

Angela Hicks

Interview by: Sara Luer // Photography by: Richard

Angela Hicks was born in Laguna Hills, California on June 20, 1989, and was raised in Cape Coral/Fort Myers. She's a graduate of Florida Gulf Coast University with a BA in Art and a minor in Interdisciplinary Studies. Hicks learned belly dance from her grandmother, Loretta Lolli, who was also a belly dance performer, teacher, and business owner of a modeling/etiquette school, and jewelry store. Says Hicks, "By age 13, I knew my passion for dance would lead my career. When I was 17, my interest in belly dance grew and I wanted to start performing. In order to create a unique show, I thought I needed some spice so I started researching props for belly dancers. I learned that some dancers use swords and thought it looked amazing, but that it wasn't for me because I had a fear of sharp objects. As time passed, I didn't like letting a fear hold me back, and a few weeks later I had a sharp double-edge Turkish scimitar in my hand."

Describe the process of becoming a performing sword balancing dancer? How long does it take to build the skills required to dance with a razor-sharp weapon?

It has been a lifelong process. When I was a child, I didn't think I wanted to be a sword balancer. Back then I wanted to be a gold medalist for gymnastics or be in a prestigious ballet company. My grandmother was very influential in my artistic career. She taught me at a young age how to belly dance, and instilled etiquette training in my day-to-day upbringing such as balancing books on my head for posture. She wanted to help fulfill my dreams and enrolled me into gymnastics and a dance academy. I built my skills to balance with grace by training on the balance beam for gymnastics, doing isolation exercises in belly dance, and obtaining good posture through ballet.

To dance with a razor-sharp weapon is a different story, because it also requires a lot of inner balance. I started the process in 2007 at age 17 with balancing books and sticks. Because of my fear, I didn't take my sword out of the plastic packaging for the first few weeks. From time to time I would place it on my head for 10 seconds, work up to 30 seconds, and continued adding time from there. I would practice walking with it and doing simple moves with my hips. About a month or two later I had my first show with the bare sharp blade. It went great until the end of the dance when the sword fell off and its handle smacked the side of my head. It hurt and I got scared. I covered the edge of the blades with two layers of duct tape for about a year of performing until I was skilled enough to face dancing with the bare blades again. Since then my sword dances average 10 minutes and I haven't dropped it since. I have also never been sliced; I've had a scare here and there, but nothing major thanks to my Ninja skills!



What do you love most about performing?

I love the energy generated by a fun crowd; their clapping, cheering and smiles. Most of all, I love hearing people say that I inspire them. I'm an artist and also love to paint, but to be on a stage and dance is my favorite form of expression. I get to be my art and make it come alive.

Are there any messages that you hope to express or communicate to the audience through your performances?

My performance has strong symbolism. The sword dance displays the strength within femininity, the balance of mind-body-soul, and the capability of overcoming fears. Through years of performing I've learned what it means to have a sense of self and to be aware of my body through balancing a dangerous object. I now have more trust in myself with the knowledge that I can conquer my goals.

Do you have a distinct or signature style of sword balancing that differs from other artists in this genre?

How far can I go? How much can I bend? Those are questions I always ask myself when creating new moves. I have a large range of flexibility and strength to apply that when working on skillful poses. Compared to other dancers, not only do I belly dance with the sword on my head to slow and fast beats, but I also spin on the ground with just my hands and can turn with one leg straight in the air. My latest move is called "the scorpion," where both legs hover over my head. I like to push the limits.

My belly dance style takes on the fusion of Egyptian cabaret, folk dancing and the fluidness of beak dance. I've been told before that my movements give the appearance that I have no bones, and that my limbs move like those of an octopus. I also specialize in ballet, jazz, modern, hip-hop, ballroom, Latin, Polynesian, and Bollywood.

You're also a dance teacher. Where are you currently instructing?

Class schedules and new locations will always be posted on my website under the "Classes" page. I currently teach beginner and intermediate belly dance at Oasis Parvaneh, located at 2377 Linwood Ave. #202 in Naples on Wednesday nights from 6:30-7:30pm (www.oasisparvaneh.com).

My belly dance classes are for any age, body type, and for the beginning to intermediate levels - no prior experience necessary. Just come with your friends, make new ones, have a fun girls' night out, and get fit! It's very affordable - one class is only \$12 or five classes are \$50. I also teach dance, art and jewelry-making for ages from children to teens at the Center for the Arts in Bonita Springs, located at 26100 Old 41 Road. Those dance classes are for ballet, jazz, and hip hop (www.artcenterbonita.org).



Dance is such a huge part of your life - what other activities and pursuits do you enjoy during your rare moments of downtime?

Most of my downtime is spent sleeping! Although I enjoy taking time to paint, make jewelry, sing jazz, and model. I also volunteer at Health Park Medical Center in Fort Myers.

How can interested readers stay up-to-date with your schedule? Any upcoming performances scheduled locally?

My public shows are always listed on my website under the "Events" page. Starting in January 7, 2012, I will be performing every Saturday night at Zorba's Greek Restaurant in Bonita Springs.

www.swordbalancer.com