

## MY FAVORITE BELLYDANCE CD'S

Since starting to teach bellydance, I have found one of the questions most asked by students is "What music should I buy?" It's a very good question, and one that plagued me for many years as a student. Over the last few years, I have spent way too many hours listening to Middle Eastern music CD's, and have spent even more dollars on them. So, with my music collection on hand, I feel amply qualified to pass on the following list of recommendations.

Of course, this list is wholly biased. Music is a matter of personal taste, and my list is also influenced by what's available and affordable in my part of the world. As well as reading my comments, I suggest you visit [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) for many other reviews.

To purchase CD's, start by trying the World Music section at your local CD store. Failing that, try [www.maqam.com](http://www.maqam.com) – a very reliable and reasonably priced supplier.

### Modern Middle Eastern Pop

- **Bellydance Superstars Vols 1 & 2 (Mondo Melodia, 2002, 2004)**

Volume 1 is one of my all-time favorite CD's for teaching. Nine of America's leading belly dancers have selected their favorite tracks, and the result is a wonderfully varied compilation. There's traditional performance pieces, new techno sounds, Egyptian pop, drum solos, etc. I could teach a whole class (or term) with just this CD. Volume 2 is also a good compilation.

- **Arabic Jukebox (EMI Music Arabia, 2004)**

I love this CD! Compiled by the BBC, it includes some of the best hits and biggest stars in the recent history of Arabic music. Once again, a wide variety of styles are present, from more traditional to modern techno fusion.

- **Sheek Shak Shook, 100% Arabian Bellydance Hits (MidEast Records)**

The cover on this CD is so tacky I just had to buy it (that, and it's cheap)! I was not disappointed by the cheesy music it contained. But cheesy in a good way. This is not-too-modern Arabic pop with cutesy girlie vocals and zilling (finger cymbals). Ideal for up-beat, straight-forward restaurant or hafla performances, or for students practicing at home.

- **Yaho, by Hakim (Mondo Melodia, 2000)**

Hakim is one of the biggest stars of Egyptian pop, and rightly so. His music is bright and funky, blending traditional percussion with modern sounds. Extremely popular among the bellydance community, Hakim's music makes you want to get up and dance – especially good for students to practice to at home.

Other great compilations:

- **Arabia 2Moro, Vols 1 & 2 (Virgin Records, 2004/05)**
- **Sunshine Arabia 2003 (EMI Music Arabia, 2003)**
- **'Now That's What I Call Arabia' series (new volume each year)**

### **More Traditional Music**

- **Baladi Plus, by Hossam Ramzy (ARC Music, 1995)**

The man of a million CD's, Hossam Ramzy is a world music superstar. His superb, clear drumming style makes it hard to resist dancing to his music. This particular CD showcases Egypt's urbanized folk music (the *baladi* of the title). The tracks are long, use repetitive drum patterns and traditional folk instruments.

Consequently, I would not recommend this for a relaxing listen. What it *is* great for is earthy *baladi* dancing, practicing steps or sequences repeatedly, and for practicing the zills. This CD also provides clear illustration of several important drum rhythms (baladi, saaidi, masmoudi, etc).

- **Jalilah's Raks Sharki Vol 6 'In A Beirut Mood' (Pirhana Music, 2003)**

The Jalilah's Raks Sharki series of CD's showcases 'traditional' oriental (mostly Egyptian) music suitable for performances at restaurants, weddings, etc. This is music designed for the professional dancer, and as such, can be difficult for students who are unfamiliar with Middle Eastern rhythms and music structure. However, it's lovely to listen to, and help develop an ear for Middle Eastern music.

This CD of Lebanese music showcases two stunning performance pieces – 11 and 15 mins long – which include entrance, fast melody, taxim, drum solos and exits. The music is played on real instruments, as opposed to a synthesizer, and is refreshingly original. The CD also includes several of my favorite *taxim* (slow) pieces.

- **How To Make Your Husband A Sultan; Belly Dance With Ozel Turkbaz (Traditional Crossroads, 2004)**

A re-issue of original 1960's vinyl, this CD is worth buying for the title and cover alone – think beehive hairdo gone mad. Pleasingly, the music is not bad! Primarily up-beat, Turkish music, there are a number of short pieces, including *ciftetelli* (a slower Turkish rhythm), plus a lively 17 minute performance routine. Including *taxim*, drums and upbeat melody, it's a perfect party piece.

- **Amera - Wahyatak Habibi (Ameras Palace, 2002)**

A compilation brought out by Amera of Sydney, who found fame dancing in Egypt. Amera has had several favorite songs recorded with skilled musicians, and sings some of the tracks herself. There's a good mix of oriental performance pieces, more modern Egyptian songs, a modern

khaleegy piece, plus 4 drum solos. An accessible introduction to very Egyptian-sounding music. Available from [www.ameraspalace.com.au](http://www.ameraspalace.com.au).

- **Champagne Bellydance – Setrak Vol. 18 (Hollywood Music Centre, 1999)**

Another CD with a cheesy cover, but don't let that put you off. This CD contains several stand-alone tracks, followed by a string of pieces that together form a ~18-minute performance piece, including entrance, melody, saïdi, taxim, drum solo and exit. The orchestration is top quality, and the music has a fun, original spirit with lots of quirky accents. This soundtrack makes for a great performance.

### **Drum Solos**

- **Sabla Tolo, by Hossam Ramzy (ARC Music, 2000)**

If you're looking for a spectacular drum solo, buy this CD! The whole recording is drum solos – 13 of them. Each one is unique, played with vigour and variable moods. I wouldn't say they are *easy* drum solos, but the CD includes a booklet which outlines the rhythms and number of bars that make up each piece. Several of the solos include rhythms that Hossam Ramzy has invented.

A quick note – if you want a CD to listen to for pleasure, this isn't it (unless you *really* like the drums)!