

## Belly Dance Show takes MDC audience on 'Arabian Voyage'



**LEFT:**  
Azlhar Dance ensemble performs.

**BELOW:**  
Director Amara Sayid is pictured in solo.

(Photos by Denise J. Marino Photography)

**BY RICHARD YAGER**

For the past two decades, the annual "Belly Dance Show" in May draws hundreds to see the swirling motions of its torso twisting dancers at Miami Dade College's Kendall Campus.

"Arabian Voyage," the 2016 Performing Arts Academy production, once again starred its troupe of dancers on May 7, attracting a packed house of aficionados just as the spectacular musical show each year draws newcomers to give Middle Eastern-style dancing a whirl at the School of Continuing Education and Professional Development.

Amara Sayid (her professional name) directed, choreographed and performed in the show, along with Danna Yasbet, assistant director and instructor of 40 students of all ages who demonstrated the intricate moves of the provocative dance steps. For Sayid, belly dancing started with a television soap opera.

"My sister, Aimee, and I would watch *El Clon*, a Brazilian program with its own colorful style of belly dancing, costuming and steps," explained Amara who grew up in The Crossings. "We both enrolled in the program at Kendall Campus."

Love for the art of belly dancing may have originated from a Syrian background in Amara's parentage but, she emphasized, "People of all ages and ethnic backgrounds enjoy learning and performing Middle Eastern dancing. There are many styles, costuming and music from different countries."

The Academy program originated at the Kendall Campus in 1997 when a few Middle Eastern dance classes were led by an internationally known artist, Samay. Throughout the years of her teaching, dance classes created one of the most popular Middle Eastern dance programs in South Florida.

In 2013, the program officially changed its name to the "Mid East Performing Arts Academy" and Samay became its creative director as Amara took the lead as artistic director, continuing Samay's legacy of authentic Egyptian dance styles.

The belly dancing movements came from



ancient Egyptian social dances, originating in India over 5,000 years ago before spreading throughout the Middle East following migrations of Gypsy tribes.

The 32-year-old mother of a son, Vincent, born in January, Amara as Adriana Quintero daily applies other design skills to projects for Planned Systems International, Washington, DC. She graduated with a BA in Fine Arts from the University of Miami in Graphics and Design, and an MBA from Phoenix University. Her husband, Andrew Quintero, is an ITT technician.

"The love of the dance comes first, but it also makes an empowerment statement for women," Amara added, noting the belly dance is only one type of a solo, improvised dance with variations depending upon the region of a country and traditions of costuming and dance style. New styles have evolved in the West as its popularity has spread globally.

"There's no limit to age," said Ileana Garcia, a 53-year-old housewife in Lago Mar, who said she caught the excitement after attending a campus yoga class. "Once you try it, you just get hooked."