

Goddesses of dance

BellySutra (from left): Megan Love and Selina Lynn.
PHOTO BY NATASHA ROOT

BELLYSUTRA DUO EMBRACES CREATIVITY THROUGH BELLY DANCE FUSION

Belly dancers Selina Lynn and Megan Love have performed as mermaids, bulls and circus freaks. They've shimmied and shaken their hips with the lights out, decked out in glow-in-the-dark paint, and have danced as wolves in headdresses, sacrificing the blood of their hunters by symbolically pouring it on themselves during a tribal prayer routine.

The two, known collectively as BellySutra, have found that their imaginations, however wild and weird, have been wholeheartedly embraced in Chico.

"We can do anything," Lynn said during a recent interview at BellySutra's Dangerous Hips dance studio. "We have had blood, and people are like, 'Give me more blood.' I love that. ... They let us be our crazy selves, and they like it. Instead of being scared, they're like, 'Wow, that's awesome!'"

Since forming BellySutra in 2009, Lynn and Love have drawn inspiration for their "belly dance fusion" routines from a variety of performing styles, combining tango, hip-hop and other forms of dance with belly dance to contribute to an ever-changing and engaging art form.

"Belly dance is always there, but we add all these crazy elements," Lynn said. "It could be characters; it could be gestures, body language."

The two also have performed with flaming swords balanced atop their heads, and dreamed up elegant fan veil dances. The latter involves handheld fans trailed by several feet of silk.

In addition to performing at private parties, BellySutra and its student troupes share their love of belly dance in shows throughout Chico, regularly performing at the DownLo as well as at the LaRocca Vineyards Tasting Room every second Thursday when the downtown Thursday Night Market is in season. The duo also has performed every year at the Chico News & Review's

Keep Chico Weird talent show, earning high marks for impressive displays of skill and theatrics as Lynn and Love synchronized their routines with video effects projected on a large movie screen.

Lynn says she's been captivated by belly dancing for as long as she can remember. During one fateful visit to Busch Gardens when she was a kid, she recalled seeing a show featuring "this beautiful lady on stage with a giant snake."

"She was getting paid to dance," she said. "I was determined to figure out, 'How can I do that?'" Lynn started taking classes at 19, commuting from her Gridley home to Sacramento.

As for Love, dancing was essentially the only thing she hadn't explored as a performer. She'd played piano, sang and acted, then started dancing with Lynn, whom she'd met through a mutual friend while they were living in Yuba City. The two clicked, and now, 10 years after forming BellySutra, they've added a dance studio to their partnership. Dangerous Hips opened last March, and in addition to teaching beginner and intermediate belly dance, they're also renting out the space to other local belly dancers for practices and classes.

The pair acknowledged that belly dancing can be intimidating for beginners, but it's a very open and welcoming art form, Love said. There are no limits or restrictions with regards to age, size or gender.

Lynn said that people often are surprised what their bodies can do, adding, "Plus, getting to be free and move how your body moves—that's, like, really great."

"Empowering," Love interjected.

"Belly dancing really gives people lots of confidence. It makes you feel beautiful, it makes you just feel good about yourself," Lynn said. "Belly dancing makes you forever a goddess, I tell you."

—ASHIAH SCHARAGA

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Live hips:

BellySutra performs *Spirit Animal* Saturday, March 9, at 8 p.m. All ages until 10 p.m. No cover. At the DownLo (319 Main St.)

Shake yours:

Dangerous Hips dance studio 220 W. Sixth St. Visit bellysutrarocks.com for class prices and times.

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