the streets, unveiled, for the so called “common rabble” and occasionally performed in the courtyards of the hareems for wedding celebrations and other festivals. The courtyards of the wealthy were traditionally the realm of the *Awalim*, who were favored by Haroon al-Rasheed. Some of the Ghawazii posed as *Awalim* in order to escape banishment. Their existence in Egypt is now precarious due to rising fundamentalism and social pressures

For the modern Ghawazii a performance in a village may last as long as seven hours and be followed by another marathon performance at a different wedding celebration or farahat. Seldom resting at these performances they prefer to dance together in groups of up to five, which may be difficult to achieve since fewer women are performing these days. They still perform in the time honored traditions of their predecessors playing sagat, singing, dancing with *assaya* and performing backbends supported by each other or sandwiched around the *tabla beledi*. Most often dancing to a rebaba orchestra in the villages, the musicians are often related to the dancers.

Their costume was described many times by travelers, “Even when not performing, they wear a great deal of jewelry; nose rings, necklaces, amulets, a row of gold coins over the forehead, and always Kohl and henna.”



(Turn of the Century Ghawazii Dancers)

The traditional costume was comprised of a glittering crescent shaped head-dress called a “*Taj*” which modern Ghawazii assert is from Pharonic times. They wore a gathered chifon skirt which has risen over time from ankle to knee-length and trimmed in multi-colored beaded fringe over which was worn narrow panels of material trimmed in metal spangles, under which they wore petticoats and a roll of cotton padding at the hip line to accentuate hip movements. They still perform the Hyetti at Egyptian weddings. The dancer always wears a particular dress and the distinctive triple crescent necklace which is a symbolic dowery piece which hangs down the front of the dancer’s torso. The necklace may be removed and used in a teasing manner with the musicians.

There are many ethnic groups from which the Ghawazii are said to descend. They are thought to be the *Nawar*, *Ghajjar*, *Bahlawan*, *Halab*, *Shahaina* and the *Ourban*). The Nawar are the only Ghawazii dancers accused of occasional prostitution. The Maazin family claim to be from the tribe called Nawar and they assert that their language is not related to the other tribes. It’s true that their vocabulary hints at a North Indian Hindi association.



“The Ghawazii were of foreign origin. There is no place in the whole world that is free of these wretched people whom we wrongly call Egyptian or Baumien; they can be

found in large groups between Materie and Cairo and also along the Nile, in several Egyptian villages, camping underneath the palms. They are as foreign in these lands as they are in ours. Because they are originally from Valachie they speak several languages and are Christian. The Italians call them Singuans. The Turks have given the Sainguan women permission to prostitute themselves publicly to all. Christians and Turks alike, and they have a house in the heart of Constantinople with several rooms, which everyone can enter freely, outside the boundaries of Turkish law. And there are at least a dozen women usually available. In Greece, Turkey and Europe these people occupy themselves by working with iron, and they are very skilled workers in this trade.”

Yousef Maazin, the patriarch of a modern *Ghawazii* family, claimed his tribe originated in Persia and were ejected from there because of suspected theivery and a bad reputation. Perhaps this is true since the poet Firdusi wrote of a King Bahram arranging for almost 1,000 *Luri*, entertainers from India, to settle in Persia circa 5th century to entertain the populace. The *Nawa* (or *Norwara*), *Halab* and *Bahlawan* are associated with the areas of Qena. The *Nawar* still speak the *Nawari* language somewhat and are considered ethnic *Rromani* (gypsies). They claim the *Halab* and *Bahlawan* speak a language unrelated to theirs.



The famous “Awalim” of Egypt were dancers as well as singers, poets and storytellers. “Awalim” (plural) or “Alma” (singular) refers to their status as “learned” or “wise women”. The “Awalim” were members of ancient guilds and believed to be of a different class from the “Ghawazee.” Although the Awalim performed strictly for women, men had occasional opportunity to experience their charm. It’s true that in the hareem the women’s areas for receiving were screened off to ensure privacy. But to maintain air circulation the screens were filigreed with carvings and lattice work allowing sound easy escape. However to further avoid prying eyes the women’s reception areas were often constructed overlooking the men’s. The men could listen as the music, poetry and laughter tantalizingly drifted down.

Egyptologist Georg Ebers wrote in 1878, “The famous Almas or singers of Cairo...(are)...women of rare and particular beauty. They constitute a distinct race, distinguished from the Egyptian proper by many particularities, and particularly the shape of the face...”

“They are called savantes. A more painstaking education than other women has earned them this name. They form a celebrated community within the country. In order to join, one must have a beautiful voice, a good possession of the language, a knowledge of the rules of poetry and an ability to spontaneously compose and sing couplets adapted to the circumstances... There is no fete without them; no festival where they do not provide the ornamentation.”

By the end of the 1800's Alma had become so closely associated with the terms Ghawazii and prostitute that few entertainers referred to themselves Awalim. They still continued to perform strictly for women and achieved their heyday during the late 1800's and early 1900's.

THE MODERN EGYPTIAN GHAWAZII - The Rromani of Egypt

“The difference between Middle Eastern folk dances, tribal dances, or regional versions of a voluptuous dance either as a public performance or a social dance may not be obvious at first, but becomes more clear as one becomes better acquainted with the cultures. In the west people often mistake any rural group dances as “tribal”. Even dance companies in the Middle East make errors regarding traditional movements and costuming of dances from other regions.”

Raks al Baladi

Raks al Sharki

Raks Shaabi

Raks or Raqs-(Arabic) and Rakasa – (Turkish) are from the Assyrian Rakadu “to celebrate” (1) and are commonly translated to mean dance.

We often become confused in the United States by the term *Beledy* which is associated here with a certain rhythm. I could find no such word referring to this rhythm used in Egypt. It's half of the name of a drum (*tabla beladi*), it's a people, a style of dance, it's a generic name for a Sa'aidi orchestra, it's a state of mind, but apparently it's not the name of a rhythm and it's not spelled beledy. The *Maqsoum* rhythm is mistakenly called a Beledy (or a million other spellings) in America. I don't know why. It's what I was told and I've probably spread the contamination myself, but no more. The Maqsoum is the rhythm which we frequently incorrectly refer to as beledi. *Sa'aidi* farmers are considered *Baladi* as are *Ghawazii* dancers like the *Benat Mazin*. The *Benat Mazin* also dance *Baladi* style as opposed to *Raks al Sharki*, which although descended from *Raks al Baladi* has acquired it's own defining characteristics most notably it's nightclub setting, costuming, choreography, music and orchestration.

The Benat Maazin, or “The Daughters of Maazin”, are some of the most popular ghawazii. Their patriarch was Yousef Maazin who unfortunately died in the mid 1980's. His passing necessated the selling of the family home and left one unmarried daughter, the talented and popular Khairiyya, to fend for herself. As well as singing and dancing the Benat Maazin sell wine and liquor to festival attendees. One of the most famous male Ghawazii entertainers was Metkal K'nawi, a fabulous singer originally from the Karnac area, he became hugely popular when he moved to Cairo and eventually performed around the world. He was even a pron star in France!

These days, not many Ghawazii daughters are pursuing the dancing profession due to cultural, economic and religious pressures and their style of entertainment is in danger of extention. Tragically many dancers currently performing feel tremendous pressure to retire and take up the veil because of rising religious fundamentalism. The *munathamam islamiyya* support a terrorist faction, the *irhabiyin*, who are alledged to have thrown acid in dancers faces! A performer's position in Egypt is marginal at best, even more so for women, so this

type of threat can be very effective. Government regulations can make performing more difficult as well. Many areas are outlawing *farahat*, one of the Ghawazii's traditional sources of income, due to violence, often the result of the celebratory firing of guns into the air (and occasionally people), as well as the many feuding factions which often take advantage of the excitement to exact revenge.

Tahteeb & Raqset el-Assaya

Tahteeb and *Raqset el-assaya* are Saaed (Sa'aidi) stick dances descended from stick fighting, one of the most popular forms of self-defense. When danced it is called *Tahteeb*, which are long heavy staffs. Fighting *Tahteeb* was a right of manhood. *Shouma* is another name for the staff and some areas were controlled by the man who fought the best with his *shouma*. *Tahteeb* is utilized by modern Ghawazii dancers for entertainment only.

The Egyptian Ghawazii from Cairo

Many of the Ghawazii dancers of Cairo are famous for their acrobatics and feats of amazement like dancers who can shimmy their buttocks while in a split and touch their toes to their ear. There are also those who lift things like tables with their teeth. The Ghawazii performers of Cairo and the surrounding area have been more heavily influenced by urban styles than have the Ghawazii of upper Egypt.

The “Zeffat al ‘Arusah” or the procession of the Bride

“*Zeffa*” is defined as “processing with noise”. In other words - a parade! There are several possible *zeffa* associated with traditional weddings in Cairo but the *Zeffat al ‘Arusah* occurs on either the day the couple marry, referred to as “*Katb el Kitab*” (“the signing of the book”) or the day they actually move in together, the “*Laylet al Doklah*”. This *zeffa* is a form of public announcement and even has its own rhythm the “*iqa’zeffa*”, “the rhythm of the *zeffa*”.

Traditionally *Awalim* are the dancers preceding the new couple and all the other entertainment. They play riqe and sing as well as call out compliments to the bride and groom. They also dance with *shamadan*. Although very expensive these performers are none the less considered prostitutes (whether they are or not) and are discouraged from 5-star hotels and banned from many government buildings. Guests at these celebrations often dance as well, after much persuasion and generally in the *Oriental* style, sometimes surpassing the abilities of the hired professionals.

Khan El-Khalili (street/district?)

Costuming stores are here

Mohammad Ali Street

In 1843 Mohamed Ali decreed 50 lashes for any female dancer caught performing on the public streets. How ironic that the best performers are traditionally found in Mohamed Ali Street, Cairo.

***Al Hashish*- the Cairo Ghetto**

Al Hashish is a ghetto located behind the city railways of Cairo where many *Rromany* live, trading on their traditional skills like entertainment. There are jugglers, fire breathers, fortune tellers, musicians and dancers. They are considered *Ghawazii*, however these are a different tribe from the Luxor area *Ghawazii*. These *Ghawazii* arrived by way of invading Turkic armies and dress and dance differently from the Luxor *Ghawazii*