

# Grosse Pointe News online

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Pointer of Interest

## Roxann Scotella

written by: Ann Fouty

**12/29/2005 - Belly dancing transcends the stage: Traditional folk dance can change a life**

Close your eyes. Lean back in your chair. Envision a belly dancer. The slim woman with long black hair is bedecked with chains and jeweled necklaces and bracelets. From her ear lobes dangle jewels and gold and silver coins. She wears a sheer pastel shirt floating to the ground covering her bare feet. A colorfully embroidered belt accented with tassels, coins and thin chains surrounds her lower abdomen. A metallic click from her jewelry keeps the beat of a distance drum, slowly at first, more quickly as the performance continues. Her arms glide smoothly in serpentine movements, and her hips rotate making



the gauzy skirt sway as if touched by a cedar-scented breeze. The tribal dance is drawing you in, transporting you to another time and place. You watch as the dancer indulges your thoughts of flying carpets and night skies dotted with starlight.

"It's the only ritual dance and cultural tradition that has existed from prehistoric times," said Roxann Scotella of Grosse Pointe Farms.

**Roxann Scotella says belly dancing, a ritual and folk style dance, will relieve stress and at the same time give one a cardio workout and become a part of one's life. (Photos courtesy Roxann Scotella)**

Scotella is both a teacher and student of the traditional folk dance with its roots in Middle East and depicted in Egyptian hieroglyphics as part of ceremonial rituals. Belly dancing, properly known as raks sharki, descended from Middle Eastern folk dances and is performed by both men and women. Throughout the centuries it has picked up bits and pieces from Turkey, Egypt, India, the gypsies in Romania and a touch of flamenco dance. The religious community viewed the dance negatively when Oscar Wilde wrote a play about the many loves of Salome. Richard Strauss based his opera, "Salome" on Wilde's play and introduced the Western world to a dancing woman who peeled off veil after veil for King Herod.

Belly dancing, an American term, uses every part of the body, even the muscles you didn't know you had. It's good cardio vascular workout," she said.

"As much as you think you are in shape and have exercised, belly dancing introduces you to muscles you didn't know you had. Belly dancing has graduated to exercise, to giving birth or chiropractic purposes." It's touted to be practiced by women in preparation for child birth, after child birth to tone abdominal muscles and to improve circulation. It is gaining popularity at spas to improve muscle tone and relieve stress, said Scotella who dances on her toes using the Egyptian style with a Turkish flare.

With the many roles a woman must fulfill in the 21st century from wife and mother to successful career woman, the stress builds up. Belly dancing in comfortable, nonrestrictive clothing is a good way to get a workout and unwind. Though not medically proven to reduce stress, it is nonetheless helpful to Scotella and her students, as well as her three daughters.



Roxann Scotella, front left, dancing with her troupe of belly dancers in Detroit with PURE, Public Urban Ritual Experiment, to promote peace.

She was introduced to the dance form by her late first husband, who was Greek. She and her daughters continued to dance after the death of her husband and their

father. For Scotella, it was to relieve her bouts of vertigo.

"I did it for personal health. I have found vertigo comes from stress-related activities," she said.

Since then the activity has blossomed into an educational tool.

She teaches private lessons. She also has classes at the Clawson YWCA and the YMCA in Warren. She is also working on setting up a local studio to accommodate students from elementary-age to senior citizens.



Roxann Scotella in her home office where she manages her belly dancers, sets up dance classes and does marketing for Pat Scot Jewelers. Photo by Ann L. Fouty

Her students take their learned talents to various venues of night clubs, graduation parties, wedding receptions, birthday parties and bachelorette parties. But it is the affiliation with the non-profit PURE that

she treasures.

PURE is the Public Urban Ritual Experiment and first performed in New York in the name of peace. She and her troupe danced in Detroit on July 17. In fact, PURE dancers in Florida, Illinois, New York, Rhode Island, Texas, Ohio, Oregon and Louisiana were all dancing that same day to promote peace.

According to PURE founder Kaeshi Chai of New York, "Throughout the ages and across cultures, dance and music have drawn people together both spiritually and physically. In our own city PURE participants aim to bring attention to the power of community ancient traditions of dance and ritual. The fluid blending of Middle Eastern, Chinese, Romani Gypsy, Israeli folk, flamenco and Indian dance movements is representative of the world solidarity we seek to affirm in the PURE experience."

Scotella picks up the explanation, "Dancing together becomes one another together. We must have peace within ourselves and love for ourselves before we can spread it out to the public."

Once that peace is achieved, it becomes addictive, she said. "It was a spiritual communal dance. We shared our spiritual self with other women who lack peace."

Scotella believes that the more she learns about herself through dance, the more she is able to teach others. And that's what it is all about, sharing, she said.

Sharing is an integral part of her busy life. In addition to her full life of dancing, she is part owner and vice president of Pat Scott Jewelers. She does the buying for the store and the marketing. When time is available she is on the store's floor working with customers and her private clients and being an involved mother with four children; Rachel, 23, who is the store's main gemologist and also teaches belly dancing; Raquel, 17, who is in college; Riana, 10 and P.J. III, 8.

Most days after school will find her or her eldest daughter and the two youngest in the corner booth of Caribou doing homework and catching up with the day's events.

"I create teamwork. Just because I'm the mom, I don't rule the roost. There is ownership in what you are doing," she said.

Scotella's day could touch in any number of her business ventures or her volunteer life. She fills her days with her retail business of selling dance costumes, training, hosting out-of-town dancers or traveling out of the country on a jewelry-buying trip. She is involved in the Kidney Foundation, Children's Home of Detroit and the Festival of Trees.

While dancing is fun, Scotella sees it as another way to learn. Never judgmental she believes students and teachers are on the same level. From learning she teaches and from teaching she learns even more.

*To learn more about Scotella's classes and her philosophy, go to her Web site, [www.bellyrox.com](http://www.bellyrox.com).*