

## **Is Bellyton the next big thing for Fusion Bellydance?**

Let me start by explaining what it is. Bellyton is a fusion of Belly Dance with Reggaeton. For those of you that haven't come across Reggaeton before the music is a form of urban music which became popular with Latin American youth during the early 1990's. It's a hybrid of different musical genres from the Caribbean, Latin America and the United States with rapping and singing usually in Spanish. The name Reggaeton is derived from the reggae music of Jamaica which influenced Reggaeton's dance beat.

The lyrics are often on issues and subjects of interest to the youth of the Latino urban centres to which Reggaeton is currently most popular. Urban crime, sex and racism; issues which have similarly made hip-hop music popular are often tackled. Currently, the leading artists of Reggaeton music include Tego Calderón, Ivy Queen, Don Chezina and Daddy Yankee, but the explosive growth in the genre's popularity promises to bring many new artists to the forum and tackle many new and perhaps softer subjects including love and romance (especially with an increase in female artists). The key feature of Reggaeton music is a driving drum-machine beat called Dem Bow. The beat can be heard throughout Reggaeton and is an interplay of a steady kick drum and a syncopated snare.

Reggaeton dancing is usually associated with a very sensual/sexual dance style, called "Perreo", which involves close body contact (doggy style) and provocatively erotic movements. However as the dance form has grown in popularity it has embraced solo and group dancing and the movements have expanded beyond this. Reggaeton dancing is fast, sexy, fun and energetic and involves big loose body moves and techniques such as winding, pumping and body waves alongside pelvic and chest isolations all of which require a great deal of skill and practice to perfect and execute, often at breathtaking speed!

There are many movements and isolations in Reggaeton dancing that have a strong affinity with Belly Dance moves, although the emphasis and accents are very different. A clear difference is the Reggaeton stance which is often wide legged with the chest pushed forward and the bottom/pelvis back and up. This is the total opposite to what we drill as good posture for Belly Dance. Similarities are clear however in the technique. Body waves tend to be big moves flowing through the whole as opposed to our more isolated camels but the undulation although exaggerated is from the same family. Shoulder shimmies are used but are looser than the Belly Dance shimmy and pelvic circles and accents are often done but with a much wider stance. It is moves such as these that allow the two styles to combine successfully together in a fluid way.

It is however the coming together of Arabic and Reggaeton artists and musicians that is really driving the fusion and giving dancers the opportunity to experiment with Bellyton. The CMN Remix of 2005's Temptation by the Iranian singer Arash mixes Reggaeton with an Arabic flavour. More recently Hakim collaborated with Reggaeton star Don Omar to produce the track Tigui Tigui. Bellydancers can also be seen in some Reggaeton music videos although the dancing is not always a fusion of the two styles or a good representation of either! This does bring about the question that Reggaeton's overtly sexual nature may or may not be a positive or appropriate thing to combine with a dance form we are constantly trying to defend and stop being viewed by some as alike to stripping or lap dancing! This is a well trodden path in the Burlesque Belly debate and you can only come to your own conclusions. I would recommend seeking it out and then deciding what you think. My view is that if it's fun and good enough for Hakim then who am I to argue!

As with all fusion styles in my opinion good fusion only comes out of having a strong grounding in both of the styles that you're experimenting with. Having Belly Danced for several years I started going to regular Reggaeton classes a few years ago driven by the desire to try different styles of dance and do more dancing for fitness. Luckily for me I happened upon an amazing teacher, Elisa Aloe, and caught the bug to learn more. Still working closely co-coreographing with Elisa it is from this grounding that I've started to experiment with Bellyton and for those of you that have made it to Bellydance Boogie (a Leeds based bi-annual Arabic Cabaret and Club night) you will have seen the fruits of this performed with some of the other Banat Eshorouk soloists.

Having got a really positive audience response to performances we've done I've also organised several Reggaeton for Bellydancers workshops (taught by Elisa) and have recently started to teach Bellyton workshops myself. Since doing this it has struck me is how truly infectious it is and how Belly

Dancers really enjoy both the music and style. A Belly Dancer has a definite advantage when learning the moves having already learnt how to isolate the chest and pelvis. Belly Dancers also seem to respond brilliantly to the energy of a Bellyton performance. It certainly works much better as a group dance and a one or two hour session provides a great feeling of unity and achievement for a group as does a performance. Being a high energy fusion I think it would be hard not to be carried along the vibrancy and expression of the dance. The side effect of course is it's also a great way to combine Belly Dance with a really intense full body work out!

So as fusion goes Bellyton seems to be a big hit for those that have experienced it. It is definitely open to being absorbed into the mainstream, even Raqs Britannia were offering a Carribean Fusion workshop taught by Tara Ibrahims and Shafeek did a similar workshop at the Bellydance Congress in 2007. Whether it is just a passing fad remains to be seen. Perhaps this will depend on if artists and musicians continue to collaborate to provide fusion music to dance but I hope the growing popularity of Bellyton will help drive this through demand and it will grow into a strong dance form in its own right.

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Written in June 2008

For more info on Bellydance Boogie, Bellyton performances or workshops with Loveday, or Reggaeton for bellydancers sessions with Elisa Aloe, contact [loveday.bellydance@googlemail.com](mailto:loveday.bellydance@googlemail.com)