



A Companion Booklet for the DVD
"Belly Dance Travel Steps,"
from World Dance
New York, 2011.



Travel Steps Study Guide

- Master List of Steps
- Terminology
- Choreography notes
- Time-indexed Table of Contents for the DVD

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Travel Steps Study Guide

If the materials in the DVD or guide are useful to you, please let others know through online reviews (at sites like Amazon as well as belly dance sites), print reviews, forum postings, and word of mouth in your community. I also appreciate your continuing support of “Beautiful Technique.”

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INTRODUCTION

Travel Steps is part of World Dance New York's "Movement Catalog" series of belly dance DVDs. Unlike traditional how-to programs that include step-by-step instructions and follow-along dance segments, Movement Catalog DVDs are intended as an open-level reference demonstrating belly dance movement vocabulary.

Using Travel Steps and the Travel Steps Study Guide

Although *Travel Steps* runs in a DVD player as a continuous presentation, the program is a literal catalog of terms, concepts, and movements, containing hundreds of discrete entries. Because these entries fly by, and because breakdowns and dance-along content were outside the scope of the DVD portion of this project, some dancers may wish for a slower, step-by-step reference. I created the study guide for these users; I hope the supplemental materials presented here will help you take ownership of the *Travel Steps* material and incorporate it into your own practice.

The main section of this study guide is a time-indexed listing of the DVD's contents that highlights key terminology, shows movement categories and the organizational framework of the presentation, and itemizes layering movements. For Combinations, the listing in this guide also contains choreography notation and some additional information about learning and using the material on the DVD. I've also included a short essay, "Using Footwork in Your Dance," with some ideas about applying the material in *Travel Steps*, and some lesson plans to help structure independent study.

I suggest dancers begin with the "Catalog of Steps" sections of the DVD (Layers and Timing Variations for Steps, Layers and Timing Variations for Step-Hold, and Combinations with Style Variations). Analytical thinkers may find that following along with the content listing in the guide makes it easier to keep track of movements and layering possibilities.

Musically-sensitive dancers may see a few instances where my footfalls seem slightly off the beat. Having been asked to develop material for the DVD in "dictionary format," I anticipated that viewers would see a series of individual segments rather than a continuous presentation synchronized to a continuous audio track, and didn't take care to ignore the melodic cues I heard in the music that was playing while I filmed. The editing work is outstanding, but can't totally make up for the fact that I danced for the camera in a stop-and-start fashion. If you have trouble seeing the rhythm of the footfalls in any movement, I suggest muting the sound for a moment.

For more information, or to start at the absolute beginning, read section two of the guide, Foundation Concepts and Terminology. (While this information is also included on the DVD, a production decision was made that this section would release in "lecture format" without keywords highlighted in annotation. As such, I believe the information is easier to follow and appreciate in print.)

For the truly detail-oriented, "Foundation Positions and Movements" are included on the DVD and indexed in the guide. You'll see that a production decision was made to present this section in a no-frills way. Rather than settling down to watch this entire segment, I suggest users start with the guide's list of moves and then consult the DVD as necessary.

Organizational Methodology

Travel Steps builds literally from the ground up, describing each piece of dance vocabulary in terms of a foundation unit of either "step," a full transfer of weight from one foot to the other, or "hold," a count of choreography that does not transfer weight. Layers on steps and holds create a variety of movements; when linked together with sequencing, timing, and style variations, plain and layered steps and holds form combinations and choreography. While traditional belly dance hipwork and isolations are included in this presentation, *Travel Steps* focuses mainly on

timing variations and on articulations of the feet and legs. For steps, I show walking and other patterns of steps in even succession, but emphasize ball-change and step-ball-change weight transfers. I treat pivots, hops, heel lifts, knee lifts, and leg extensions as movements that happen between steps, and describe these articulations as layers on holds. To show holds in the context of travel steps, I demonstrate each layered hold variation in a step-hold sequence.

Style and Nomenclature

Foot and leg movements are inherent to belly dance but were not historically emphasized or refined in the dance's countries of origin, so some belly dancers may be accustomed to thinking of polished use of this vocabulary in terms of ballet, jazz, or other western forms. *Travel Steps* uses three terms shared with ballet: arabesque, attitude, and chassé. I used these names (along with another generic term, grapevine) because they are used in common by many styles of dance, and widely understood in belly dance classes to refer to belly dance moves danced with belly dance technique; I've avoided other ballet terminology because I believe its use suggests that polished foot and leg technique in belly dance necessarily represents fusion. Although precise foot and leg placement is a Western-influenced and contemporary development, I do not regard beautiful and intentional use of the feet and legs as inherently alien to a pure belly dance aesthetic or necessarily requiring cross-training. While not appropriate or useful to every style, technique and clean lines for the whole body can be conceptualized from a belly dance perspective, developed within a belly dance training program, and proudly claimed as integrated and proper components of belly dance.

To support precise dance, *Travel Steps* describes movements with precise language. For this project I favored English-language movement names that describe skeletal placement and joint articulation, with the goal of transmitting “styleless” foundation technique, and helping dancers break down unfamiliar layered movements into identifiable components. *Travel Steps* establishes and defines clear foundation terminology, and then applies that terminology with internal consistency to describe the mechanics of each movement. Some dancers may find my language to be “plain English,” while others may see it as technical – from either viewpoint, it is not poetic. When teaching a movement in the context of a choreography, genre, or particular dancer's individual style, evocative language or nicknames may do a much better job of cueing a move or conveying its feeling than do my formal designations. I encourage dancers to adapt my foundation nomenclature just as they adapt *Travel Steps*'s foundation technique—to suit their own style and purpose.

Attire

I teach dance in tights or with bare legs to transmit as much information as possible about placement and alignment, and I designed my short skirt bedleh specifically for *Travel Steps* so that viewers could see my feet and legs. While I recommend teaching and training in clothing that shows joint articulations and body lines, I don't suggest that dancers use my teaching clothes as a model for performance costuming. Minimalist designs that show the entire leg may be appropriate for theatrical and fusion work, but for folklore or traditional belly dance, follow the conventions of the style you are presenting, and choose costuming that is appropriately modest or daring for each context and venue. Most traditional costumes include a floor-length skirt, although harem pants are frequently used in American cabaret, and gartered or flare pants are used in some tribal styles. A short skirt may work in some nightclub environments; I also suggest it as a possibility for the contemporary lyrical fusion style shown in the “Combinations with Style Variations” section of *Travel Steps*.

Most dancers will find that the pivoting vocabulary in *Travel Steps* is much easier to dance in a soft-soled dance shoe than barefoot. I love the look of barefoot dancing and the connection it gives me to the floor, but I've never been able to build up enough callouses to pivot barefoot with the same degree of ease I have in shoes. (A wooden floor helps too. You'll see and hear a few very sticky pivots in *Travel Steps*; I was dancing on a floor designed to provide a

high degree of friction and traction for modern dancers). If I'm dancing anywhere other than a dance studio or theater stage, I also wear shoes as a basic common sense safety precaution.

I love the Fizzion shoe by Capezio (this is the shoe I'm wearing in the practice-clothing segments of *Travel Steps*), but many students looking for a lower-priced option will also be happy with a basic ballet slipper. For a fancier look, Miguelito makes ballet shoes in gold and silver. In the performance-costume segments of *Travel Steps*, I'm wearing Dance Paws. Half-soles and lyrical shoes like these are also a popular choice to decrease friction without covering the entire foot. If you're new to dance shoes, try on several styles from several manufacturers. The construction nuances in different shoes make a big difference in the way each design feels and performs, and it's worth shopping around to find the perfect match for the shape of your feet and how you use them against the floor. Nearly all dance shoes have leather soles; if you're looking specifically for a vegan shoe, there's one available from Cynthia King.

I rarely dance in high-heel shoes, but they're also a costuming option. Heels change your weight distribution and body alignment, so if you perform in heels, I suggest that you also wear them to train.

FOUNDATION CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY

Describing Positions of the Feet and Legs

Weight Distribution and Transfer

In dance, weight means the weight of the body, and how it is distributed over the feet. When weight is equally distributed, neither foot can be lifted from the floor. By transferring weight forward or back, it becomes possible to lift the toes, or to lift the heels. By fully transferring weight left or right, one foot becomes free to lift off the floor.

Describing Unequal Weight Distribution

Weight-Bearing Foot

Standing Leg

Weighted Hip

Free Foot

Unweighted Leg

Unweighted Hip

When weight is unequally distributed between the left and right foot, movements can be described in terms of the weight-bearing foot, the standing leg (also called the supporting leg or weighted or weight-bearing leg), and the weighted hip. On the other side of the body is the free foot, unweighted leg, and unweighted hip.

Hip Rotation and Rotational Orientation of the Legs

Parallel

Turn-In

Relaxed Turnout

Engaged Turnout

Hip rotation is the action of the femur turning in the socket of the hip joint. Rotation in the unweighted hip turns the leg to a new orientation. Rotation in the weighted hip turns the body over the standing leg. When the top of the thigh bone faces front, the leg is in a parallel orientation. When it points across the body, the leg is turned in. A relaxed unweighted leg rolls naturally into a slightly turned out orientation. Muscle engagement can turn the leg further, into an engaged turn-out. Most belly dance hipwork requires a close parallel stance, but when one foot is lifted from the floor, the unweighted leg may turn in or slightly turn out. In *Travel Steps*, the standing leg usually has very slight turnout, to improve balance and stability. The basic orientation of the unweighted leg is slightly turned out when it is extended forward or back, and parallel when the knee is bent, or when the leg is extended to the side. Engaged turnout may be used for fusion, but is not used in traditional belly dance.

Articulation of the Ankle and Toes

Flat Weight-Bearing Foot

Lifted Heel (Weight-Bearing Foot)

Pointed Toes (Free Foot)

Flexed Free Foot (Men's Saidi Styling)

Weight on the foot depends largely on dance style and music tempo. Staying heavy on a flat foot creates grounded movement; lifting the heels gives a lighter feeling, and facilitates quick weight changes. A pointed toe extends and finishes the line of the unweighted leg. For Saidi steps, female dancers sometimes imitate men's flexed-foot styling, but *Travel Steps* shows Saidi in a theatricalized women's style, with a pointed toe.

Breaking Down Footwork into Steps and Holds

On any count of music, the movement in the body may be described as a step, a full transfer of weight from one foot to the other, or a hold. During a hold, movement may continue in the body, but weight does not transfer.

Layering Steps with Movement

Weighted Hipwork

Upper Body Isolations

Sways

A step may be layered with weighted hip pushes, lifts, or other movements of the weighted hip, with isolations in the upper body, and with large full torso undulations, that sway to the side or back.

Layering Holds with Movement

Push

Pull

Touch

Knee-Lift

Extension

Heel-Lift

Hop

Heel Drop

Pivot

Unweighted Hipwork

During a hold, a dancer may perform weighted hipwork or upper body isolations in place, but she is also free to push the free foot out or pull it in, touch the free foot, lift the knee, or extend the unweighted leg. A weight transfer forward onto the ball of the foot or back onto the heel also allows movement of the weight-bearing foot during a hold: A heel lift floats the body up to create a level change or lifts the free foot from a touch to an extension; a hop lifts the foot entirely from the floor; a heel drop marks the beat of the music with a heavy accent. A pivot is a rotation on the ball or heel of the weight-bearing foot. In belly dance, movements of the unweighted leg, heel lifts and drops, and pivots are occasionally used alone, but are more commonly layered with one another and with unweighted hip movement, such as unweighted hip lifts, drops, twists, unweighted circling or undulating movements, or rotations of the leg in the socket of the unweighted hip joint.

Step-Hold

Step-Hip

Step-Touch

Step-Knee-Lift

Step-Extend

Step-Pivot

A step-hold is a 2-part sequence of a step, followed by a hold. Either the step or hold in a step-hold sequence may be layered with additional movement. The combinations frequently called “step-hip” are variations on step-hold, created from a touch layered with an unweighted hip movement. In addition to step-touch and step-hip, other variations include step-knee-lift, step-extend, and step-pivot. In choreography, step-hold sequences are often timed with a step on count 1, but if the body is already in position count 1 may be a hold. For instance, step-hip can be danced as hip-step, with a “hip” on count one, and a step on 2.

Individual Steps

A step describes a full transfer of weight from one foot to the other, in place, or moving the body to a new spot on the floor.

Step Out

Step Forward

Step Back

Step Side

Step Across Front

Step Across Back

A step out—forward, back, to the side, crossover to the front or crossover to the back—recenters the body over a new spot on the floor.

Step In | Step Together

A step in or step together brings the foot underneath the hip.

Step in Place

A step in place keeps the foot underneath the hip.

Ball-Change | Step-Ball-Change | “Cha-Cha-Cha”

A ball change is created by a step out to a new spot on the floor, quickly followed by a second step that takes the body back to the original location. A ball-change also describes a rebounding weight change, where the body is temporarily transferred to an unbalanced position. A step-ball-change (or, ball-change step) is a linked sequence of three steps that transfers weight right left right or left right left. When cueing choreography, the counts for quick step-ball-change sequences are sometimes verbalized as “cha cha cha.”

Steps in Even Succession

Time-Marking Steps

Time marking steps are rhythmic patterns of steps in place or combinations of steps in place, touches, holds, and ball changes.

Walk | Run

A walk or run describes a series of left-and-right alternating steps forward or steps back.

Step, Step-Together

Step, Cross-Behind

Grapevine

Push, Step Out, Pull, Step In

Belly Dance Chassé

Step-step together patterns take the body forward, back, or sideways, alternating between a step out on one foot and a step in place on the other. Using crossover steps in step-step together patterns allows the dancer to travel while maintaining a close spacing of the feet and legs. Movements like a weighted twist or undulation often travel on a step-cross behind pattern, starting with a step in place, and travelling with a crossover step to the back. The most common belly dance grapevine step is created from crossover steps and steps in place. A variation that crosses the stage more quickly combines crossover steps and steps out to the side. In belly dance, step-step together patterns that don't use crossover steps usually push and pull the feet across the floor with sliding steps. A push sequence begins with the feet together. Slide the foot out, transfer weight, step together. A pull sequence begins with the feet apart. Slide the foot

in, transfer weight, step out. A quick sequence of sliding steps creates a chassé. For continuing travel with chassé footwork, the pattern of the feet is: step out, step together, step out.

Belly Dance Turn Technique

Flowing Out in Turns

Unlike Western dance forms, which often emphasize pulling in and up to turn, belly dance turns flow out, with a horizontal or grounded feeling. Belly dancers often turn with a shift, tilt, bend, or twist in the body, drawing spirals or multiple circles in the air. Layers on turns add still more circles upon circles through movements like hip circles, reaching arms, head rolls, or veil work. Turns in belly dance are usually initiated from a movement in the hips, solar plexus, or shoulders. The most common exceptions are cross-pivot turns, led by a pull from the free foot and the hopping pivot of Saidi dance, led by the unweighted leg.

Countertwist Technique

In the same way that belly dance uses torso movements to initiate turns, counter-twisting movements of the hips or upper body are sometimes used in belly dance to stop rotation, creating a feeling of unfurling energy and then snapping it back in. Countertwists punctuate the phrasing of combinations, creating both a visual and emotional accent in the flow of the dance. On a practical level, a countertwist allows the dancer to complete a turn with one foot lifted from the floor.

Placement on the Foot

Most belly dance turns pivot on the ball of the foot with the heel relatively close to the floor, but high heel lifts may be used. The cross-pivot turn rotates on both the ball and heel of the foot. Alternating toe-heel pivots create a gliding movement sometimes used in fusion. Heel pivots may be found under movements that shift body weight back, like hip circles or undulations. Some belly dancers also use heel pivots in turn technique borrowed from Indian dance.

Defining the Direction of Rotation

Inside and Outside

Open and Close

In Western dance forms, the naming convention for the direction of a turn reflects movements that are defined in terms of a working leg and a standing leg and the technique of initiating a turn by pulling in and up. “Inside” and “outside” turns are named relative to the side of the body of the working leg. An “inside” turn rotates toward the standing leg, and an “outside” turn rotates away from the standing leg. In belly dance, however, the “working” part of the body is usually the torso, and most turns originate with a movement of the hip or shoulder on the same side of the body as the weight bearing leg, so “inside” and “outside” feel opposite from the way they are named in Western dance. For instance, a pivot on the right foot might flow from a push of the right hip, or from an outside swing of the right arm. From a pure belly dance perspective, an “inside” rotation turns the working side of the body toward the unweighted leg, and an “outside” rotation turns the working side of the body away from the unweighted leg.

In *Travel Steps*, turns are named as movements that open or close, relative to the shoulder or to the hip over the weight-bearing leg, and relative to the energetic feeling in the belly, solar plexus, or heart. A pivot “open” is a clockwise pivot on the right foot or a counterclockwise pivot on the left foot, and follows a movement that opens the front of the body. A pivot to “close” rotates counterclockwise on the right foot or clockwise on the left, and follows a movement that closes the front of the body.

Movement Breakdown for Turns

In *Travel Steps*, pivots and steps are always treated as discrete components in movement breakdowns. Pivots happen between steps: weight is transferred to one foot in a step, a pivot moves the free foot over a new location on the floor, and then weight is transferred in another step. In step-pivot combinations, a pivot often takes a full count. Count “1” for the step, “2” for the pivot. Steps and pivots flow together in faster turns and turns across the floor, but the breakdown is the same. Step on the count, pivot between steps.

MOVEMENT VOCABULARY

Foundation Positions and Movements

Movements on the Weight-Bearing Foot

- 52:37 **Heel Lift**
- 52:43 **Heel Lift-Drop**
- 52:49 **Heel Drop**
- 52:53 **Hop**
- 53:00 **Pivot Variations**
 - Basic Pivot Open (from the Solar Plexus)*
 - Pivot Open Led from the Arm*
 - Pivot Open Led from the Shoulder Blade*
 - Pivot Open Led from Hip to the Side*
 - Pivot Open Led from a Hip Circle*
 - Basic Pivot to Close (from the Solar Plexus)*
 - Pivot to Close Led from the Arm*
 - Pivot to Close Led from a Hip Twist Forward*

Positions and Movements of the Free Foot and Unweighted Leg

- 53:53 **Touch Under the Body**
 - Basic Touch Under the Body (Parallel)*
 - Touch Under the Body with Turned-In Leg*
 - Touch Under the Body with Turned-Out Leg*
- 54:04 **Knee-Lift**
 - Basic*
 - Knee-Lift with Turned-In Leg*
- 54:15 **Front: Push Out, Straight-Leg Touch, Extend, Pull In**
 - Basic Push Out Front and Pull In (with Hip Rotation)*
 - From Parallel, Push Out and Turn Out; Pull In and Rotate Back In to Parallel

Basic Straight-Leg Touch Front (Turned-Out)
Basic Extension Front (Turned-Out)
Push Out Front and Pull In, Parallel Variation
Straight-Leg Touch Front, Parallel Variation
Extension Front Parallel Variation

54:43 **Bent-Knee Touches and Front Attitudes**

Basic Bent-Knee Touch Front
Parallel Attitude Front
Bent-Knee Touch Front, Turned-In Variation
Bent-Knee Touch Front, Turned-Out Variation
Turned-Out Attitude Front

For Saidi and Other Folklore

54:59 **Side: Push Out, Touch, Extend, Pull In**

Basic Push Out and Pull In (Parallel)
Basic Touch Side (Parallel)
Basic Extension Side (Parallel)
Push Out Side and Pull In, Hip Rotation Variation

From Parallel, Push Out and Turn Out; Pull in and Rotate Back In to Parallel

Touch Side, Turned-Out Variation
Extension Side, Turned-Out Variation

55:25 **Back: Push Out, Touch, Extend, Knee-Bend, Pull In**

Basic Push Out Back and Pull In (with Hip Rotation)
From Parallel, Push Out and Turn Out; Pull In and Rotate Back In to Parallel
Arabesque Touch (Turned Out)
Arabesque Extension (Turned Out)
Arabesque Attitude Touch (Turned Out)
Arabesque Attitude Extension (Turned Out)
Push Out Back and Pull In, Parallel Variation
Touch Back (Parallel)
Extension Back (Parallel)
Basic Bent-Knee Position (Parallel)
Bent-Knee Position, Turned-In Variation

56:02 **Hipwork-Driven Touches and Extensions Front**

Double Drop

From a Bent-Knee Touch Front to a Straight-Leg Touch Front

Hip Pull Back

From a Bent-Knee Touch Front to an Extension Front (Parallel Variation)

Hip Push-Twist:

From a Basic Touch Under the Body with an Open Hip to an Extension Front

Lumbar Contract-Release with Straight Leg

Between a Straight-Leg Touch Front and an Extension Front

Lumbar Contract-Release with Bent Leg in Front of the Body

Between a Bent-Leg Touch Front and a Parallel Attitude Front

56:44 **Hipwork-Driven Extensions Side**

Full Shift Side

From a Touch Under the Body to a Side Extension

Weighted Hip Drop

From a Touch Under the Body to a Side Extension

- 56:56 **Hipwork-Driven Touches and Extensions Back**
Hip Forward
From a Basic Touch Under the Body to an Extension Back with an Open Hip
Lumbar Contract-Release with Bent Leg Behind the Body
Between a Basic Bent Knee Position and a Touch Back

Leg Sweeps and Circles

- 57:19 **Sweep to the inside**
From Arabesque Touch, Sweep around to Straight-Leg Touch Front
Basic
Heel Lift-Drop Variation
From Arabesque Touch (Turned-Out), Sweep around with Hip Rotation to Touch Side (Parallel)
Basic
Heel Lift-Drop Variation
From Touch Side (Parallel), Sweep around with Hip Rotation to Touch Front (Turned-Out)
Basic
Heel Lift-Drop Variation
- 57:59 **Sweep to the outside**
From Straight-Leg Touch Front, Sweep around to Arabesque Touch
Basic
Heel Lift-Drop Variation
From Straight-Leg Touch Front (Turned-Out), Sweep around with Hip Rotation to Touch Side (Parallel)
Basic
Heel Lift-Drop Variation
From Touch Side (Parallel), Sweep around with Hip Rotation to Arabesque Touch (Turned-Out)
Basic
Heel Lift-Drop Variation
Forward-and-Back and Side-to-Side Leg Movements
- 58:58 **Sagittal Circles**
Knee Lift, Extend Forward, Pull In
Knee Lift, Extend Forward, Pull In (Parallel Variation)
Knee-Bend, Extend Forward, Pull In
Knee-Bend, Extend Forward, Pull In (Parallel Variation)
- 59:26 **Undulating 8**

Hip Rotation to Pivot the Body Toward or Away From an Extended Leg

- 59:42 **Pivot Open**
From Extension Front, Pivot Open to Arabesque Extension
From Extension Front, Pivot Open to Extension Side
From Extension Side, Pivot Open to Arabesque Extension
- 1:00:15 **Pivot to close**
From Arabesque Extension, Pivot to Close into Straight-Leg Touch Front
From Arabesque Extension, Pivot to Close into Extension Side
From Extension Side, Pivot to Close into Straight-Leg Touch Front

Torso Isolation Layers for Holds

1:00:50 Basic Unweighted Hipwork

Unweighted Lift Forward
Unweighted Twist Forward
Unweighted Lift Side
Unweighted Twist Side
Knee-Lift with Twist Front-Back
Knee-Lift with Twist Front-Back, Extension Front

1:01:05 Upper Body Accent and Countertwist Layers for Holds

Reverse Undulation Accent
Spiraled Reverse Undulation Accent
Upper Body Countertwist
Upper Body Countertwist with Spiraled Reverse Undulation Accent

Turns

1:01:55 Cross-Pivot

Step Across Front
Step Across Back

1:02:16 Push-Pivot

Basic
With Opposition Hip Circle

1:02:23 Turns Across the Floor

Turn Open: Travelling Turns
Turn To Close: Travelling Turns
Turn Open: 3-Count Turn and Touch on "4"
Turn to Close: Travel in a Curving Path

Layers and Timing Variations for Steps

Steps in Even Succession

Walk and Run

- 4:15 *1. Slow Walk*
- 4:27 *2. Fast Walk*
- 4:38 *3. Slow Walk with Lifted Heels*
- 4:53 *4. Fast Walk with Lifted Heels*
- 5:00 *5. "Bouncy Walk" (Walk with Heel Lift-and-Drop)*
- 5:13 *6. Run*

Time Marking Steps

- 5:21 *1. Basic Time-Marking Step*
- 5:31 *2. Box Step*

Sideways Travel with Step, Step-Together

- 5:43 *1. Push*
- 5:53 *2. Pull*
- 6:03 *3. Step in Place, Step Across Back*

Grapevines

- 6:17 *1. Step-in-Place Grapevine*
6:29 *2. Step-Out Grapevine*
6:40 **Alternating Toe-Heel Pivots**
Steps Layered with Torso Isolations
7:00 *Steps Layered with Weighted Hipwork*
Side to side hips
Weighted hip drops side
Hip circle
Undulation
7:16 *Steps Layered with Upper Body Isolations*
Shoulder accents
Shoulder bounce
Ribcage circle
Head slide

Ball-Change

- 7:45 **Basic Ball-Change**
7:54 **Ball-Change with Unbalanced Weight Change**
Ball-Change with Weighted Hipwork
8:07 *Hip Front, Flat Foot*
8:14 *Hip Front, Lifted Heel*
8:20 *Hip Side, Flat Foot*
8:25 *Hip Side, Lifted Heel*
8:29 *Full Shift Side*
8:39 *Hip Back, Flat Foot*
8:49 *Hip Back, Turned-Out Leg and Flat Foot*
8:59 *Hip Back, Lifted Heel*
Ball-Change Layered with a Sway
9:06 *Spiraled Upper Body Reverse Undulation*
Undulation Up to the Side
9:17 Upper Body
9:28 Full Torso
9:39 *Untwisting Upper Body Undulation Up to the Side*
9:49 *Upper Body Untwist*
Undulation Up to the Front

Step-Ball-Change

10:02 **Step-Ball-Change Time-Marking Step**

10:12 *Basic*

Layered Variations

10:18 Double Side-to-Side Hips

10:23 Double Hip Pushes Front

10:28 Basic Back

10:33 Weighted Hip Drops and Lumbar Contract-Release

10:38 Step Back with Double Undulation

10:46 Triplet Twist

10:48 “Pony” Step

7:29 **Travel with Step-Ball-Change**

10:56 *Basic*

Layered Variations

11:03 “Egyptian Waltz”

11:12 Chassé

11:18 Step Across, Ball-Change Side

Layers and Timing Variations for Step-Hold

Touch Under the Body

11:26 1. *With Upper Body Accent*

11:40 2. *With Hip Lift Side*

Bent-Knee Touch Front

11:52 1. *Basic*

12:01 2. *With Hip Lift Front*

Straight-Leg Touch Front

12:10 1. *Basic*

12:15 2. *With Hip Twist Front*

Knee-Lift

12:24 1. *Basic*

12:38 2. *With Heel Lift-and-Drop*

12:49 3. *With Turned-In Leg*

12:53 4. *With Turned-In Leg and with Heel Lift-and-Drop*

13:02 5. *With Hip Twist Front-Back*

13:15 6. *With Pivot Open*

13:25 7. *With Pivot Open and with Hip Twist Front-Back*

13:33 8. *With Pivot to Close*

Knee-Lift, Extend Front

- 13:46 1. *Basic*
- 13:57 2. *With Extension from Turned-In Knee Lift*
- 14:06 3. *With Parallel Extension*
- 14:18 4. *With Heel Lift-and-Drop*
- 14:28 5. *With Pivot Open*
- 14:39 6. *With Hip Twist Front-Back*
- 14:51 7. *With Pivot Open and with Hip Twist Front-Back*
- 15:04 8. *With Pivot Open, Rotating Away from Extension*
- 15:20 9. *With Pivot to Close*
- 15:36 10. *With Pivot to Close, Step with Figure 8 Forward*
- 15:48 11. *With Pivot to Close, Step with Undulation*

Extend Front

- 16:08 1. *Basic*
- 16:16 2. *With Heel Lift-and-Drop*
- 16:23 3. *With Pivot Open*
- 16:38 4. *With Pivot Open, Rotating Away from the Extension*
- 16:59 5. *With Hip Push-Twist*
- 17:09 6. *With Pivot Open and with Hip Push-Twist*
- 17:21 7. *With Pivot to Close*
- 17:33 8. *With Pivot to Close and with Hip Pull-Drop*
- 17:50 9. *With Leg Sweep*
- 18:01 10. *With Pivot to Close and with Leg Sweep*
- 18:18 11. *With Lumbar Release Accent (Extend, Touch, Extend)*

Touch Side

- 18:25 1. *Basic*
- 18:35 2. *With Hip Twist*
- 18:40 3. *With Hip Lift*
- 18:50 4. *With Chassé Transition*
- 18:59 5. *Turned-Out*

Extend Side

- 19:09 1. *Turned-Out*
- 19:16 2. *Touch, Extend, Touch*
- 19:31 3. *With Pivot Open; Step with Figure 8 to the Back*
- 19:42 4. *With Pivot to Close; Step Across Back*

Arabesque Touch

Arabesque Extension

- 20:05 1. *With Pivot Open*
- 20:17 2. *With Pivot Open and with Upper Body Countertwist*
- 20:25 3. *With Leg Sweep*
- 20:39 4. *With Pivot Open and with Leg Sweep*

Arabesque Attitude Touch

Arabesque Attitude Extension

- 21:03 1. *With Pivot Open*
- 21:14 2. *With Leg Sweep*
- 21:25 3. *With Pivot Open and with Leg Sweep*

Extend Back

- 21:38 1. *With Push-Pivot*
- 21:52 2. *With Push-Pivot and with Opposition Hip Circle*

Knee-Bend

- 22:00 1. *Basic*
- 22:10 2. *With Pivot Open*
- 22:18 3. *With Pivot Open, Step Across*

Swing Through

- 22:28 1. *Turned-In Knee-Bend → Touch Front*
- 22:38 2. *Turned-In Knee-Bend → Forward Extension*
- 22:45 3. *Hip Push-Twist → Forward Extension; Swing Back with Undulation → Knee-Bend*
- 23:12 4. *Undulating 8; Swing Back → Arabesque Attitude Extension*
- 23:24 5. *Undulating 8; Swing Back → Arabesque Extension*

REFERENCE NOTES FOR LAYERED FOOTWORK COMBINATIONS WITH STYLE VARIATIONS

Annotation on the DVD describes the footwork in each combination. In the choreography notation here, I've used bullets to denote layers on the footwork described in table headings.

Modern Egyptian Oriental

Step, Step, Step-Hold

		Step	Step	Step	Hold
22:35	1	walk forward			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • touch under the body • reverse undulation upper body accent
23:52	2	walk forward			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knee-lift
23:59	3	walk forward			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knee-lift • reverse undulation upper body accent
24:06	4	walk forward			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arabesque extension • leg sweep

Step, Step, Step-Pivot

		Step	Step	Step	Hold
24:27	5	walk forward			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pivot open • arabesque extension • leg sweep
24:52	6	walk forward			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pivot open • knee-lift, extend forward • hip twist front-back
25:08	7	in place; cross behind; in place			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pivot open • knee-lift
25:18	8	back; in place; back			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pivot to close • extension front

Ball-Change, Step-Hold

		Step	Step	Step	Hold
25:37	9	ball-change side		forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • touch under the body
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • untwisting full torso undulation up to the side 			

Step-Pivot, Ball-Change

		Step	Hold	Step	Step
25:52	10	across front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pivot open 	ball-change back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lumbar contraction and release

Egyptian Folklore (Theatricalized Style)

Hold, Step, Step, Step

		Hold	Step	Step	Step
26:08	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> front extension (parallel variation) rotation over the standing leg 	walk		
26:18	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> front extension (parallel variation) 	walk		

In this sequence, the initial hold, layered with a front extension, creates a floating transition into the steps that follow. In the first variation (shown three times), I begin facing downstage, but rotate my torso over my standing leg, creating turnout in the standing leg's hip. Put another way, my extension points to the "side" relative to the audience, but it is a forward extension relative to my body.

Step, Step, Step-Hold

		Step	Step	Step	Hold
26:30	3	forward	together	back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bent-knee touch front Egyptian hip drop, twist forward

This sequence is sometimes called a "belly dance pas de bourrée," and the hold is usually layered with unweighted hipwork and danced with the body facing side so that the working hip is downstage. The footwork is a simple step sequence, layered with subtle rotation that changes the dancer's orientation 180 degrees while she crosses the stage. Most sequences don't use any pivoting footwork; the change in the body's orientation is created by rotating the body over the standing leg, in the hip, using the technique shown in this section's opening combo..

		Step	Step	Step	Hold
26:54	4	across in back	side	across in front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Straight-leg touch side Hip twist

With the body facing in the same direction throughout the sequence, this combination is a true grapevine. Taking the initial step back gives a relaxed impression of falling or melting in to the combination.

Hold, Step

		Hold	Step
27:06	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot to close front extension leg sweep 	across in back
27:17	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot open arabesque extension leg sweep 	across in front

This section illustrates a 2-count component used in longer combinations. Many folklore combinations contain 2-count hold-step sequences with the arm and leg layering variations shown here.

8-Count Combo 1

		Step	Hold	Step	Hold	Step	Hold	Hold	Hold
27:30	7	across front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • straight-leg touch side • hip lift • rotate over the standing leg 	front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pivot open • straight-leg touch side • hip lift 	side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pivot to close • straight-leg touch side • hip lift 	wait	wait

This is a turning step-lift combo. The turning component of this combination comes primarily from pivots, but the dancer also helps the turn along by reorienting her body over the standing leg. After the first hip lift, the dancer rotates into a turned-out position on her standing leg in preparation for a step forward on count 3.

8-Count Combo 2

		Step	Step	Step	Hold	Step	Step	Step	Step
27:41	8	ball-change		across front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arabesque • leg sweep 	across front	side	ball change back	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full shift side • arm undulation 						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • undulation, back on “7” 	

The steps in the second half of the combo turn the dancer using the same technique as belly dance pas de bourrée. In preparation for the step on count 7, the dancer rotates her body over her standing leg, creating turn-out in the standing leg’s hip and transitioning into a side-facing orientation for the undulation on counts 7 and 8.

16-Count Combo

		Step	Step	Step	Hold	Step	Step	Step	step
28:14	9	walk			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • arabesque • leg sweep 	across front	In place	across back	In place

(9 cont.)	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Step	Hold	Step	Hold
	hip circle				side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pivot open • Straight-leg touch side • Hip lift 	side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pivot to close • Straight-leg touch side • Hip lift

Counts 5 – 8 use a grapevine step. Unlike the cross-in-back variation shown in combination 4, this grapevine is led by a step across in front. The hip circle in counts 9 -12 transfers weight around the front to the free foot, then around the back, returning weight to the same foot as when the circle started. Counts 13-16 use steps from combo 7, turning step-lifts.

Saidi (Theatricalized Women's Style)

True Saidi folklore is danced only by men, but women borrow steps from this style for theatricalized folklore dances, or for folkloric-inspired Oriental dance. Men dance Saidi steps with a flexed foot; women often soften the line of the leg with a pointed foot. I recommend a pointed foot as basic technique for women, and use a pointed foot to demonstrate the movements in this section. However, women may certainly imitate men's flexed-foot styling, especially if the mood or music calls for a strong or flirtatious variation.

Time-Marking Heel Drops

28:59 *Basic Drop (Even Timing)*

29:04 *Heel drop with Turn in Place*

29:14 *Heel Drop Layered Underneath Hipwork*

29:20 *Timing Variation: Saidi Rhythm*

Drop on the "doum," lift up on the "tek." Drop-lift, drop, drop, lift.

Heel Drop, Lift, Pivot to Close

I've described the direction of the pivot in this movement as closing. This nomenclature follows the "open" and "close" naming convention I use throughout this presentation, but for this particular move the label may feel counterintuitive. This is a folkloric movement, not an Oriental one, and the impetus of the turn comes from springing up and from the unweighted leg's side of the body. A dancer may feel like she is "opening" in this pivot.

All three variations of this movement have a slight knee bend layered over the heel drop. The legs spring back to straight in preparation for the pivot.

29:27 *Basic*

29:31 *Timing Variation: Saidi Rhythm*

29:37 *With Forward Extension*

Saidi Time-Marking Steps

		Step	Hold	Step	Hold
29:47	1	forward	• heel lift-and-drop	back	• heel lift-and-drop
29:54	2	side	• heel lift-and-drop • knee-lift	side	• heel lift-and-drop • knee-lift
30:00	3	side	• heel lift-and-drop • turned-out attitude front	side	• heel lift-and-drop • turned-out attitude front
30:05	4	side	• heel lift-and-drop • parallel attitude front	side	• heel lift-and-drop • parallel attitude front
30:12	5	forward	• heel lift-and-drop • parallel attitude front	back	• heel lift-and-drop • parallel attitude front
30:24	6	side	• heel lift-and-drop • knee-bend	side	• heel lift-and-drop • knee-bend
30:30	7	side	• heel lift-and-drop • turned-in knee bend	side	• heel lift-and-drop • turned-in knee bend

Touch → Lift or Bend

30:35 *From Bent Knee Touch Front, Lift to Parallel Attitude Front*

30:41 *From touch under the body, to turned-in knee bend*

30:46 *From touch under the body, to parallel knee bend*

30:54 Hop with Side Extension, Hop with Knee-Bend

Many dancers will consider this cheerful movement to be the most difficult piece of vocabulary included in *Travel Steps*. If you are among them, don't be discouraged! It definitely requires both strength and stamina, but the footwork becomes easier (and less tiring) once it's in your "muscle memory." Here's the breakdown for learning this step:

- Start with your weight on your right foot, and your left leg in a turned-out touch side. Center your head over your right foot, leaning your torso slightly right, so that your left leg and the left side of your body make a long diagonal.
- Still leaning toward the right, hop, and bend your left knee. While you are in the air, use the knee bending motion to pull your body to the left.
- Land back on your right foot. You are now a little bit to the left of where you started. Your unweighted left leg is turned out and a bit to the side, and your left knee is bent so that your left calf is parallel to the floor and crossed behind your right calf. Your body is leaning toward the right, and your left foot is roughly under your right shoulder.
- Hop a second time from your right foot. While you are in the air this time, change feet, and lean your torso to the other side.
- Land on your left foot in a position that mirrors your starting position. Now it is your right leg in a turned-out touch side, and your torso leans slightly left.

When you have the footwork sequence, keep the upper body strong but relaxed, and find a subtle undulation in the chest, up to the side. The head may turn slightly from side to side, looking out over the extended leg.

Ball-Change, Ball-Change

The pivots in this sequence happen on the "and" between counts. Notating the combination in a way that shows both counts and the "and"s between counts, the breakdown looks like this:

		Step (1)	Hold (&)	Step (2)	Hold (&)	Step (3)	Hold (&)	Step (4)	Hold (&)
31:06		side	(wait)	in place	• pivot to close	side	(wait)	in place	• pivot open

I'm showing this sequence with a closed right hand and looping arm path, to suggest a cane or stick. Of course it may also be done with an open hand and relaxed arms, or with an actual cane held in the right hand.

Ball-Change, Step-Hold

		Step	Step	Step	hold
31:18		ball-change side			in place
					• heel lift-and-drop • parallel attitude front

There's a very slight asynchronicity between the audio and visual here. If you have trouble seeing the rhythm of the footfalls, I suggest muting the sound for a moment.

American Cabaret

Step, Step, Step-Hold

		Step	Step	Step	Hold
31:34	1	walk forward			• touch under the body

8 Count Combo 1

		Step	Step	Step	Hold	Step	Step	Step	Step
31:48	2	3-count turn			touch under the body	basic time marking step			

Grapevine

		Step	Step	Step	Step	Step	Step	Step	Hold
32:02	3	across in front	in place	across in back	in place	across in front	in place	across in back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hop • knee bend

Step-Ball-Change

Count these sequences with steps and holds on both on the beat and on the “and” between counts.

		Step (1)	Step (&)	Step (2)	Hold (&)	Step (3)	Step (&)	Step (4)	Hold (&)
32:17	4	forward	together	forward	[wait]	forward	together	forward	[wait]

This footwork pattern is a variation on a belly dance chassé.

		Step (1)	Step (&)	Step (2)	Hold (&)	Step (3)	Step (&)	Step (4)	Hold (&)
32:30	5	back (flat foot)	in place (lifted heel)	in place (lifted heel)	[wait]	back (flat foot)	in place (lifted heel)	in place (lifted heel)	[wait]

This footwork pattern is commonly called “basic back.”

Step-Hold, Step, Step

A truncated version of the footwork precedes a version with additional steps.

		Step	Hold	Step	Hold
32:42	6	across front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • touch side • hip lift 	across front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • touch side • hip lift

		Step	Hold	Step	Step
32:45	7	across back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • touch side • hip lift 	walk backward	

16 Count Combo

		Step	Hold	Step	Hold
32:52	8	in place • weighted twist	• touch side	in place • weighted twist	• touch side

8 (cont)	Step	Hold	Step	Hold
	side • shoulder shimmy	• touch side	side • shoulder shimmy	• touch side

(8 cont.)	Step	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold	Hold
	forward	• hop • knee lift	Cross-in-front pivot turn				[wait]	[wait]

In my voiceover, I describe this combination as beginning with four steps. It would be more accurate to describe the first half's footwork as four sets of step-hold.

8-Count Combo 2

		Step	Hold	Step	Hold	Step	Hold	Hold	Hold
33:05	9	push-pivot	push-pivot	in place	• bent-knee touch front	• double drop			

Veil

Step, Step, Step-Hold

		Step	Step	Step	Hold
33:22	1	walk forward			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> knee-lift hip twist front-back
33:35	2	walk forward			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> knee-lift hop
33:44	3	3-count turn			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> touch under the body
33:50	4	3-count turn			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> knee-lift
33:57	5	3-count turn			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> touch under the body

Box Step

		Step	Step	Step	Step
34:09	6	across front	in place	in	in place

Step-Pivot, Ball-Change

		Step	Hold	Step	Step
34:23	6	across front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot open arabesque extension 	ball-change back	

16-Count Combo

		Step	Step	Step	Step	Step	Hold	Step	Step
34:49	7	box step (across, in place, in, in place)				across front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot open arabesque extension 	ball-change back	

(7 cont)	Step	Hold	Step	Hold	Step	Hold	Step	Step
	step-touch side with chassé transition (x2)				in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot to close front extension 	ball-change in place	

Contemporary Lyrical Fusion

Step-Hold, Step Step

		Step	Hold	Step	Step
35:12	1	forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> from knee-bend with turned-in leg, rotate and swing through to forward extension 	walk	

Step-Pivot, Ball-Change

		Step	Hold	Step	Step
35:23	2	across front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot open arabesque extension 	ball-change back	

16-Count Combo

		Step	Hold	Step	Step	Step	Hold	Step	Step
35:33	3	across front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot open arabesque extension 	ball-change back		across front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot open arabesque extension 	ball-change back	

(3 cont)	Step	Step	Step	Step	Step	Hold	Hold	Hold
	turn across the floor (leading open)				in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot open arabesque extension 		

8 Count Combo 1

		Step	Hold	Step	Step	Step	Step-Hold-Step (6&7)	Hold
35:54	4	across front	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot open arabesque extension 	ball-change back		Across front	step in, pivot to close, step in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot open arabesque extension leg sweep

Leading with the right foot, here's the sequence for this combination: Step right, pivot, ball-change (left-right). Step the left foot across in preparation for a turn. Step on the right foot and pull the right arm in, pivoting to close on the right foot. Transfer your weight to your left foot and continue your counterclockwise rotation; the right leg lifts to arabesque and sweeps forward in a continuation of the turn.

Step-Knee-Lift, Step, Step 15:47 – 16:16

		Step	Hold	Step	Step
36:06	5	in place	knee-lift	in place	in place

		Step	Step	Step	Hold
36:16	6	walk			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> knee-lift
36:25	7	walk			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> knee lift, extend (parallel variation)

Step-Pivot, Step, Step

		Step	Hold	Step	Step
36:37	8	in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pivot to close hip pull-drop forward extension 	walk backwards	

Step-Ball-Change, Hold

		Step	Step	Step	Hold
36:50	9	forward <ul style="list-style-type: none"> full shift side 	in	in place	[wait]

8-Count Combo 2

		Step	Hold	Step-step-step (3&4)	Step	Step	Step	Step
37:06	10	forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> knee-lift, extend (parallel variation) 	step back, step in, step in place	side	3-count turn (lead to close)		

Contemporary Fusion

Step, Step, Step-Hold

		Step	Step	Step	Hold
37:29	1	walk forward			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • touch under the body • reverse undulation upper body accent

Step-Touch, Step-Touch

		Step	Hold	Step	Hold
37:43	2	in place	touch under the body	in place	touch under the body

38:06 Alternating Toe-Heel Pivots

Alternating toe-heel pivots create a travel variation for an upper body circle.

Step-Knee-Lift, Step, Step

		Step	Hold	Step	Step
38:27	3	in place	knee-lift	in place	in place

Hold, Ball-Change, Step

		Hold	Step	Step	Step
38:47	4	knee-lift	side <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full torso undulation up to the side 	in place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full torso undulation up to the side 	in

Step-Hold, Hold, Hold

		Step	Hold	Hold	Hold
39:02	5	step side into a wide turned-out stance		undulating 8 with bent knee	

USING FOOTWORK IN YOUR DANCE

Clean confident footwork skills allow grace and rhythm to flow with ease. While some belly dance uses virtually no locomotor steps (for instance, isolation-intensive tribal fusion choreography, or flowing classic Egyptian moves in the style of Tahia Carioca), every dancer's alignment begins at the point where her feet meet the floor. Every entrance, exit, weight shift, and clean body line is, at its deepest foundation level, balanced over the feet. Rooted in the stable base of sure footing, both the mind and body are ready to relax, focus, or spring into action.

Coordinated with music, footwork underlies the movements that become dance. A deep connection to the music is a hallmark of traditional styles of belly dance, and footwork is often used to interpret rhythm, with steps in time with the beat. Precision footwork, perfectly timed with the music, may create virtuoso performances. Or it may create something tedious and robotic, stripped of life, breath, and joy.

The *Travel Steps* program is based on the idea of reducing dance to units of “step,” and “hold,” effectively digitizing dance into ones and zeros. Digitization of dance, like the digitization of music or images, confers the wonderful ability to easily record and replicate data. It's an excellent tool for the classroom, and a boon to choreographers who archive their dances with written notation. I strongly recommend dance training based in a “digital” approach, drilling and perfecting discrete components in their most pure form. A “digital” approach to performance, however, has limited utility. For theatrical or character work, it might be a great strategy to create mechanistic looking movement, but it's unlikely to create the soft warmth that typifies traditional belly dance styles.

Dance is a window to the extraordinary. You may relate to this idea best in these exact terms, or you may prefer to think of magic, mystery, spirituality, divinity, the unknowable, or a sense of reverence, wonder, or awe. Some forms of dance dazzle with spectacular physical feats, like the special effects in a movie. There's room in belly dance to impress audiences with stunts and tricks (particularly in specialties like drum solo or balancing props), but more often we appeal to the emotions on a subtler level, like poetry or perfume. As dancers, we know the long hours of training that our form requires, but audiences see our movements as “natural,” and the aesthetic of our dance is flowing and organic. At our best, we reveal the natural as extraordinary, creating moments of transcendence in everyday reality. (Or, in some cases, working in gothic or tribal fusion styles, we create the extraordinary through deliberately unnatural movements, working from the other side of the same coin of aesthetics.) Whatever the style of belly dance, the secret to our power is not fancy footwork—it's our connection to the rhythm of the universe. Technical skills are simply a toolkit to help us communicate this connection to our audience.

Many strategies and philosophies exist to help seekers deepen their connection to the extraordinary, but for dancers a good place to start is with music. Music originates from the organic rhythms of the body—breath and the beat of the heart—and the living musician who creates sound by moving her breath or body across an instrument. Deepen your awareness of these rhythms. While functions in the body can be described on a molecular level in terms of definite chemical interactions, our senses don't perceive “on” or “off” in the flow of blood and breath. The heart squeezes and relaxes; the lungs expand and deflate. These cycles are contained by punctuated timing, but between beats and breaths, within the container of timing, blood and air continue to flow. To interpret the extraordinary in music, mark the rhythm, but follow the flow.

And, in whatever way you understand it, follow the extraordinary sense of being alive. The “on” and “off” that we do perceive in our body is the “on” of life, and on a more quotidian level the “on” that marks the presence of our connection to our vitality—that feeling of flowing or of being “all there” or “in the zone.”

Stay on.

LESSON PLANS

These lessons are designed for dancers who have some previous training, but include many very basic awareness exercises. When material isn't useful to you, why not skip ahead?

Balance and Alignment

Working without music, stand quietly and feel the floor. Check the alignment of your body, and bring yourself to a neutral dance posture. Move your awareness to the sensation in the soles of your feet. Shift forward and back, jiggle your ankles and the bones in your feet, stretch and spread your toes, then restack your foot and body, making adjustments until your weight feels stable and optimally balanced. Your foot should be relaxed, but not flattened—look for a springy feeling in the arch.

Transfer all of your weight to one foot, and reach out with the free foot. Allow the unweighted leg to roll into a gently turned-out alignment. Point the free foot and roll it onto the floor, starting with the toes, then the ball of the foot, and finally the heel. Transfer your weight forward, and step through with your other foot. Focus on a smooth step, adjusting your bones to find the most free and comfortable transition. Your point, turnout, and foot shape will determine how your foot meets the floor, but using gentle technique most dancers will find that their middle toes touch the floor first. See how your foot lands, then find the most stable and comfortable rollthrough for your anatomy.

Begin to walk, rolling every footfall down in toe-ball-heel order. Start to transfer your weight and move your body forward as soon as your toes meet the floor; as one foot rolls down, the other peels away. If your balance feels very shaky, speed up a little, or think about bringing your heart forward over your free foot—wobbly steps are often the result of completely laying the foot down in advance of transferring weight and moving the torso forward. Imbue the movement with sensuousity, feeling the floor's pressure increase and decrease across the soles of the feet. Imagine that each step leaves a shimmering footprint behind.

Speed up. Soften the toes, and simplify the rolling footfall into a two-part ball-heel motion. Think of leading the motion with a lengthening of the front of ankle; extend your foot with a gesture similar to the one you would use when extending your hand to be kissed. Keep an open lifted posture, but relax your upper body and breathe.

Walk with music. Find a piece with a very slow tempo and languorous instrumentation. Take a moment to ground and align your body in a neutral dance posture. Breathe deeply. Then walk slowly with the music, relaxing into each step. Look for balance and stability in every transfer of weight. Imagine a loving friendship between your feet and the floor, and feel a “high-five” reaching up to support every step. Refuse to rush or be rushed. Imagine that there is someone important waiting for you on the other side of the room—walk to this person, but take your time. Whoever this person may be, he or she will have to wait for you.

Change the music to a piece with a faster tempo. Speed up without rushing. If you are unsteady, try shortening your steps. Stay grounded and heavy in the hips but use your feet softly and gently. Imagine yourself as a panther or snake. Direct your energy horizontally into the direction of your travel, and skim or slide across the floor. Relax against the music

Connecting to Rhythm

For traditional styles of belly dance, a strong connection to the music is essential. Following the beat comes naturally to many adults who had some exposure to music in their childhood play activities, but everyone's degree of musical sensitivity is different, and the muscle coordination that translates music into movement also depends on a dancer's physical skills and training. If you are new to dance or still developing a sense for music, use this exercise to cultivate your musical feeling—the literal awareness of the sensations that music and rhythm create in your body. If you are a more experienced dancer or if you repeat this lesson, you may find this exercise helpful as a way to focus awareness at the beginning of a practice session.

Begin by walking in time to any piece of medium-tempo music with a 4/4 time signature. (Most Arabic and contemporary fusion music for belly dance uses this time signature—if you are in doubt, choose a piece where you can clearly hear the beat, and follow musical phrases of four even counts each. If you are still in doubt, you may need to consult a teacher or friend with some dance or music background).

Lead with your right foot. Feel four-count phrases that definitively start with a step on the right, then evenly move through three more steps (left, right, left.) Coordinate your steps with the music so that your leading step on the right foot falls on the first beat of a four-count phrase in the music. Switch, and lead with left foot. Continue to emphasize the first step in the way you relate your walking to the rhythm of the music.

While the music is still playing, sit or lie down, close your eyes, and imagine that you are still walking. Listen for the “belly” of each beat, and visualize your step landing perfectly in the bull's eye or trough of each count. Listen to the phrasing of the music. Depending on the structure of the piece you have chosen, you will hear four-count phrases grouped into longer phrases of eight, sixteen, thirty-two, or sixty-four counts. Choose to lead with either your right or left foot, and mentally walk longer phrases. Start each long phrase clearly with a decisive and intentional first step, and subtly mark the beginning of each shorter four-count phrase within the longer phrase.

Standing once again, restart your music, connect with the beat, and “dance” through the song with walking only, walking in a way that makes the song's rhythm and phrasing felt in your body and visible to an audience. Practice an entrance and an exit. Walk in figure-8 and circle patterns. Add steps that travel backwards and sideways. Show changes in the music by changing the direction or intensity of your steps. Choose to lead each phrase with either your right or left foot, and step with intention into the first count.

Step, Step-Together & Push; Step-Together, Step & Pull; Chassé

Walk through a step, step-together pattern: start with feet together, then take a step out with your right foot; bring your left foot alongside your right foot, then step in place on the left. Continuing with this footwork pattern, move forward, back, and to the right. Switch to lead with the left foot, and travel forward, back, and to the left.

Walk through a step-together, step pattern: start with feet apart, then step your right foot in to bring the feet together; step out with the left foot, widening your stance, then step the right foot in. Continue with this footwork pattern, initiating with a step in. Travel forward, back, and left; then switch to lead left, and travel forward, back, and right.

Allow one or both feet to slide along the floor and add a subtle timing emphasis to create either a “push” variation on step, step-together, or a “pull” variation on step-together, step.

Try push footwork first. Leading again with your right foot, step out on count 1, then slide your left foot into meet it, and transfer weight left on count two. Continue by stepping out on the right foot on count three, and sliding the left foot in to transfer on count 4. Travel forward, back, and right. “Push” the feet apart on count one, then pull the feet back together.

Travel right, and add a hipwork layer to the push: take your step out with a lifted heel, and a right hip lift to the side. The left foot slides flat along the floor in coordination with your hip lift. Keep a continually lifted right heel and a flat left foot as you continue the movement.

Switch to lead left, and push forward, back, and left. Travel left with push footwork layered with a hip lift on the left side.

Switch back to lead right, and push right with a different hipwork layer—a lift of the left hip. As you reach out with the right foot, lift the left foot’s heel and push side with the left hip. As you transfer weight onto your flat right foot, release the hip and slide the left foot in. As you continue the movement, keep working with a flat right foot and a lifted left heel. Change and lead left. Move left with a flat left foot, lifted right heel, and a hip lift on the right side.

Depending on how you interpret the feeling of the hipwork layer, you may feel more “pulling” than pushing in at least one of these movements. The “push” is a descriptor of the separation of the feet that initiates the footwork pattern, danced in coordination with the first count of a musical phrase. Working with music, dance through step, step-together footwork, taking care to match the timing of your movements to the phrasing of the music. Step out so that feet are apart on count one, then bring the trailing foot in so that feet are together on count two. Practice leading with both your left and right foot, and try adding different hipwork layers (pushes, lifts, drops, circles, twists) over both the leading and trailing foot.

Continue with the same movements, but vary your timing to create pull footwork relative to the music. Begin with feet apart, step in on count one, then separate the feet on count two.

Working with music, alternate between push and pull phrases. Here is one exercise to practice timing:

- Start with feet together. Wait for the beginning of a musical phrase, and start the exercise so that you take your first step on the first count of the music.
- Push to the right for seven counts, and hold on count eight: R-L, R-L, R-L, R [hold]
- Continue to move to the right, but switch to a pull. Your left foot now leads: L-R, L-R, L-R, L-R
- Change and travel left. Continue leading with your left foot, but change to a push: L-R, L-R, L-R, L [hold]

- Continue to travel left, but switch to a pull. Your right foot now leads: R-L, R-L, R-L, R-L

Even though this exercise moves to both the right and left, to build the strongest brain-body connection it's still a good idea to continue on with some run-throughs that lead from the left. Start with feet together, wait for the beginning of the musical phrase, then push left. Continue travelling left with a pull. Switch and travel right, first with a push, then with a pull. To increase the difficulty of the exercise, add one or more layers to each segment. Another variation is to shorten each segment to four counts or even to two counts.

Using either simple or layered steps, dance through a chassé footwork pattern: right-left-right, left-right-left. Try travelling forward and back, both in a straight line and on alternating diagonals. Vary the speed of your steps. Working at a slower speed, step on the beat, on counts one, two, and three, and hold on count four. Working at a faster speed, count the music with an "&" marking the timing between beats. Take three steps in coordination with "1 & 2." Hold on the "&" between counts two and three. Take another three steps in coordination with "3 & 4." Try varying the timing—for instance: hold on "1" (perhaps with an upper body accent layer) and step in coordination with "& 2 &," hold on "3," and step in coordination with "& 4 &."

Step, Cross-Behind

Traditional styles of belly dance keep close spacing between the legs for many movements. Because step, step-together patterns pass the feet through wide spacing, some isolations do not layer modestly on this foundation. For sideways travel with layers such as undulations or shoulder shimmies, crossover footwork allows a dancer to take relatively large travel steps while still keeping close spacing for the legs.

Move right and left with a step, cross-behind footwork pattern. Start with a step in place on the right foot. Travel right by stepping the left foot across to the back. Bring the right foot over to the right and step in place, under the right hip. Continuing with this footwork pattern, you will observe that the steps you take on your left foot are the steps that move your body to a new position on the floor. But, rather than widening the distance between your feet with your travel step, you have narrowed it. Switch and lead left. To move in one direction and then the other, take three steps and hold on “4,” or take seven steps and hold on “8.”

Use the step, cross-behind pattern as the foundation layer for sideways travel with undulations. If you are taking small steps, you may also use a step, step-together footwork pattern, but this is not a good choice if you need to move quickly across the stage with layered larger steps. Give it a try—you will see that your undulation takes on a comical appearance.

Working with music, try a timing variation: cross-behind on “1,” step on “2.” Working in eight count phrases, travelling first right then left, the footwork sequence is:

Cross-behind L, step R, cross-behind L, step R, cross-behind L, step R, cross-behind L, hold

Cross-behind R, step L, cross-behind R, step L, cross-behind R, step L, cross-behind R, hold

An undulation layered on this footwork variation will be timed with an emphasis to the back.

If you’d like to continue practicing with step, cross-behind footwork patterns, make sure to lead to both the right and left sides. Try layering the steps with hip twists, weighted hip drops, or a hip circle, and try timing variations of both a step on “1” and a cross-behind on “1.” Try moving left and right, and also turning your body so that your sideways travel takes you towards the audience and back upstage.

I don’t routinely use a “cross-in-front, step” footwork pattern because it’s not the basic travel foundation for any hipwork layer, but some folk dances use this sequence, and it may occasionally be useful to add variety to your dances.

Single Steps Across and Grapevines

Cross-over steps are useful for maintaining close foot spacing, but stepping across your body's center line also creates variety and interest in your combinations. While plain walking steps can be used in dance, sharply-directed crossover steps give a fancier impression since they are rarely used in everyday locomotion. They are also useful as accents, to emphasize a beat.

Try these footwork patterns to see how a step across compares visually to a step out .

	Step	Step	Step	Hold
1	Across Front	Forward	Forward	Hip Lift
2	Across Back	Forward	Forward	Hip Lift
3	Forward	Forward	Forward	Hip Lift
4	Side	Forward	Forward	Hip Lift

You may notice that a step across initiates your travel with a more decisive look—stepping across communicates a direction change. Depending on how you use your upper body, stepping across to the front can communicate strong intention, while stepping across to the back can give a more relaxed feeling.

Grapevines, footwork patterns with steps alternately crossing front and back, emphasize the stylization that a crossover step brings to travel. The *Travel Steps* DVD shows two variations on a grapevine step: a step-in-place variation, and one that uses a step out. Try these two grapevines now.

Start with a step-in-place grapevine travelling to the right. Begin with your weight on your right foot. Step your left foot across in front. Bring your right foot to the right to step in place underneath your right hip. Step your left foot across in back. Again bring your right foot to the right to step in place underneath your right hip. Just as with step, cross-behind footwork, your crossover steps are the steps that move your body to a new place on the floor. Use this grapevine step to give an impression of daintiness to your footwork. It's also the grapevine of choice when wearing a costume with a narrow skirt or revealing slit.

For contrast, try a step-out grapevine. Begin the same way, with your weight on your right foot, and an initial step across on the left. Your next step is a step out to the right, creating a wide space between your feet. Step your left foot behind, and again step out with the right foot to a wide stance. Continuing with this footwork pattern, you will observe that you cover the floor much more quickly. Use this grapevine to rapidly move from one spot to another, or to create a bolder flavor in your dancing.

If you are new to grapevines, try a few variations of each step, leading from both the left and right. The most common footwork sequence is to begin the grapevine with a crossover step in front, but initiating with a step behind creates an interesting variation. Or try beginning with a step in place, and crossing over to the front or back on count two. To move in one direction and then the other, take three steps and hold on “4,” or take seven steps and hold on “8.” Try adding layers to either the grapevine steps or the hold at the end of each segment. A simple upbeat variation starts with a step across in front and uses a hip twist on the grapevine and a touch on the hold; an elegant option is to start with a step across to the back, put a gentle sway on the grapevine steps, and layer the hold with an arabesque and a leg sweep. Working with music, experiment with layers and timing to create more variations.

Changing Direction with Hip Rotation; Belly Dance “Pas de Bourrée” ; Cross-Pivot

In a step across, you’ll feel a slight twist in your body. This twist isn’t a pivot—your foot stays fixed on the floor—but a rotation in the hip (probably complemented by rotation in the torso). Use the next few exercises to take notice of how you use hip rotation to change your direction of travel in everyday locomotion. These sequences aren’t designed to cultivate any special technical skills; you’ll just be taking “normal” steps. But some dancers will find that bringing awareness to the action in the hip increases the intentionality of their dance and can give a cleaner look and feeling to their movements.

Try taking steps to turn in place. Standing comfortably, bring your weight to your left foot, so that you feel the weight of your right leg hanging underneath your right hip. Start by turning your pelvis counterclockwise, bringing your right foot and leg across and forward. Notice that your left leg has become turned-in relative to your pelvis. Transfer your weight to your right foot. Turn your pelvis counterclockwise again, bringing your left foot behind you. As you turn, you will feel your right leg turning out under your right hip. Transfer your weight to your left foot. Continue turning your pelvis and stepping until you have taken yourself through a counterclockwise turn.

Turn the other direction, this time using rotation in both hips to carry the body further in fewer steps. Start with your weight on your left foot. Turn your pelvis clockwise, bringing your right foot behind you and feeling your left leg turn out under your left hip. Before you transfer your weight, reorient your right leg, so that you are turned out in both hips. Step on your right foot. When you step, unless you engage turn-out muscles, you’ll feel your pelvis naturally turn clockwise over your right hip, reorienting to a parallel alignment in the right leg. Turn your pelvis clockwise again, this time rotating to a turned-in position in your right hip. Before you step left, turn-in your left leg. When you transfer your weight, again you’ll feel the pelvis turn over your standing leg to reorient to parallel. If you used a lot of hip rotation, you may find that you’re facing the front of the room again, and have completed a full revolution in just two steps.

Try walking around your dance space, making direction changes, and noticing how you use hip rotation to direct your steps. Walk towards one diagonal, then turn your pelvis to walk to the other diagonal. Walk toward the audience, then turn away.

Step through the footwork pattern commonly known as belly dance “pas de bourrée.” (Pas de bourrée is a ballet step derived from a regional dance. The belly dance version doesn’t resemble it very much, but Mahmoud Reda uses this term to describe a sequence that appears frequently in his choreographies, and many belly dancers who work in Egyptian styles have adopted the term.) Here’s the footwork sequence for one set of pas de bourrée, leading with the right foot:

Step	Step	Step	Hold	Step	Step	Step	Hold
R	L	R	[staggered stance, facing stage right]	L	R	L	[staggered stance, facing stage left]
Forward	Together	Back	• Unweighted hipwork	Forward	Together	Back	• Unweighted hipwork

The steps in the sequence turn the body toward one side then the other. Begin the sequence on the right side of your dance space, standing in profile to the audience, with your right hip downstage and weight on your left foot. As you step forward, step together, and then step back, turn your body clockwise, so that you face “3 o’clock” for the unweighted hipwork in the hold. Step, step, step, and turn back to face “9 o’clock.”

The turn inside the belly dance pas de bourrée can be danced with pivots, but it's more often accomplished with changes of direction in steps, led by subtle rotations in the hip. Either variation is straightforward and can be danced easily by a beginner, but you may find that your precision improves after you've taken a moment to dance through the sequence with a close focus on placement and alignment.

Finally, try a cross-in-front pivot turn, noticing how both legs deeply rotate in to help power the movement. With your weight on your left foot, turn your pelvis counterclockwise, turning your standing leg in under the hip. Then, also turn in your right leg, so that you can reach your right foot as far around behind you as possible—ideally you should place the ball of your right foot behind your left heel. Begin to pull yourself around. Once you are pivoting, lower your right foot and complete the pivot on the ball of the left foot and heel of the right foot. If you get stuck, try stepping directly into the pivot; the swing of the leg may make it easier to get around. Step on your left foot, then step across on the right, allowing momentum from the right leg to slightly pivot you counterclockwise on the ball of the left foot at the very beginning of the movement, before the right foot lands. You may also notice that the momentum of the right leg increases your hip rotation and allows you to reach the foot around further behind you. (If you're new to this movement, or have a very limited range in your hips, the momentum may also misdirect and put torque on your knees; be gentle!) When you're stepping into the move, take care to land the right foot directly underneath your body. If you're having balance problems, it may relate to the spacing of your feet. Hopefully you're finding that your balance is steady and your turn delivers you to an ending position with the feet side by side, but some dancers find that concentrating on the breakdown of this movement makes it impossibly difficult to execute. It isn't essential understand the movement this way, so don't get bogged down in the details if they're not helpful for your learning style.

If you just can't make the cross-pivot work at all, there's another version you may prefer: cross your right foot over your left, so that all ten of your toes are in a row or shallow "v" with pinky toes in the center. Your right heel is lifted and your left foot is flat; legs are either parallel or slightly turned out. Shift into your right foot, and turn yourself counterclockwise. End with the left foot crossed over the right.

Before you call it a day, make sure to also run through a few clockwise pivots that start with the left foot across.

Ball-Change and Step-Ball-Change Variations

Layering Variations

Try out the layered variations included in *Travel Steps*. (Work from the content listing in this guide, or follow along with the DVD). *Travel Steps* shows several ball-changes that change weight out to a foot with a lifted heel, and then return weight to a flat foot. Try ball-changing out onto a flat foot, and stepping back to a foot with a lifted heel. What other variations can you create? Any weighted hip movement can layer on steps, and upper body movements are an option too. If there are any movements you particularly enjoy using that weren't demonstrated as layers in *Travel Steps*, try them out now as possibilities for layering a ball-change. If you've printed out this study guide, get a pen and add your moves to the content listing.

Directional Variations

A ball change is most often a step out, followed by a weight change that pulls the body back to its original position. However, any linked pair of steps that travel in different directions may make a ball change, and changing the directionality of those steps creates a huge number of possible variations. Here is a list to run through. (Some dancers may also consider two steps in the same direction to be a ball change, if they are two different types of steps—like a step across followed by a step side, or a step side followed by a step together. I haven't included these possibilities.) Remember to try each variation leading with both the right and left foot. If you are feeling ambitious, you could also try layering the ball changes.

Ball-Changes from a Close Parallel Stance

Ball-	Change
In place	In place
Side	In place
Side	Front
Side	Back
Front	In place
Front	Side
Front	Across Front
Front	Across Back
Back	In place
Back	Side
Back	Across Front
Back	Across Back
Across Front	In place
Across Front	Front
Across Front	Back
Across Back	In
Across Back	Front
Across Back	Back
In place	Side
In place	Front
In place	Back
In place	Across front
In place	Across back

Ball Changes from a Wide Stance (Weight on one foot, the free leg extended side)

Ball-	Change
Together	In Place
Together	Front
Together	Back
Together	Across Front
Together	Across Back

Ball Changes from a Staggered Stance with Weight on the Back Foot

Ball-	Change
Together	In Place
Together	Side
Together	Front
Together	Across Front
Together	Across Back

Ball Changes from a Staggered Stance with Weight on the Front Foot

Ball-	Change
Together	In Place
Together	Side
Together	Back
Together	Across Front
Together	Across Back

Ball Changes from a Crossed-in-Back Stance

Ball-	Change
Together	In Place
Together	Side
Together	Front
Together	Across Front
Together	Back

Ball Changes from a Crossed-in-Front Stance

Ball-	Change
Together	In Place
Together	Side
Together	Back
Together	Front
Together	Across Back

The possibilities for step-ball-change and ball-change step are even more numerous. To use this listing, try a step forward, back, side, across front, or across back for any step “out.” A sequence that includes a step together before a step out needs to start from a wide or staggered stance, or from a position with one foot crossed in front or behind the other. This listing is overwhelming; don’t get bogged down. I suggest just choosing one or two possibilities, or even to skip the list and just try experimenting with three-step phrases that include at least one direction change.

In Place	In Place	In Place
Out	Out	Out
Out	In Place	In Place
In Place	Out	In Place
In Place	In Place	Out
In Place	Out	Out
Out	In Place	Out
Out	Out	In Place
Together	In Place	In Place
In Place	Together	In Place
In Place	In Place	Together
Together	Out	Out
Out	Together	Out
Out	Out	Together
Together	Out	Together
Out	Together	In Place
Out	In Place	Together
In Place	Out	Together
In Place	Together	Out
Together	Out	In Place
Together	In Place	Out

Timing Variations

Travel Steps focuses on steps that happen on the beat, but you may also step rhythmically on the “&” between beats. If you’d like to practice counting music or stepping rhythmically, run through these footwork patterns, working to music in 4/4 time or a metronome or rhythm track. For the most basic option use steps forward and ball-changes to the side; or create your own directional and layer variations. Take note of the different visual emphasis created by each pattern.

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Ball-		Change		Step		Step	
Step		Ball-		Change		Step	
Step		Step		Ball-		Change	
Change		Step		Step		Ball-	

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Step		Step		Step	Ball-	Change	
Step		Step	Ball	Change		Step	
Step	Ball-	Change		Step		Step	
Change		Step		Step		Step	Ball

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Ball-	Change	Step		Step		Step	
Step		Ball	Change	Step		Step	
Step		Step		Ball	Change	Step	
Step		Step		Step		Ball-	Change

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Step	Ball-	Change		Step	Ball-	Change	
	Step	Ball-	Change		Step	Ball-	Change
Ball-	Change	Step		Ball-	Change	Step	
	Ball-	Change	Step		Ball-	Change	Step

Ideally, your steps should emphasize accents in the music or follow the phrasing of the melody. Simple patterns are usually fine, but some music may call for more complex phrasing. Here are few examples of other ways to creatively combine step and ball-change elements.

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Step	Ball-	Change		Step	Step	Step	Step
Step	Ball-	Change		Ball-	Change	Step	
Step	Ball-	Change			Ball-	Change	Step
Ball-		Change			Ball-	Change	Step
Step		Ball-	Change		Step	Step	

Try creating a few footwork sequences of your own. To focus on technique, work without music, or use a rhythm track. Or, focus on musical interpretation, creating footwork sequences for a particular song. For a simple exercise, just use steps forward and ball-changes to the side. For a greater challenge, layer your steps, and vary their direction.

Step-Hold Variations

Layering Variations

Using the listing in this study guide or following along with the DVD, run through the layered variations *Travel Steps* lists for step-hold. Are there any movements you like that were not included?

Directional Variations

Just as in a ball-change, the step component of a step-hold may be a step in place, a step out (forward, back, side, across in front, or across in back), or a step in to a close stance. As you work through this lesson, use directional changes in your steps to create variations.

Timing Variations

Try using step-hold in 4-count phrases. Pick a variation you like, and try timing the hold on each count of the phrase. Take note of the different visual emphasis created by each pattern. For a simple exercise, walk forward and layer your hold with a touch under the body. For a greater challenge, vary the direction of your steps, or vary the layers on your steps or holds. Stepping with a flat foot or lifted heel also varies your movement

1	2	3	4
Step	Step	Step	Hold
Step	Step	Hold	Step
Step	Hold	Step	Step
Hold	Step	Step	Step

Throw in some ball changes!

1	2	3	4
Ball-	Change	Step	Hold
Change	Step	Hold	Ball-
Step	Hold	Ball-	Change
Hold	Ball-	Change	Step

Step-ball-change! Step! Hold! Ball-Change! Step-Hold! I've marked out holds to accent with a layer, but keep in mind that empty cells in this table represent unlayered holds. .

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Step	Ball-	Change		Step		Hold	
Step		Hold		Step	Ball-	Change	
Step	Hold	Step	Hold	Step		Step	
Step	Ball-	Change		Step	Step	Hold	
Step		Step		Hold		Ball-	Change

You see where this is going...

Creating Footwork Combinations

Using the movements we've covered thus far, try sequencing steps and holds into combinations that use all the elements of your footwork vocabulary.

If you're interested in a technique exercise, use a coin toss to sequence steps and holds eight count phrases. Create a chart with 16 columns – one for each beat, and for the "&"s between beats. Flip for each beat, and write down the move you get. Assign holds to heads and steps to tails. When you flip two tails in a row, flip again to see how to use them—assign ball-change to heads, two steps in even succession to tails. Flip a third time to see how to use step-ball change or ball-change-step sequences. Assign "1&2" timing to heads, "1, 2,3" timing to tails. Add layers and direction variations, either following your fancy or using another random method. (If this appeals to you, you could create 3x5 cards with variation options, and pull a card from the stack. You could even print out the appropriate pages of the study guide, cut them into strips with a move on each strip, and then draw strips from a hat.) Keep in mind that this is primarily a training exercise for improving timing and drilling transitions. You may end up with combinations that you later "plug in" to dance pieces, but you'll probably find that you create more interesting dances when you choose movements that specifically interpret the music you're dancing to.

If you feel overwhelmed or uninspired, try working with a friend or even starting a practice group. You're likely to find yourself dancing through a greater variety of movements, and have some fun while building your technical skills.

If you're ready to work on musical interpretation, then go to it! I find that it's very helpful to diagram my music before I begin dancing. If you need an example for a music diagram, check out the booklet for my previous DVD, "Beautiful Technique." If you prefer to improvise, you may still find that a diagram deepens your understanding of the music you are interpreting. If diagramming isn't for you, it certainly isn't necessary. Follow the process that's best for your creative flow. As you work, remember that not every passage of music calls for locomotor steps. Now that you have a large vocabulary of travel steps, use them to add dynamic texture to your dance, but don't forget all of the wonderful isolations that form the core of belly dance vocabulary.

Happy Travels.