

American Tribal Style® (ATS®) Belly Dance

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Firefly Belly Dance

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www.facebook.com/fireflybellydancecompany

www.instagram.com/firefly_belly_dance

www.youtube.com/channel/UCn6mgXnxL5HZx5qUndft_uA

What is American Tribal Style® Belly Dance?

Defining Characteristics

American Tribal Style® Belly Dance (ATS®) or Tribal for short is a modern style of belly dance created by FatChanceBellyDance® director, *Carolena Nericcio* in San Francisco. American Tribal Style® Belly Dance is clearly defined and documented with the primary characteristic being that of group improvisation as opposed to use of choreography.

Dancers learn a large vocabulary of moves together, and use a series of cues and transitions initiated by the leader to change between these moves. Members of the group take it in turns to hold the lead spot and chose the next move for the group. Each move belongs to either the fast or slow family of moves according to whether it is attached to the a downbeat for timing or flows through without reference to a beat. The music being used will dictate which family of moves will be used.

American Tribal Style® Belly Dance is performed in specific formations to allow the leader's cues to easily be seen by the followers. ATS® is almost never performed by a single dancer as the beauty of the dance form lies in the repeated patterns made by multiple dancers. Because improvised format relies on non-verbal communication and eye-contact between dancers it fosters a strong sense of community and the idea of dancing together in the moment as well as performing for an audience. Common formations are duet, trio, quartet & chorus line. When dancing in a chorus line formation duet, trio or quartet feature dancers will perform in the centre while the remaining dancers follow the chorus line leader in basic moves to compliment the current feature dancers.

History and Development

The early roots of tribal bellydance is accredited to *Jamila Salimpour*, who fostered a fusion of costumes and folkloric dances styles from the Middle East, North African, Spain, and India (such as the Banjara gypsies of Rajasthan) and began teaching what she knew and performing all over California and the West Coast. Using traditional folkloric dance elements and costumes inspired by traditional and ethnographic traditions, she presented on stage through *Bal Anat*. Bal Anat was a colorful dance company which included musicians, singers and dancers to create a "souk" or almost circus feel. Taking what she herself had learned from native dancers from Morocco, Algeria, Turkey, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon who were dancing in the United States, she began to catalogue "belly dance movement" and began creating a basic repertoire terminology which is still the basis for Tribal Style and American Tribal Style repertoire.

Jamila's student *Masha Archer* went on to form the *San Francisco Classic Dance Troupe* which included Carolena Nericcio in the 1970's & 1980's. After this troupe disbanded in the late 80's Carolena eventually formed FatChanceBellyDance®, catalogued & codified the movement vocabulary and cues which became known as American Tribal Style® Belly Dance and is now taught and performed around the world.

Costume and Aesthetic

For costuming, tribal dancers typically favouring full skirts with voluminous pantaloons underneath, choli tops with open backs and costume bras adorned with antique coins or mirrored fabrics. Props commonly used by tribal belly dancers include zills (finger cymbals) and swords.

The aesthetic of ATS® is earthy with rich layers of antique fabric and solid heavy jewelry. Although the dance is modern the costumes are often an eclectic mix of traditional textiles and accessories.

Combined with an uplifted regal posture, dramatic makeup and generally dancing in a group the costuming adds to the imposing and confident nature of most ATS® performances.

Music

Music for ATS® ranges from traditional drum based music through to more modern choices as desired by each troupe. When dancing to music with a strong beat, tribal dancers require a 4/4 music signature to be able to be able interpret the music and follow the beat together using movements from the fast vocabulary of steps. When dancing slowly to a more melodic piece then any rhythm can be used and dancers will draw from the slow vocabulary of steps.

ATS® and Firefly Belly Dance

In 2015 Tracey completed ATS® General Skills & Teacher Training with the style's creator Carolena Nericcio in Australa. Firefly Belly Dance is now a registered Sister Studio to FatChanceBellyDance®, one of only two in New Zealand & currently the only Sister Studio in the South Island.

Sources

General Skills & Teacher Training for ATS® Workshops

FatChanceBellyDance® <https://fcbd.com/>

The Tribal Bible by Kajira Djoumahna <https://www.amazon.com/Tribal-Exploring-Phenomenon-American-Bellydance/dp/0972848606>

Suggestions for Further Research

For costume, jewelry and makeup examples for ATS® check out the Firefly Belly Dance Pinterest board:

<https://www.pinterest.nz/fireflybellydance>

If you are a fellow dance geek here are some key names to look up online & on YouTube:

- Carolena Nericcio
- FatChanceBellyDance®
- Masha Archer
- Jamila Salimpour
- Bal Anat
- Wild Card Belly Dance
- Divine Chaos Tribal Fusion
- Sirin Tribe
- Davina Tribal Collective