

# Dispelling perceptions through dance

ARTI DAS | NT BUZZ

The second edition of the Bwitschs International Bellydance Fusion Festival will be held here in Goa from March 11 to March 14 at Nazri Resort and Tito's Courtyard in Baga. Some of the teachers who are masters of belly dance and Fusion belly dance from around the globe and all over India will be attending including Nadia Nikishenko (Russia), Colleen Shakti (USA), Nika Mlakar (Slovenia), Natalie Nazario (Puerto Rico), Sedona Soulfire (USA), Meher Malik, Leena Viie, Payal Gupta, Bindu Bolal, Deepthi Shetty and Essa Duhaime (India). We speak to one of the dancers to Leena Viie to know more...

**Q: Did you always want to be a belly dancer? And at what point in your life did you decide to be a professional belly dancer?**

No, I always thought I would work for a corporate and geared up towards that. As much as my corporate life was financially rewarding and cerebrally stimulating, I found myself taking a sabbatical for a few months to travel. That changed my life. I couldn't see myself go back to an office environment after witnessing the amazing things I found myself doing.

Around that time, I saw this truly beautiful belly dance performance which made me want to dive right in and learn the dance. I never knew I would take it up professionally but I eventually did.

**Q: You've always believed that this dance form is all about women empowerment. Can you elaborate?**

Yes true, belly dance is one form unlike many others that is affirming despite a woman's shape, size, age and skill. Any woman can in essence embrace belly dance.

That's why it's empowering. The moves such as hip circle, a hip drop seem very natural to a woman's body while accentuating her curves, her sensuality and her being as a woman, a goddess.

In today's patriarchal society where a woman's prowess is usually curtailed, this



form almost serves as a rescue, an outlet for women to find that missing link— a route to discover their own bodies in a safe, affirming manner. It helps to change our body perception since belly dance can be as beautiful on a well-built woman as on a petite woman! There aren't any rights or wrongs, good or bad anymore.

**Q: There is a general perception that belly dancing is aimed at entertaining men and it does not garner the respect compared to other dance forms. Please comment.**

That's a symptom of patriarchy. Anything that empowers women tends to threaten society. Women are blamed, shunned when they claim their power and so yes, this isn't anything new.

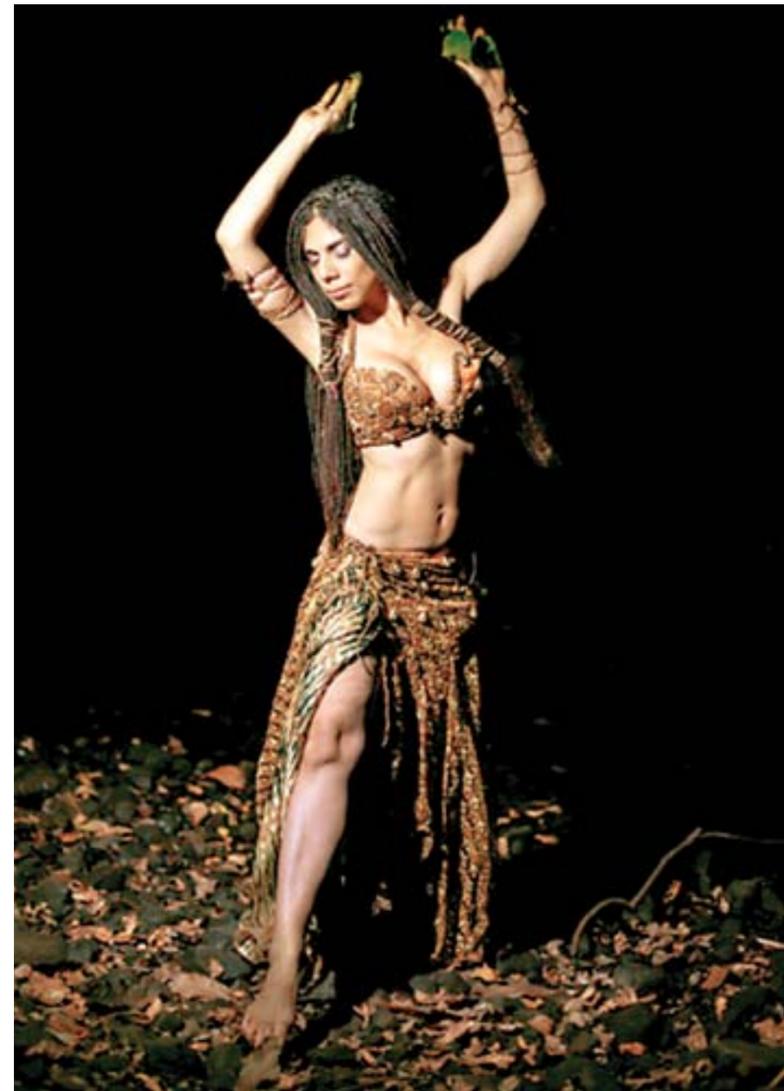
The name of our Festival is Bwitschs. Bwitsch is rooted in the word witch, which is highly misunderstood. It means 'wise' woman. Our gut, our womb, our belly is a powerful seat from which arises this natural wisdom, perception, intuition. Women gifted with it were shunned, since it made them more powerful. This festival has a mission to reclaim that side of us.

The festival has a mission to also debunk

Belly dance is probably one of the few dance forms of the world, which is not yet considered a true art form. In an attempt to shed all the negative perceptions associated with it, the Bwitschs International Bellydance Fusion Festival, will be held at Baga over this weekend. **NT BUZZ** speaks to the belly dancer, trainer and the organizer of the festival, **Leena Viie**, to understand more about this dance form and why she thinks that belly dance is associated with the concept of women empowerment

the myth that belly dance is all about titillation. The form itself has grown from being informal, folk-like to becoming refined on technique. Mastery of muscles, continuous training (sweat, toil and tears) are indispensable. New genres especially like tribal fusion belly dance are taking the form to a near classical form thus raising the bar even more. More so these new styles explore other aspects not related to the concept of femininity by default – such as dissent, darkness, anger, aggression, and independence.

The festival aims at strengthening the community such that there is a common understanding as to what the art form and



keeping true to its authenticity.

Belly dancing is an advanced art form like almost a classical dance form with complex rhythms to fathom, intricate movements that takes several years of training to master while respecting the musicality, the culture, the stylization. That's why raising the bar itself by holding international festivals such as these are critical.

**Q: How you look at Bollywood in promoting belly dancing? Do you think it has reduced the dance form to the stature of an item song?**

Yes very much. Bollywood mostly de-

generates women to an item and applauds objectification. It becomes even more imperative then we get together as a collective since that serves as a starting point to do something about this trend.

**Q: What steps need to be taken to remove taboos associated with this dance form?**

Upholding the dance form as a true art form is the only way forward. Only when it grows and everyone is on the same page that it's a dance form by the empowered and for the empowered that the taboos would naturally fall away.

## Procession of saints: A way to seek penance for sins

MARIA DE LOURDES BRAVO DA COSTA RODRIGUES

The Lenten season in Goa is observed by Catholics with due consideration to the liturgical practices laid down by the church. These practices came to us with the Portuguese who introduced Christianity in Goa. Many religious processions were conducted by the various Religious Orders existing in Old Goa. Many of these processions were either banned or put out of practice by the Church in the course of centuries.

However, ritual practices of Lenten pageants or tableaux, with their processions, introduced by the religious orders are still practiced in Goa. The two unique processions that continue to the day are the procession of 'Capas Magnas' at the Se Cathedral, commonly known as 'Xeppedeochea Pursanv', on Good Friday and the Procession of 'Ordem Terceira', known as 'Santachem Pursanv', at Goa Velha, on Monday after the passion Sunday (fifth Sunday of Lent). Interestingly, both these processions are today held only in Rome, besides Goa.

The procession of 'Ordem Terceira' was also observed in the Portuguese colony Bahia de Todos os Santos in Brasil. However, it was held on Ash Wednesday.

The procession of Franciscan Third Order was a regular feature years ago in the Convent of Pilar, where the Franciscans of the third Order found this theme of penitence for Lent. Towards the end of the XVIIIth century; seeing the corrupt and sensual life led by Christians, they decided to institute a Procession of the Saints. The objective was to instill into the hearts of the population a spirit of prayer and penance, taking as a model the saints - simple people who belonged to this world, and who sanctified their lives. The penitential procession with its 65 images of Saints, belonging to the Order, in their original sizes and vestments used to leave the Pilar Convent Church, and after passing through neighbouring villages, return to the Convent. Members of various Religious Orders, poor, rich and innumerable faithful were present.

To cover the financial expenses incurred for the procession, the comendador João de Menezes Aguiar, a member of the Terceira Ordem (Secular), instituted a fund of one thousand 'xerafins', thus providing for the expenses. Years later a salt pan called 'Aggor' was purchased along with its immediate surrounding land which was later renamed 'Santancho Aggor', and income accrued from it was used for the expenses.

In 1835, Queen Maria II of Portugal issued a decree abolishing religious orders in Portugal and her colonies. This resulted in the transfer of the Confraternity of the Third Order and the Franciscans of the Convent of the Holy Sepulcher of Mary Immaculate Conception, to the church in Goa Velha. It is interesting to note that the procession, until 1835, took place on Monday of the first week of lent. Thereafter, there was an interval when nothing happened, during which many images and vestments were destroyed.

With the new church the procession came to Goa Velha and from then onwards, on Monday following Passion Sunday. In 1889 and 1895 new images were added, and in the twentieth century, a few more. Santa Angela Monica was offered by the villagers living in Bombay.



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However, the original number of 65 was never achieved, and today there are only 30 which include: St Francis of Assisi; Pope Innocent III; St Michael; Cardinal St Boaventura; St Clare of Assisi; St Francis of Assisi with St Lucy and St Dona Bona; St Pascal Bailan; St Rose of Viterbo; St Roque; St Isabel; Isabel of Hungary; St Antonio of Lisbon; Cardinal St Peter Damiano; St Bernardo; St Louis IX King of France; St Filipe; St Ina of Assisi; St Rosa of Lima; St Francis of Assisi and St Dominic; Immaculate Franciscan; 'Ecce Homo', the Divine Nazarene; the martyr of Golgotha or the Man of Sorrows embracing St Francis of Assisi; St John Evangelist; St Mary Magdalene; Our Lady; St Angela Marcia; St Francis of Assisi on his knees seeing a vision of Our Lord being crucified.

There is the Holy Face, which according to Rosario Francisco Rodrigues who wrote a book 'World's grand Procession of Saints in India - A study on the 'Procession of Saints' at Goa-Velha village in Goa', the Holy Face brought by Franciscans from Rome may be the 'Veil of Veronica' which had mysteriously

disappeared from Rome in 1608. A new missionary society founded in Goa that took the name of Society of Pilar was es-



tablished on the hillock at Pilar in 1613. He further says that the villagers of Goa Velha maintain that Franciscan friars brought the 'Holy Face' from Rome.

The lead Charol (the tableaux on which the image of the Saint is mounted), is the one that has a cross with both hands crucified; one represents our Lord and the other St Francis of Assisi to form the arms and symbol of the Franciscan Order. The procession ends with the tableaux depicting St Francis of Assisi on his knees, seeing a vision of our lord being crucified and on the hands, chest and feet of the Saint are seen imprinted the wounds of Jesus Christ.

People accompany the procession which goes around the village on a prefixed route. People also pass under the Charols as they believe that they will be blessed and their sins will be forgiven. At the end of the procession the Charols are arranged on the 'adro' (the open space in front of the church), in a semi-circle, and a sermon is delivered after which, the Charols are kept inside the church for veneration, for two days.

