

Moves for CHANGE

Bwitchs International Bellydance Fusion Festival took place in Baga

The second edition of the Bwitchs International Bellydance Fusion Festival was poised as more ambitious than its previous edition last year, that took place in Mumbai. Some of the finest teachers and masters of bellydance and Fusion Bellydance from around the globe and all over India attended. These included the likes of Nadia Nikishenko (Russia), Colleena Shakti (USA), Nika Mlakar (Slovenia), Natalie Nazario (Puerto Rico), Sedona Soulfire (USA), Meher Malik, Leena Viie, Payal Gupta, Bindu Bolar, Deepthi Shetty and Essa Duhaime (India).

The festival was across two venues, Nazri Resort and Tito's Courtyard in Baga. It included workshops at the serene environs of Nazri Resort, the hospitality partners and gala performances in the evening over the weekend at Tito's.

But it's more about the swirling mesmerizing hip movements as there was more to what met the eye. Since it's held around International Women's Day, it aimed to talk about women empowerment using the medium of dance. Apart from the panel discussion, there was a flash mob which was inclusive of women whose life circumstances prevented them from a direct opportunity to consider bellydance.

Leena Viie, the organizer of the festival was inspired to activism when she participated in anti-rape protests on December 23, 2012. "I was restless sitting and watching the horrid protest news on TV. I decided to go out and join the protests on Sunday. It was an unforgettable incident. The police so-called 'legitimate care-takers' of our society used tear gas, lathis and cold water while chasing us down and hurling abuses."

Drenched with water and shivering cold, she was forced to run for my life over roads strewn with pipes and material from a construction nearby, jump overgrown thorny bushes and over wet slippery grounds. She fell three times over in the stampede and at one point, she almost wanted to give up running. "I thought if this is this the price I pay for voicing what I feel as a woman in this country then something is wrong in our standards. I didn't dare return to the protests the next day because I simply afraid of being seriously injured. But I didn't want my voice to be quiet as they intended. I know changing perceptions isn't easy but we need to have awareness of the patriarchal conditioning that limits us and consciously work towards building a society where we can feel





good in the body, feel what it feels like to walk freely on the streets, sexual, un-intimidated, un-harassed, unafraid. This is the world we women deserve.”

Hence she came up with the name Bwitchs. Bewitch means to enchant, ‘which we bellydancers naturally do’. “We cast a spell on anyone who watches since this indeed is a powerful feminine dance form. Bwitch also rooted in the word witch, which is highly misunderstood. Witch actually means a 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.”

She quotes Paulo Coelho, which sums this up eloquently. “Our imagination is larger than the world around us; we go beyond our limits.’ This used to be called ‘witchcraft,’ but fortunately things have changed, otherwise we would both already have been burned at the stake. When they stopped burning women, science found an explanation for our behavior, normally referred to as ‘female hysteria.’ We don’t get burned anymore, but it does cause problems, especially in the workplace.

But don’t worry, eventually they’ll call it ‘wisdom.’

Bwitchs, she says ‘is a collective as I see it of women who love to enjoy living life on their own terms.

Indian society as we know is still rather closed and patriarchal. The recent rapes are sheer testimony to that. Women don’t feel safe in such an environment and therefore can’t blossom into their fullest’.

The Bellydance community is a vulnerable one. The forms still carries a tainted image and perceptions such as ‘dancers are immoral’, ‘bellydance is for men’s titillation’, etc. “Hence it’s imperative we find our voice and clear some of these ‘myths’. We shall use varied mediums like the Flash Mob and YouTube clips to channel our message. Dancing allows us to tap into a revolutionary and poetic energy which takes the lid off the patriarchal container releasing more of our wisdom, our self love, our sexuality, our compassion and fierceness.”