

# Belly dancer

## Undulations wriggle her Phi Beta Kappa key

By J. Y. Smith

L.A. Times/Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Kay Richardson, who is 24, is a girl who has had a lot of things behind her.

She is from Houston, where she was born, and Oklahoma City, where the chiggers used to bite her when she did gymnastics on the lawn, and Vassar, where she got a full scholarship and a Phi Beta Kappa key, and Princeton, where she got a master's degree in urban planning, and Washington, where she used to work on local transportation problems.

She has put all that behind her to become a professional belly dancer.

"You see, I love to perform," she explains with the confidence some people get who have done a lot of things well.

"Belly dancing is a very natural dance and that's why I love to do it. It's for people to feel free and to feel natural with themselves. You have to be relaxed enough to hear not only what your body says, but what the music is telling you. Arabic music has so much soul."

For emphasis, she waves one arm as if to say, "Come hither," and the other as if to say, "Keep your distance," and you get the point the way you get the difference between fire and ice.

"And of course," she adds, "belly dancing is a very sensual dance. Ballet is for robots."

Miss Richardson is quick to anticipate an argument about her judgment of ballet, which she has studied and which she uses as the basis for much of her belly dancing.

She does not expect any arguments about whether belly dancing is sensuous.

Sami Shayed, who plays the oud, a stringed instrument that is shaped like half a watermelon with a handle on it, stands at the mike, and Jimmy Dabaie slaps the dumbuck, a drum, and Ermin Gunduz strums the kanun, a stringed instrument that he holds across his lap. Shayed takes a deep breath as Jimmy pops at the dumbuck and shouts "NAIMA!"

Miss Richardson, whose stage name is Naima (Hebrew for "Pleasant"), jumps on the stage of the Salaam Supper Club with her arms outstretched and the zills, which are miniature cymbals, tinkling on her fingertips.

She undulates and twirls. She

smiles and laughs. She looks down at her body as if to seek for herself what it is doing. Jimmy hits the dumbuck and she repeats the beat with her hips. Her head is almost still and her movements are sinuous, gliding. A hop quivers almost imperceptibly.

The effect is a kind of earthiness, at once primitive and understated. It is as if all things in creation were made of earth, air, water and fire. Her veil creates an illusion of something held back.

It looks effortless, and the thought comes with a jolt that this is a dancer who practices three hours a day. She is "really into my body," she says, and she certainly has control of it. She is one terrific athlete.

The dance ends, and the customers, who have been silent, which is the polite thing to be during a belly dance, break into applause.

"See this?" Miss Richardson says to a visitor later. She is holding up part of a broken glass bead.

"The bead fell off my costume and this piece stuck in my foot," she says. "It happens all the time."

She has been doing gymnastics since she was 5 and has been dancing almost that long. She took up belly dancing, or oriental dancing, as some of its practitioners are now calling it, two years ago when she was studying for her master's at Princeton. She took some lessons at the YWCA.

Since she quit her job with the District of Columbia department of housing and community development last September, she has been belly dancing for the D.C. department of recreation. She says her oldest student is about 65 and the youngest about 6.

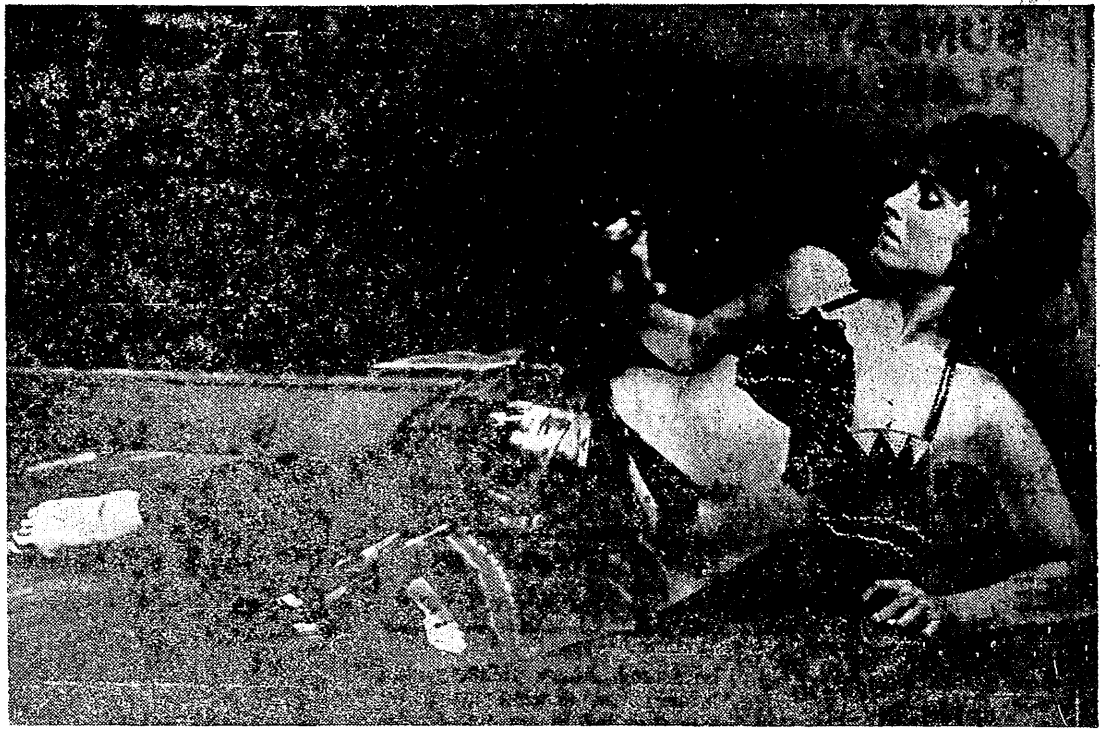
"It is a very, very feminine dance, which is why I have a lot of friends in the women's movement," she says. "You're such a sell-out," they say. "Who are you kidding? I'm not kidding anybody." I tell them. "This is the most feminine dance there is."

She is not kidding herself about her future as a dancer. After all, she says, the active life of most dancers is over by mid-40s and it is an uncertain profession in any case.

But she is planning to go to Egypt in the spring to study more and she loves her teaching and, as she says, "I'm only 24 and this is the time I should be dancing."

When you think of Houston and

Oklahoma City and Vassar and Princeton and the District of Columbia government and what most people in those places and institutions do — or try to do — and then you see the large and beautiful eyes of Kay Richardson peeking over a green veil, you have to agree with her: this is the time she should be dancing.



Kay Richardson

# Dobama audacious, but not too wild

Continued from Page 1  
have already done as well as we could?"

Bianchi is 43, has curly dark hair, blue eyes, and has a boyish, quiet shyness about him. He talks in a breathless, intense, almost staccato clip, as if his mouth muscles are having a difficult time keeping up with the torrent of thoughts.

Marilyn, curled up beside him on the couch, is a cherubic, bubbly woman, definitely not shy. She is as out-goingly intense as her husband is quietly so, and has a girlishly innocent friendliness about her.

"One of the most exciting things in the world," Marilyn bursts in, "is to be able to create something for the very first time." (When the Bianchis are talking about their theater, Don often takes the lead, Marilyn sits, seemingly about to explode with a comment she wants to make, excitedly waiting for a place to break in. An interview often feels like a running commentary.)

"Our saving grace," Marilyn continues, "is the fact the plays are new, our audience doesn't know what to expect, and that they are willing to take a chance that they won't like what they see."

In any business, one can, hypothetically sell whatever one wishes. However, even if it is legal, one probably will not do it too long unless someone wants to buy what is being sold.

In the Bianchi's case, they have managed to find a market, an audience for the kind of theater they want to present.

"Take the Front Row, for example," Bianchi analyzes his audience. "They have the largest segment of the live theater audience. Within that audience, you can find the Play House audience and the Hanna audience."

"Then within the Play House and Hanna audience, there is the segment that comes to our theater."

In other words, the Dobama audience, Bianchi believes, also goes to the Play House and/or the Hanna. But not all of those who go to those two theater show up at Dobama.

"In some ways," he goes on, "The Dobama audience are those people who are most knowledgeable about theater..."

Bianchi places those who buy his product a little left of the Play House on some vague sort of continuum of theater orientations, a

good deal to the left of the Lake-wood Little Theater, and substantially less conservative than Broadway.

"Broadway has left the theater. Except for its technical aspects, theatrical considerations on Broadway, as opposed to commercial considerations, have diminished to the point where they don't exist."

On the other hand, he does not look upon the collected oeuvre of Dobama as being all that radical. "We've never been 'avant garde.'"

Dobama's new works are generally within the major traditions of Western theater. Few of its works could be considered far out, either in subject matter or form.

Yet theirs is a level of theater that does not appeal to all those who enjoy seeing round actors de-claiming before the footlights. The point is, however, that there is a proportion of the local theater

audience that will support the Dobama brand of theater.

In fact, if Dobama were to dive off the deep radical end into "guerilla theater," let's say, or romp into the more sexually energetic amusements, Dobama would be in trouble.

"Nothing we do," Bianchi says, "is an attempt to draw a particular audience..."

On the other hand, their audience does shape what they do and how they do it, at least covertly. "There are occasional plays," he admits, "that we couldn't do in this time and place without being offensive. We are not living in New York or Los Angeles..."

The young woman in "Veronica's Room," to give one example, is supposed to be stripped to her underwear after her demise. Well, not in Cleveland. They settled on a polite suggestion of disrobement that left her surprisingly still remarkably overdressed.

Continued on Page 6

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