



Serpentine Belly Dance Dictionary

Note: There is no official codified terminology in belly dance.

YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/SerpentineVideo>

Playlist: Famous Egyptian belly dancers:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYUtFJWB2Ui-eKcdGtrH_utGDyWcFJKtg

BEGINNER

POSTURE

- Pelvic - spine alignment
- Shoulders
- Rib-cage lift / diaphragm
- Stance - soft knee
- Feet placement: straight / 30° turnout
- Weight in heels / heel pulse
- Arching the ankle + Mermaid Pose
- Pointing the foot
- Relevee
- Soccer kick

HEAD

- Alignment / Water jug
- Slides
- Crescents + circles
- Khaleegi half head circle
- Eyebrow raises - one or both

SHOULDERS

- Shrugging + bouncing
- Thrusts
- Rolls
- Shakes
- Over the shoulder flirting

ARMS

- Elbow direction
- Positions - the Asterix
- Directional changes to melodic phrasing

- Flutters
- Snake arms

HANDS

- Position - holding sagat
- Leading wrists
- Wrist circles
- Wrist crescents

RIB CAGE

- Slides
- Lift + drop
- Twisting
- Crescents + circles - vertical / horizontal (V/H)
- Tit shakes
- Zikr twist

HIPS / PELVIS

- Top / bottom isolation at waist
- Contract / release + jiggle
- Twists
- Lifts / drops
- Crescents
- Circles - top + bottom
- Figure 8s: V/H + Forward/Reverse (vertical figure 8 = snake)
- Beladi hip drop + kick

SHIMMIES

- #0 Alternating Up/down glutes



- #1 Twisting "Washing Machine" horizontal shimmy
- #2 Alternating Up/down pelvis
- #3 Heel bounce
- #4 Torso contract/release / pelvic rock / forward and back
- #5 Knee shake (wet dog) side/back/front

UNDULATIONS

- Camels front/back
- Snakes side to side
- Reverse undulation (body wave)

TRAVELING STEPS

- Switching directions/transitions
- 2-count Processional step-touch
- 2-count walking strut
- Penguin walk - lift and drop with straight legs
- 2-count horse step (leg lift)
- 2-count side push step
- Chassee skip step
- Mona Said walk - 3 step + pause
- 4-step forward/back
- Grape vine

- Cross step - front / back
- Arabesques

TURNS

- Spotting - 2 types
- Nagwa Fouad 3-count 180° turn
- Cork-screw turn
- Paddle spin

RHYTHMS

- Finding the doum
- Maqsoum
- Malfouf
- Saidi

SAGAT

- Clam-shell grip
- Ring / clamp
- T-grip
- Tremolos
- Accents
- Doubles
- Triplets
- Walking + playing on the downbeat



INTERMEDIATE

POSTURE

- Balancing on one leg
- Traveling in releve
- Trampoline jump

SHOULDERS

- shakes while traveling

ARMS

- Transitions while traveling
- Marking the beat

HANDS

- Undulations
- Gestures: (Heart, grinder, go away, come)
- Finger Snap
- Flutter
- Indian Hands
- Lotus

RIB-CAGE

- Layered drops/accents
- Backbends

STOMACH

- Rolls
- Flutters

HIPS

- Gush / Goosh
- Omi - Inner Hip Circle,
- Pelvic Scoop
- Tuck
- Tunisian
- Pops + pelvic drops
- Beladi hip drop with twist
- One-sided bouncing drop hip circles

- See-saw down hip - 2 x hip drop forward + 2 x back
- Maya - reverse vertical 8 snake
- Turkish figure 8 / "Jewel" - on the down with hip accent, either pull or twist

SHIMMIES

- 3/4 shimmies - 3-count hips: up, up+over, down, twisting.
- Hagala 3/4 shimmy - up and over, accent down with a twist (forward or back)
- sliding shimmy
- shimmy + layering
- Layering: 3/4 shimmy with hip circle
- Layering: figure eights or circles with shimmies
- Choo-choos
- transitioning from one type to another without losing the beat
- shimmy walk in relevee

TRAVELLING STEPS

- Three Malfoufs
- 4 x 4s - Improv groups
- Beladi double hip drop + crescent
- Pelvic camel side step
- Double down-hip back step
- Saidi 2-1 back hop step
- Saidi hop - side kick/bend (Sahar Samara)
- Finale hip twist on releve
- Leading back down hip side walk
- Jewel - forward crescent walk - accent hip pull or twist / horizontal figure 8
- Pivot hop (jump)
- Reverse horizontal figure 8 walk
- Step-ball-change walk
- Tunisian walk
- Walking/turning hip circle



TURN S

- Stationary paddle spins
- Barrel turns
- 180° walking turn + hip accent
- Character spins
- Traveling spins around stage
- Saidi 180° lifted back knee pivots up

RHYTHMS

- Wahda wa Noss (1+1/2) beladi
- Fellahi
- Masmoudi
- Nubian
- Zeffa
- Ayoub
- Sama3ee 10/8
- Khalegee
- Waltz
- Iraqi
- North African 6/8
- Lebanese dubke
- Turkish 9/8

SAGAT

- Syncopation
- 1 - 3 - 5 - 7 - 11:
- 1-3-3-3- / 3-3-7 / 5-5-7-5 /
- Solo improv sets of 4s

PERFORMANCE

- 6-part show: mergenci - taqsim - shaabi/audience participation/sagat - beladi progression - veil/wings - cane - drum solo - tarab/Om Kalthoum/Golden Era - Finale
- Mergenci asterix
- Choosing / editing music

VEIL

- Veil wraps: Amcab + Egypt
- Front / back change sides
- Veil arms 1-side figure 8
- Peeking Out
- Toreador Turn
- Toss and catch
- Full body circles

CANE

- Basic twirl - both directions
- Figure 8 swing - both sides of body
- Reverse grip figure 8 twirl - Mona Said - center or end grasp - back-bend
- Helicopter twirl overhead
- Strike cane + turn under arm 180°

turn

- Spanking hips
- Balancing
- 2-person limbo

FLOOR WORK

- Full + half drops
- Hip Sway/crescent (kneeling)
- Hip circles (kneeling)
- Horizontal/vertical Figure 8s + reverse (kneeling)
- Shimmy kneeling #0
- Shimmy lying down #5
- Sit to lying transition
- Slide (kneeling)
- Snake (lying side + stomach flutters)
- Splits + demi split
- Spin on floor
- Stomach rolls (lying back)
- Turkish Drop
- Upper body large circle (kneeling)



Categories: Body-Part Isolations - Traveling steps - Music terminology - Cultural vocabulary - Performance techniques

T 4-step - 4-count step moving the same foot forward and back while the other foot steps in place.

T Arabesque - A travelling step that pivots on one foot with a lifted leg extended back behind the hip.

I Arm "flutters" - in front shoulder height. One arm goes up, the other down, hands at 90° from wrist. Lead with the wrists.

I Backbend - leaning backwards arching the upper body.

M Beladi Progression - a 4-part instrumental section of a belly dance performance that can include: taqsim - call/response - maqsum melody - fast fellahi end

T Barrel turn - Turning in place with the arms extended (one up, the other down) while spotting on the floor in front.

P Bedla - 2-piece belly dance costume

I Belly flutters - With lifted rib cage, rapid contract / release of the diaphragm muscle.

I Belly pop - a quick contract / release / contract of the pelvis.

I Camel - A vertical **undulation** forward and back along the spine, either full-bodied or isolating the top or bottom of the torso.

T Chasse - entrance skip step to malfouf

I Chest circle - Moving the ribcage in a circle, either horizontally or vertically.

I Chest drop / lift - Moving the ribcage quickly down or up using the diaphragm.

T Choo choos - Hip shimmies on relevé using the feet to move the pelvis.



T Corkscrew turn - A stationary turn done by crossing one leg over the other and pivoting on the heel of the front foot.**T Egyptian walk / Hagalla** - Down-hip walk

M Doum - low heavy beat that often marks the 1 of a musical measure

M Duff - hand-held frame drum

I Figure 8s - vertical + horizontal - pelvis and rib cage

P Floorwork - Movements done sitting or lying on the floor.

T Grapevine step - A 4-count sideways step (4-step) with the back leg crossing either behind or in front of the leading leg.

I Head slide -A horizontal sliding of the head using the cervical vertebrae.

I Heel pulse - Tapping one or both heels on the ground in time to the doum (the downbeat/one of a musical measure) or as an accent.

I Hip bump - Thrusting the hip sharply sideways using the glutes.

I Hip circle - A circular horizontal rotation of the pelvis. Top versus bottom stationary + small versus full lower body

I Hip drop or lift - With the weight squarely on one leg, lift or drop the opposite (non-weight-bearing) hip on the down beat.

I Hip jewel - Half a horizontal pelvic figure 8 ending with a small abdominal contraction OR forward crescent ending with a double twist on either side.

I Hip slide - Horizontally sliding the hips from side to side / R - L.

I Hip twist - Twisting the hips forward and back horizontally using the groin muscles.

I Layering - Doing multiple movements at once.

M Maqam - Middle Eastern musical scale



I Maya - Down-hip vertical figure 8s with the hips moving away from the body.

C Melaya - A heavy black rectangular piece of cloth worn by women in northern Egypt as a cover up.

P Mergenci - recent term adapted from French for the first section of a belly dance performance.

M Nay - reed flute

C Nubian - a region along the Nile from northern Sudan to Aswan, Egypt

M Oud - Middle Eastern 11 or 13 stringed lute without frets. Double-stringed except for the last base string.

I Pelvic lift and drop - Moving the pelvis up/down, in/out by contracting or releasing the groin and sacral muscles.

T Pelvic tilt with weight shift / contract-release - Tilting the pelvis forward or back while shifting weight between front and back legs/feet.

I Poses - Finales, accents, pauses

T Processional 2-count step / step-touch

M Qanoun - Middle Eastern zither

T Relevé (or demi-pointe) - Dancing on the balls of the feet.

M Riq - Middle Eastern tamborine

M Sagat - Egyptian one-holed finger cymbals with flat rims

C Saidi - from the southern part of Egypt: Minya to Aswan near border with Sudan

T Seesaw step - a 2-count variation of the 4-step where one leg or hip swings forward and back, usually with down hips.

I Shimmy - Generating a vibration using different body parts to jiggle torso flesh



I Shoulder rolls - alternate rolling the shoulders up-back-down-around.

I Shoulder shimmies - quickly alternate pushing shoulders forward and back

I Snake - side to side full body undulation

I Snake arms - with the arms extended to the side at shoulder height, elbows pointing backward (not down) alternate rolling the shoulders in a backward circle, releasing the tension in the wrists. Palms down.

T Soheir Zaki down hip (penguin) walk- in releve, alternate dropping one hip down while stepping forward, emphasizing the downward motion.

T Step-ball change - **R** kick front + **R** step back on ball + **L** step

M Tabla - (darbuka) Middle Eastern hand-held drum played for belly dance

M Tak - higher pitched strike on the rim of a tabla

M Taqsim - solo of one instrument, usually without percussion

T Travelling steps - covering the stage, moving around.

M Tremolo - musical cue for shimmies and spins

I Undulations - camels + snakes - rolling the spine forward/back or side to side in a wave motion. Can be done full body or with half - top/ribs or bottom/pelvis.

M Zills - American or Turkish 2-slot stamped finger cymbals with small curved rims

C Zuffa - Egyptian wedding procession + rhythm



4 X 4 COMBINATIONS