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### President's message

There are some critical issues currently confronting the International Costumers' Guild Board of Directors. Discussion is ongoing on whether to open up the online meeting of the BOD for observation and participation by the ICG membership. Currently, the Board meetings are closed by direction of the ICG President, Carl Mami. Members of the SiW are on the forefront of trying to re-open the meetings and establish open meetings as the new ICG standard.

The BOD is also beginning to confront the complex and confusing nature of changes required by the US government of non-profit organizations. Our chapter representative will try to keep you posted as to the discussions and issues.

Many of our members are members of other chapters as well and we are now the third largest chapter, though far behind CGW and GBACG. If you care about these issues, please let this chapter and your other chapter(s) know your opinions. Communication is the only way changes can reflect your concerns.

### Editor's message

The concepts behind costume design transcend genre. Gail Wolfenden-Steib has contributed an article on costume design for belly dancers that embodies many of the important principals of design. Gail is an experienced and award-winning theatrical costume designer, and her advice and suggestions are applicable to competition costuming, hall costuming, faire costumes and much more.

## Elements of Costume Design: How to Get the Most out of your Costume

Gail Wolfenden-Steib

As a theatrical costume designer I was taught that design elements function to help the audience identify, clarify, and intensify the intellectual and/or emotional perception of a play's action. This is achieved through the use of various elements of design: line, color, texture, movement, composition, and balance. Now you may be asking how this applies to belly dance costumes. Well, as performers we want to convey a message to the audience with our dance and look amazing while we do this. By thinking about the big picture and the elements of design we can avoid some of those costly mistakes we all have made at one point or another when designing, making, assembling or purchasing our own costumes.

Since we don't have scripts like they do in theatre that serve as an outline for characters and their actions, dancers need to ask themselves a few questions about what they want to convey to the audience and what they personally want to emphasize in their dance. Listen to the music you like to dance to the most: what do you see when you 'dance in your head'? For example, I like some of the techno tribal hard-edge music. When I listen to this I don't have visions of fluff and chiffon in my head, but a harder edged—one with lots of straight lines, harder edges and multiple textures (think Rachel Brice or Domba's looks). I also enjoy dancing to Egyptian pop. When I listen to this, depending upon the artist, I see more traditional cabaret costumes with the 'popping movements' of beaded fringe and swaying chiffon. Rather than straight lines, images of serpentine lines and rounded forms appear. You still can have a variety of textures, but the look is 'softer'. You wouldn't wear a full-on Egyptian cabaret costume to dance to tribal fusion music, just as a tribal dancer wouldn't wear their more traditional look (or non-traditional look) to dance a 'true' cabaret piece. By doing this exercise you've established an idea of character.



←This is an example of simple cabaret-style costume--note the use of texture to create interest. What you can't see in the picture is that the bra is color blocked with a black velveteen on the underside of the cups. This increases the visual impact of the fringe when it moves. Also note that three colors are used to create visual interest. This was made for a client out of materials she purchased and liked before I came on board.

This is a shot of me in a tribal look that is much more suited to SCA wear than what most folks wear for tribal in my area. It is completely danceable, but is more historic in orientation. Note the variety of textures and prints incorporated into the layers (all of which are faked). →



Now that you have an idea of what you want to portray to the audience, you're ready to start playing with the elements. Lines can be either straight or curved. Converging straight lines form angles and converging curved lines form arches. Enclosing straight lines form triangles and

rectangles, enclosing curved lines form circles and ovals. Remember that horizontal lines accentuate width and verticals accentuate height. Look at your street clothes: what shapes look the best on you in everyday wear? Use this information when you start thinking about the dance costume. You can play against type to a degree. This will give you a starting point.



**Egyptian Bra and belt.**

Color is the second element of design. Rather than go into a long discussion of color theory, let's concentrate on some basic ideas associated with color in general. Lighter colors seem to come forward or proceed, and darker colors recede or seem to pull away. You may choose to work in monochromatic color schemes which are made up of tints and shades of only one color, or in harmonic color schemes which are made up of colors in close harmony on the color wheel. An example of the harmonic scheme would be red, red-orange, orange, yellow-orange and yellow. A complementary color scheme uses opposing colors on the color wheel—an example of this would be blue and orange, or red and green. No matter what colors you choose, remember to always use more than one color. A red costume that is all the same shade of red doesn't pop under lights (and is visually on the boring side) as well as a red costume that uses multiple tints or shades of the same color. Look at some of the better quality Egyptian bras on the market. They have many different 'reds' involved on a red bra. As a general rule, two colors are visually more interesting than one color, and three more interesting than two. By using multiple colors you can create depth in the garment. Personally, I look for a 'textured' base fabric that is a slightly darker color or a slightly different color than the embellishments on my belts and bras. This will help pop the detail work out of the ground and create visual interest.

**This is an example of a more traditional cabaret look. The belt and bra are constructed out of appliqués and beaded fringe as a time saver. Again, this is one that I constructed. The base fabrics on the bra and belt are layered--the under layer is a vibrant fire engine red satin with a burn out velvet layered on top to create the blood red color. The skirt is an iridescent red/black chiffon and the harem pants are --dare I say, since I shudder to use it in most situations--black and clear confetti dot fabric. The harems sparkle through the skirt when dancing under lights, adding depth.→**

Texture is what an object 'feels' like. Objects (beads or shells for example) and fabric look rough or smooth, heavy or light, hard or soft. Try to look at textural elements both up close and far away—you'll have audience watching from a variety of distances. Try to select items that look good at a variety of distances. Texture can help make a monochromatic costume even more visually interesting. If at all possible look at the item under a flash light if it's a metallic lame, metallic jacquard or shiny satin. Frequently these fabrics have a tendency to look like cheap aluminum



foil (despite being expensive) under light or reflect so much light that they wash out or 'shine' like no tomorrow. Be sure that the look you are seeing is the look you want to present.



←On the far right is my instructor in a more traditional tribal look with Indian influences. Note the weight of all our costumes in comparison to the light and more airy (and heavily beaded looks) associated with Cabaret costumes. The woman second from the right is wearing cowry shell hair ornamentation and a long fringe over skirt. The black base skirt is a more traditional tribal skirt. These are usually 10 to 12 yards of fabric and are very heavy but move gracefully in spins to reveal brightly colored harem

pants below. I'm in another more traditional Indian look with a choli and skirt. Note the shisha (mirrors) all over the top and skirt. This is frequently seen in tribal looks. The woman on the far right is a newbie--she's incorporated the most basic elements of tribal into a quick throw together look--a tiered skirt and a hip wrap. This was taken at a recital so none of us is very dressed up. Examples of 'traditional' tribal stylings can be seen in the costumes of Fat Chance Bellydance and Gypsy Caravan.

Here is a closer look at some of the costumes' details→



Movement is important in dance, no matter what type is being performed. The serpentine line is associated with fabrics that flow or float in a gentle smooth manner. The angular line is associated with an abruptness--fabric that is still flexible but has a dignified flow to it. The heavier skirts associated with tribal dance still move beautifully on stage, but exemplify the abrupt quality when compared to a chiffon skirt. As a general rule look for fabric that has a good drape. A little weight will also help the fabric move in a more controlled manner. Very light weight silks and chiffons can tend to stick and do not 'fly' as well as a slightly heavier fabric. I recommend a minimum of 8 mm silk for a veil. 'mm' is pronounced 'mummy'. It's a weight measurement for silk--the lower the number, the lighter the fabric weight. 10 mm flies beautifully, but is more expensive and is suitable for both veils and skirts.



← Yep it's me again. This time I'm in a Brazilian bra and belt. This is a cheaper alternative to the Egyptian style bra and belt sets. The beads are larger and tend to be plastic combined with sequins. Egyptian sets are typically smaller glass beads and sequins. I'm wearing pants which is acceptable in cabaret costumes but is considered a more modern look. You need to know your venue to know if this style of dress will be accepted. The pants would be equally acceptable in a tribal fusion costume as a more modern cabaret look. By changing out the bra and belt to a choli and heavier-looking coin or mirror belt, I can create a second look. Tribal fusion is when elements of both tribal and modern dance stylings are combined. The look tends to be very gothic. The best example of this type of dance look in my humble opinion is Rachel Brice. Since I didn't want to get busted for posting a copyrighted shot of her, you'll need to look her up online.

Composition and focus bring everything together into a cohesive design. Composition is simply the arrangement of the design elements into a pleasing order, balancing the weight, line, color and texture of the costume to create a cohesive look. The costume can be composed symmetrically where the design elements are distributed evenly from a central focus point, or asymmetrically when the balance point is not centered. Try to focus on your best 'asset'. If you do amazing arm work, put emphasis on the arms. If you are a shimmy goddess, emphasis on the hips is perfect. The main thing to remember is not to forget the rest of the body when you do this. Think back to those old Sesame Streets you saw as a kid --if one of these things is not like the other, you don't have a design that works as a whole.



← Another not so good shot of me in a homemade cabaret costume. Think layers and flow....



↑ This is another type of tribal look. All of us are in cholis. You can see the open back typical of the style on my instructor on the far left. Note the turbans. Cholis are frequently combined with heavily coined bras (worn over the choli).



←This is an example of what I would call a transitional costume. It works for cabaret and for tribal fusion stylings. I could easily pair the pants and arm bands with a less 'severe' bra and call it a true cabaret costume. The coin belt is a very typical hip wrap (and is used for class wear).

Your next assignment is to go out and watch some dance videos and think about what you've just read. Watch the dancers take notice of their costumes. Does what they are wearing convey a sense of the music and accentuate the movement, or does it do nothing to enhance your experience—or worse yet, distract you from the dance? Where have they placed their balance point on the costume or is it even balanced? Do some research online. If you see something you really like, print off a copy and start a costume morgue. Any ideas you have should go into this file to be resourced in the future. You might like the way a top is constructed or a beading pattern. Save that element to personalize into your own design at a later date. This information can be used to communicate your ideas to a costuming professional or as handy reminders down the road when you start to build your own. It's also handy to give copies of the pieces you love to a friend that might be shopping at a show that you are unable to attend. Costumes turn up in the strangest places, and it's best to be prepared!

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## Report from Kayta

Carolyn Kayta Barrows

I just got a job as the Costume Director of the Living History Program at the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. The year we do is 1901, and, since we're a maritime park, we specialize in maritime history, on the park's historic ships or near them. Our Living History Day is the second Saturday of the month.

In fact, I'm the entire Costume Department. It's everything I always wanted in a job - except the paycheck, but it will look good on my resume...

I'm the inventory manager. Since there had never been an inventory, I got to do that first thing. And since there was no record of who had been issued costumes, I had to track down every volunteer and Park Ranger and ask them if they had some of our stuff, to make the inventory complete. There are now images of almost everything we own, to be completed when these people finally show up wearing the stuff (or turn it back in).

I'm the wardrobe mistress. This means that I do all the repairs on all the costumes in the costume locker, and make sure they're clean.

This is me doing an alteration to a skirt from our costume locker; a total reconfiguration really. This skirt was never intended to look like 1901, only to look "old timey," so I need to make it look it is from 1901, or we can't use it. Another project of mine is removing exterior labels from otherwise historically correct trousers.





Most of the shirts we had were size medium, and we really needed more size large and XL, so I make lots of shirts. Some of this fabric is not quite right for 1901, so I may end up making shirtwaists or skirts out of it. This is just the uncut fabric. There are six more shirts half finished.



Once sewn, I will find space for them in the shirt section of the costume locker. The shirtwaist on the left, with white flowers on white, will get an alteration so it will look like 1901 not 1895.

I'm the costume approval person. This means it's my job to see to it that everyone meets our standards of authenticity. It also means it's my job to help our new people meet those standards, whether or not they can sew. This means more sewing for me, and some pattern

making and fittings. It also means consulting at thrift stores, to make sure nobody spends money on things they can't use.



This is the "over my dead body" stuff that we have but which will never get issued. It's so wrong that no amount of my work can make it right. I'm working on "de-accessioning" it.

I'm also the resident costume expert, for those new people who want to make their own costumes instead of checking out something belonging to the park. I'm working on illustrated costume guidelines. I may even be called upon to give sewing lessons or a costume lecture.

I'm also one of the living history participants, and this is the fun part.