**The Austin Belly Dance Convention 2015 Experience**

**by Alectria**

From the moment stepping into the hotel where the Austin Belly Dance Convention took place, it was clear that this was a haven for belly dancers. People in tasseled belts, bombastic glittering sashes, and flowy dance attire confidently made their way throughout the halls. Coming from a smaller belly dance community in College Station, TX, it was an exciting sight to see so many dancers come together in one place for the ABDC. Finding the check-in area was simple, because all it took was to follow the glitter!

There were different colored wristbands for each workshop and gala show ticket purchased, reflecting how organized things flowed at the Austin Belly Dance Convention. The play on names for the workshop spaces such as “Green Belt,” “Zil-ker,” and “Taqsim Springs” were an extra touch that added to the overall atmosphere of the convention. The check-in volunteers were more than happy to answer questions and help direct, creating a warm welcome from the start of the weekend.

Due to being a showcase performer on Saturday, I signed up for two back-to-back workshops on Friday: “Trappings of Tribal” from Draconis and “Tools of Dance Making” from April Rose. Having seen Draconis perform in person for the first time almost a year ago, it was a pleasure to finally take a workshop with him. His workshop was continuous, learning combo after combo in tribal style. I loved that Draconis pointedly wore shorts while teaching, which he mentioned, because it let us see very easily what his legs were doing. Afterwards was a transition from Draconis’ all-dance to April Rose’s more lecture-based workshop on the creation of a dance. April Rose’s explanations on her topic were so organized and concise that I had no confusion at all over her discussion. It was incredibly clear! To add to that, her views of dance are nothing short of inspirational.

Waiting for the Gala Show to start was a perfect time to peruse the various vendors who were set up around the convention. There were costume pieces lining the walls, stylized handcrafted jewelry, and even some vintage dance VHS for sale! At one stand was Lauren Checchio’s metal crafted jewelry, where she had intricate pieces such as combs, rings, bracelets, and more for sale. While admiring her work, she asked me to try on a golden chain belt comprised of tiny alligators as each chain link. It fit right around the stomach, instantly making me feel like a tropical tribal goddess. Lauren pointed out that this was the first time someone had ever worn this new belt, which made the moment extra fun and memorable.

Watching the evening Gala Shows with lovely performers, some I had not seen in person before, was exciting and it promoted more love and energy for belly dance. Each individual dancer had different qualities that stood out, like a signature. The performances ranged in style. Some made me laugh, while others instilled admiration for beautiful technique, and a few brought profound sadness, the kind that moves people.

Nervous excitement filled the start of my Saturday, the good kind before a performance. It was around the check-in time for the afternoon ABDC showcase performers. The backstage atmosphere was friendly and fun, and at the same time focused. Dancers were glammed out, complimenting each other’s costumes all amongst introductions. Performing among fellow belly dancers was a blast!

After the Saturday Gala show, there was a fun ABDC based after-party at Kick-Butt Café, with a more relaxed hafla-feeling atmosphere of dancing. Z-Helene exuberantly hosted the party with an energetic presence. Kick Butt was a great way to relax and mingle after the activities during the day that also kept the belly dance vibe going. Zills, veils, and even a snake made their way to the stage, all enjoyed along a nice cup of coffee.

The end to my Austin Belly Dance Convention experience was appropriately scheduled with a stage presence workshop “Magical. Breathless. Command the Audience with Dramatic Stage Presence.” by Jenza. Detailed development of each dancer’s stage presence was discussed in depth, with flair of old school belly dance. It was like taking a step back into belly dance time with Jenza, a golden way to end the ABDC with this kind of appreciation.

The ABDC was an incredible weekend that is perfect for the belly dance lover. Thank you Amara, Tatianna, and everyone who helped make The Austin Belly Dance Convention 2015 happen for such a wonderful experience!