

Dear current (and prospective) Luciterra School of Dance students

Luciterra Dance Company is now in our 8th year, and we have an announcement to make about what exactly we are doing here. Luciterra School of Dance consists of 100 or so dancers, two annual student productions, and weekly dance classes in a style of dance that has become increasingly difficult to categorize. As the result of a year-long comprehensive internal assessment and a multi-staged community consultation process, we have decided to no longer label our school or performance company as "Bellydance," as we no longer represent bellydance with accuracy.

Here's what we DO. We DO teach dance in a safe, encouraging, fun, and rigorous environment for adult learners. Our students are adults who run the spectrum from curious to serious about dance. We DO teach dance to a mixed level of experience: ranging from those completely new to dance to adults coming back to training after some time away. We DO include teachings around power/privilege, feminism, and social justice through lectures and workshops to add depth and meaning to our movement. We DO put a lot of effort into making our school and productions feel like a welcoming, safe, and inclusive community. We DO teach core and muscular isolations, pilates-based posture, complex coordination, balance, travelling steps, and choreography, stemming from the training and processes that we as four dancers have.

To be clear, this announcement is NOT that our school is about to change. Rather, this announcement is to be transparent that our school and performance company has ALREADY changed, and now the language is catching up. Our school is constantly growing and evolving, and our intention is for it to continue to do so, according to what is authentic and true for us. This announcement does not mark a sharp shift, rather a continuation along the lines that we have already been moving in for quite some time.

In 2013, we stopped advertising our performances as bellydance, differentiating between the dance style we PERFORMED (no longer accurate to label as bellydance) and the dance style we TAUGHT (still bellydance). Since then we have used a whole string of labels including "Theatrical Dance," "Contemporary Cabaret Dance Theatre," "Urban Contemporary" and many others. We are still experimenting with labels, and are open to hearing your thoughts on this! We underwent this process with caution, following our hearts but trying not to be too noisy, as we wanted to spend more time unpacking our privilege dynamics in making these changes.

Since 2013, we have grown increasingly concerned with Luciterra's participation in cultural appropriation, despite our effort to challenge and unpack our process. We have spent the past year undergoing a series of internal assessments, allyship trainings, and a multi-staged community consultation process. The result of all of this is the conclusion that it is no longer appropriate for us to play the role of "expert" or teacher in teaching bellydance when we no longer aspire to represent it accurately or specifically. This decision is not made in a vacuum - it is informed by our positions of privilege in the global power dynamics of cultural paranoia, xenophobia, and patronizing exoticism.

We will continue to credit and discuss the legacy of bellydance in our work, through a social justice lens, in an effort to be transparent and to honour the powerful lineage of dancers whose work has benefitted ours. We humbly aspire to continue to grow our analysis and solidarity, and for our little dance school to be a safe and inclusive space.

Several of you have asked us what to call these dance classes, or how to describe them. We no longer have a single word for it, but a good way to summarize it would be - adult dance classes incorporating lyrical and core isolations work, in a thoughtful, encouraging, and challenging environment. Hope that helps!

With love,
Luciterra Dance Company.