



## Editor's Note

By INBC Newsletter Editor, Kat Lebo

We've reached the end of 2020 -- finally. This has been an interesting year, in the sense of the old Chinese curse "may you live in interesting times." While it hasn't been fun or easy or hopeful, we will still look to 2021 and hope for some sort of normalcy to arrive before this time next year!

I have high hopes for the 2021 Newsletter. Remember that there are lots of things you can submit. Photos -- recent and archival (try to get permission from each person featured in the photos). Articles written by someone other than yourself (just get the proper permissions first). Articles you've written on dance in general, dance styles, costume making/mending/revamping, performance makeup and hair, etc. etc. Do you drum or play another instrument? Write about that. Maybe make a recording of you playing and submit that. Write about your favorite dancer or most inspirational dancer -- again, current or archival. Send links to videos of that person performing. Got a killer recipe for baklava or Cous Cous? Send it in! Did you write a poem about dancing? We want to see it!

The deadline for making submissions to the first Newsletter of 2021 is January 1, 2021. Photograph something. Write something. Film something. Throw me a bone!

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## Public Relations Report

by INBC PR Officer, Deborah Kull

Since June, we have revised the Members' Handbook and updated various sections of the website to make it more useful to members and the general public. The Facebook members' group and INBC Public page and YouTube have been revamped and updated, and INBC now has accounts on Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn to connect better with our members and the larger MENAHT dance and music communities. In the next year, we hope to increase our outreach and involvement for the Spring Carnival. Additionally, we hope to create a database of member videos and photos (along with legal permissions); create opt-in email lists for members and interested persons; expand our followership and engagement (and knowledge of!) social media and marketing; create an online "suggestion box" for anonymous feedback; revise/update documents/guidelines for future board members; and make INBC a supportive network of like-minded artists striving towards common goals of education, culture exchange, and creation and promotion of art.

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## Online Lessons and Lessons Learned

By Romana Bereneth

In February I was a full time gigging musician and music instructor. I had a healthy cadre of students 5-6 days a week and I gigged two-three nights a week. I also taught a small dance class (as in ONE regular student). My constant student came in one night in January asking me, a former MD PhD resident focusing on Infectious Disease, what I thought about coronavirus. I took a moment to consider-since I quietly bowed out of medicine I'd kind of avoided biomedical news. I didn't know much about coronavirus beyond what I learned in school, and I considered the "emerging infectious diseases" I'd encountered while I was studying/residenting.

I shrugged and said it would probably go the way of SARS or MERS. Colds make you sick. It's the FLU that kills you (seriously, get your flu shot). People didn't even come into the clinic for cold symptoms, really. That was my answer. "Oh. It'll be fine. There's just a bunch of semi-hysterical people on the West Coast who are looking for something to be scared of."

**HOO BOY I WAS WRONG!!!!!!!!!!**

Within a couple weeks, my gigs started getting canceled. My income dwindled. My anxiety grew. Whispers on my news feed about venues closing, shutdowns. A possible shelter in place order.

The three places where I taught shuttered, and my final gigs were canceled. In less than two weeks, 100% percent of my carefully plotted multi-source income was obliterated

If you're reading this and you somehow don't know any full-time artists, let me bust one commonly held myth for you right now. We are not glassy-eyed, lazy, absent-minded manic pixie dream people. We work hard, 24/7. We dream of financial catastrophe scenarios then get up and create a contingency plan. We don't take days off. We're not on drugs, we're not alcoholics. We love our work. We pay our taxes.

I surfed across Zoom pretty quick. The studios all jumped on board. After all, for a studio, 1/3 of your income over the computer beats 0% of your income in person. That was our choice. Reinvent or die.

As a teacher, I learned several things pretty much immediately, and I learn at least one thing every time I log on to teach.

1) Audio- We all know about Background Noise Reduction by now, but what I've noticed is that Zoom has an ever evolving taste in music. Sometimes woodwinds are the thing Zoom wants to hear, sometimes they sound awful and get muted even with the noise reduction turned off. (Trust me, whatever kind-hearted suggestion you're about to tender, me and the thousands of teachers going through this together already clicked that button. The students and their parents did, too!) The most consistently reviled instrument on Zoom is the guitar, and if you happen to teach group guitar lessons like some Romana we all know and love HOOOO BOY. Unsurprisingly, people quit before I got my method figured out, so that eventually I was only teaching 2-3 person classes (they used to be 8 or more). What did I do? I put everyone on mute, play the exercise/song for the week, then have them round table one by one. It works for me. The singing teacher I work with has students upload videos she can review beforehand. That works, too.

In addition to latency, tuning is unreliable over Zoom, so I've told students they're on their own there- "Get a Snark, kid!"

Also, laying my phone down on my laptop to play music works like a charm.

2) Visual- Dancers are constantly doing adjustments to get hands in screen, then feet, then side to side moves. No one lives in a castle with a ballroom studio and TV equipment. The famous and the unknown alike all now share one phrase, "Let me change the angle so you can see."

Also, the camera on my laptop sucks. I look like a low budget nineties film, or worse, Roller Cator if my mouthy cat decides to get in the action. And there's no good place to put my coffee table.

3) Timing- nothing says tidsoptimist like a teacher who logs in to the 2 pm lesson at 1:59, or even better 2:00 exactly, or even better, logs on to Zoom at 1:58, still in pajamas just to have the computer suddenly decide now is the time to reeaalllly give you the Ever Rotating Blue Circle Of Waiting. I'm getting to class at 2:03 and I don't even leave my house. WTH???

Also, thank goodness there's no smell-o-zoom cause...Whew boy.

As a student, I've also learned some things...OK, they're mostly about myself but you may benefit from a read through of this list:

Every teacher has a mysterious mute button that will press itself at the beginning of class (not just the Zoom mute, I mean a mysterious hidden switch somewhere deep in the workings of the hardware itself). Chill out, they'll find it.

Many of us look good on Zoom, some of us look like we've lost jobs, loved ones and haven't left the house in months during a global pandemic.

Seriously, over half of us own pets and they are 100% adorable when on screen. They are also 100% a distraction if kids are also in play. Cats are omnipotently omnipresent. They always know where you're stepping and are hell bent on beating you there.

Classes tend to be donation based-and it seems to be working for the super famous and well established. In a world where everything is on the Internet, the planet is just a big neighborhood. You're only learning limitations are time, and money.

In a way, I feel like I'm the blind bookworm guy in that Twilight Zone episode. He survives the end of the world, finds a library only to smash his glasses. I have all this time and ability- but no way to pay. Who knew "cash" would be my personal glasses? Speaking of time-did you ever miss the first half of a workshop with \_\_insert world famous person here\_\_ because you forgot you signed up? Or you forgot what day time it was, or how to correctly interpret time zones or that today is actually Friday and not Thursday? What time is it right now, anyway?

Thank god for recorded lectures is all I have to say. That has been my saving grace.

One great thing about Zoom? The chat box! Thank goodness for the chat box! Too humble/shy to ask a question in front of 58 people in a crowded zoom? Go for the chat box- you can even think about how to word your question and reread it before clicking send. Most teachers are pretty good about the chat box and if not, a more extroverted student will likely pick your question up and relay it. I like this system.

Going forward...

I don't know how things are going to look in the future. Anyone who does is lying by omission of uncertainty. But I do have some opinions.

1) The current learning situation is far from ideal, but it does offer some significant boons. There is NO WAY I could ever study consistently with teachers like Mardi Love in Ye Olden Times. I simply never had the means to do that. Now I can pay my donation fee and slide into the zoom room and take notes to my academic heart's content during class, rather than tripping over other students to get to my notebook.

2) The current financial situation is far from ideal. If you're anything like me, your students are constantly absent due to "the sniffles" (interpret that how you will), your gigs are a joke, and the last four months of unemployment checks have all been for "0.00" dollars despite your claim being "investigated". But you can scrape together five dollars for a zoom class, and your dance or music classes may be the one weekly thing that is providing a pattern, a

routine, something stable in your life that-SHOCKER-you actually enjoy. That makes it worth it.

3) The current world situation is far from ideal. Whether you believe in COVID or not, the restrictions placed upon society by it are not going anywhere, and I just saw a lovely new word to add to my vocabulary this week: "TWINDEMIC" (meaning flu and COVID together, WHOOO YEAH! WHOOOO! YEAH!) My doctor friends are seriously sweating November, December, January and February, so I'm not making any major plans to change my teaching or learning approaches, except perhaps to force my few in-person students back onto Zoom, depending on how things go. Which means it's March or, more likely, April before things get safe-ish again. And after such an extended period, many of the COVID habits we've developed this year will certainly follow us into the future. I think hand washing is definitely one that should stay. Also, keeping a little distance when in line, kind of nice (remember how I SMELL? I'm keeping that one as a defensive maneuver!)

One thing I hope we take from COVID classes into the future of in-person workshops is the zoom element. How cool would it be to be able to take a workshop with a famous person in California without having to fly there? Or New York? Or Indianapolis if it's happening on a day you can't get away from work? Just pay in, get home, and log on! Workshop recordings should stay, too. The workshop teacher can have control over the recorded content that is distributed among students. No more holding up a sea of cell phones and making everyone pinky swear not to load your hard won content to youtube. Just make a Facebook group (that's like an email list but even better! Instant engagement!) or an expirable link. As a workshop organizer, won't it be nice to sell, for example, 35 IRL tickets and 15 Zoom tickets as opposed to just 35 IRL tickets? I think so! I think the adversity we've faced during COVID will absolutely serve us as we emerge from the pandemic.

And we are going to emerge, silk veils, zils, saidi canes, antlers, bedlah, Melo pants, coins, cowery and all. We are going to emerge. I mean, we survive the GLITTERdemic every day. We got this.

Keep washing your hands, and don't wipe your hands of COVID lessons learned.

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ATS Worldwide Flashmob

by Maria Spratford

In 2012, Heidi Capps Hayden, director of Sevanti Tribal in Kentucky, came up with the idea of an international flash mob, featuring ATS (FAT Chance Belly Dance Style) dancers. She asked everyone to vote on a piece of music, and then everyone was to make a video of their flash mob performance and post it on the second weekend in October. It was a huge success, with dancers from all over the world contributing their videos.

Since then, it has grown each year, and now features dancers from almost every country in the world. Indy Tribal has participated every year. This year, because of the pandemic, we split into three groups in order to keep our numbers small, and featured different parts of the

Indy area. One group danced at Pan Am plaza downtown, one was at the Indianapolis Art Center, and one was at the gazebo in mid-town Carmel. One of our dancers, Paul Pogue, cleverly edited the video to showcase all three groups. It was a challenge dancing in masks, but the finished video was worth it. Here's a link to our flash mob entry.

<https://youtu.be/9N7GgTVABjk>

After you watch it, take a look at some of the entries from other countries. It's fun to see the different interpretations of the same piece of music! Looking forward to next year!

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Cultural Appropriation? Cultural Appreciation?

by Kat Lebo

**Disclaimer:** This article is not intended to solve this question once and for all. Each of us involved in the dances that make up what is generally, in the West, called belly dance, have to do our own soul searching, self-analysis, and decision making. And then, we have to remember that there is no election for the office of belly dance police. Each to their own, keeping in mind that every decision has consequences. So, run and get yourself a pair of adult panties and pull 'em on; here we go.

Those of us who have been involved in MENAHT dance over the past several years have probably kicked this ethical football around time and time again. If you've ever run across Randa Jarrar's 2014 article on Salon.com entitled *Why I Can't Stand White Belly Dancers*,



you probably remember the outpouring of responses, both pro and con, to that article that flooded internet dance forums and groups. While the subject of appropriation had been around long before 2014, that article was perhaps the first article to provoke a world wide discussion on the subject.

What is Cultural Appropriation you ask? The simplest, and therefore not the most definitive definition I could find was at Dictionary.com: *the adoption or co-opting, usually without acknowledgment, of cultural identity markers associated with or originating in minority communities by people or communities with a relatively privileged status.*

But there is so much more to it than that. It can refer to foods, ethnic styles of dress, songs, music, dancing, rituals, jewelry, and so much more. The question of when is it appreciation and when is it appropriation – that is a much harder question to answer. By the way, if you think the ideal of cultural appropriation deals mostly with the performance arts, you'd be wrong. I started reading the latest Stephanie Plum novel a couple of days ago, and here's what I found on page 13 (Stephanie is describing the small, multi-cultural neighborhood she grew up in): *Cultural appropriation is a good thing here. Polish housewives share recipes with their Italian neighbors. Kielbasa, macaroni and red sauce, Cozido a Portuguesa, enchiladas, burgers, goulash, pot roast, pirogi, pad thai. We eat it all. The American melting pot is alive and healthy in Burg kitchens.* But Evanovich's description of cultural appropriation reads more like appreciation to me. Those recipes and dishes were shared willingly among the cultures where Stephanie Plum grew up, and lack of permission is one of the big markers of appropriation.

This issue jumped to my attention this year because of a video shared on Facebook by a Moroccan dancer of Amazigh heritage, Raïssa Leï of Troupe Kif-Kif Bledi. Here is that video:

<https://www.facebook.com/troupekifkif/videos/346416043127802>

This was shared not only on her troupe page, but on at least one dance group where it attracted a lot of attention and discussion. I contacted Raïssa by Messenger to ask permission to share the video in our newsletter. We had a very nice talk with her about the ethnic dances from her heritage, and about dance in general. Just in case you might think, from the video, that she what I often get called, "a belly dance purist," that term is really not descriptive of either one of us. However, both of us do think that when a dancer purports to be performing a specific ethnic dance, that the dance should contain correct movements, music, and, above all, knowledge of the underlying culture.

For example, here is her Urban Berber Fusion:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTbPQAOAcO8>

And here is her Chaabi Marocain Traditional:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RG9Lk0olfhk>

You can find several other videos of hers and of Troupe Kif-Kif Bledi on youtube.

So, now, I'm off and running with what is and what is not cultural appropriation. For this article, I'm going to look mostly at what it is. We will each have to make decisions about when we are or are not appropriating.

Wikipedia has an article (of course!) on the subject. For me, the first two sentences help us better define cultural appropriation: **Cultural appropriation** is the adoption of an element or elements of one [culture](#) or [identity](#) by members of another culture or identity. This can be controversial when members of a [dominant culture](#) appropriate from disadvantaged [minority cultures](#). ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural\\_appropriation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_appropriation)) I think this is a key element for us to consider. Most of us came to study Menaht dance because it sounded like fun. Some because one does not need a partner for the dance. And some came because they were fascinated by one or more of the Middle Eastern, North African, Hellenic, and/or Turkish cultures. Whatever the reason, if we stayed on after our first set of classes, we discovered a world of information heretofore unknown to us! I began dancing in 1974, long, long before the internet erupted on the scene, changing all of our lives and making the study of, well, anything much easier than it had been prior to that time. When I and many of my dance friends started dancing, we were lucky if we had an instructor who was well versed in "belly dance," and if our libraries carried Serena Wilson's book, *The Serena Technique*, or Dahlena Genova's book, *The Art of Belly Dance*, for us to use to supplement our dance educations. By the 80s, there were other books and many dance periodicals such as *Habibi* and *Arabesque*. But it was later in the 80s or maybe not until the 90s that many of us could get our hands on video instruction, as well as video of ethnic dance done by ethnic people. Although I think we all started out desiring to represent dance from the Menaht areas respectfully, sometimes we did well, and sometimes we did not.

But this is today, 2020. We all have the ability to learn about the many different styles of dance, from folkloric styles to stage styles, and to learn the differences in not only the styles, but in the cultures that produced them. And it is more than dance. It is also jewelry, hair, head pieces, costuming, etc. – which we all love and love to mix and match, but have probably not thought about how it actually fits into what we are doing or what it might say about our understanding of the cultures that are the foundations of our dance.

Raïssa Leï did such a wonderful job of describing what cultural appropriation is that I'm not going to try to better her descriptions. I've put together several articles regarding this subject below. Each of us should take the time to read and watch at least some of them. I tried to pick pieces that are both pro and con differing issues, and I doubt anyone could go through this list in a single sitting (I know I didn't). However, it will give each of you fodder for discussion and/or self-analysis. This subject isn't just about dance, and some of what I've included will address appropriation in pop culture and pop music. I certainly don't intend to hang up my hip belt, but I can be more aware, and whenever possible, introduce my dancing in a more "woke" manner, and to be more aware of all that is involved in this issue as I am choreographing or planning an improvisational performance.

This article on Shira.net's page here:

[http://www.shira.net/culture/misirlou-folk-dance.htm?fbclid=IwAR1wxHkxupk-ZlcVDF03SRm mTU-o1t4rQpaxJZwxzytXLLkyT-BwFJlvG\\_s](http://www.shira.net/culture/misirlou-folk-dance.htm?fbclid=IwAR1wxHkxupk-ZlcVDF03SRm mTU-o1t4rQpaxJZwxzytXLLkyT-BwFJlvG_s) describes one way in which a dance presented as authentic folklore can be all wrong. I know that the folkdance group that met the same

night as my troupe rehearsals at Morton Community Center, taught a dance called “Misirlou,” and I’m betting it’s exactly what is described in this article.

Here are a couple of links to articles discussing what is and isn’t cultural appropriation:

<https://www.healthline.com/health/cultural-appreciation#avoid-this>

<https://preemptivelove.org/blog/what-is-cultural-appreciation/>

And here is a list of articles that includes grievances some ethnic people may have regarding this issue:

This one is Randa Jarrar’s original 2014 piece:

[https://www.salon.com/2014/03/04/why\\_i\\_cant\\_stand\\_white\\_belly\\_dancers/](https://www.salon.com/2014/03/04/why_i_cant_stand_white_belly_dancers/)

And here is her follow up piece:

[https://www.salon.com/2014/03/18/i\\_still\\_cant\\_stand\\_white\\_belly\\_dancers/](https://www.salon.com/2014/03/18/i_still_cant_stand_white_belly_dancers/)

This one is a response to Jarrar’s first article:

<https://www.afsnet.org/news/167898/Response-to-Why-I-Cant-Stand-White-Bellydancers.htm>

And here are several articles, some pro, some con, but all with interesting points.

<https://www.colorlines.com/articles/icymi-belly-dancing-when-youre-white-woman>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/03/in-praise-of-polyglot-culture-and-multicultural-belly-dancing/284290/>

<https://thedailybanter.com/2014/03/yes-white-belly-dancing-is-inexcusable-cultural-appropriation/> (note: this article is not what the title sounds like it would be)

<https://thoughtcatalog.com/jessica-renslow/2014/05/thoughts-from-a-white-belly-dancer-why-appreciating-another-cultures-art-may-still-be-seen-as-offensive/>

<http://stanceondance.com/2016/03/10/on-belly-dance-and-cultural-appropriation/>

And some videos which discuss appropriation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsKxC3rcfGQ>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=vfAp\\_G735r0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=vfAp_G735r0)

<https://www.pbs.org/video/what-i-hear-cultural-appropriation-vs-appreciation/>

This one is in regard to fashion:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1JCWc7s6FY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eo3i5O-lfbg>

And one regarding music:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wY5S3pfPis>

And, of course, I got carried away and included some video on non-dance subjects that are often seen as cultural appropriation, and some of these make their way into the dance in the form of body and costume decoration:

On Braiding:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFGwmUCH9aI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXejDhRGOuI>

The bindi and the tilak:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fy9Wgk-0EP0>

And on facial and body tattoos in the Middle East, North Africa, Greece, and Turkey.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GnBikwWZOE>

<https://www.cnn.com/style/article/facial-tattoos-yumna-al-arashi/index.html>

<https://tattooartfromtheheart.com/blog/middle-eastern-tattoos/>

From other than North Africa:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lksFqfWwgnU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JulBph9P6ms>

The bottom line is that it is up to each of us to police our own dancing and styles. At the very least, be informed that no matter how much you may love your jewelry or costuming or hair and head pieces, be sure they are correct for the performance you will do. Keep dancing. Keep learning.

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Deadline for submissions for the January-February 2021 Newsletter is January 1, 2021!