

Earthy Undulations

Replace Can-can at Gerties

Story and Photos by Tara Borin

While many had their fill of green beer this St. Patrick's Day, about 40 curious locals came out to Diamond Tooth Gertie's to witness live

Middle Eastern music and genuine belly dancing. With 26 different dance numbers and 22 costume changes, we were not to be disappointed.

The Saba Dance Ensemble hails from Whitehorse, led by Nita Collins of Nita's Celebrations Bellydance studio. These 11 beautiful women of all shapes and sizes enchanted the audience with a

variety of numbers, some including the whole troupe, some just a few women, some solo. The dances were at times joyful, funny, and thoughtful. We were lucky to have the Mediterranean Raqs Band from Seattle, WA, playing a selection of modern and classical Egyptian, Greek, Turkish, Armenian and Persian music.

Though many cultures claim to have originated belly dance, one thing is clear: it has always been a dance primarily by women, and is traditionally performed at family celebrations. The dance exemplifies female fertility and power, and was thought to strengthen a woman for childbirth. It wasn't until Oriental



dance came to North America that it changed into the public cabaret-style spectacle we are familiar with today.

Last Tuesday's performance was a perfect blend of the dance's traditional roots and its modern takeoff.

Despite the elaborate, sparkling costumes, the undulating movements of the dancers were undeniably earthy. Their smiles as they danced were genuine and drew each spectator into a joyful communion with something more primal.

One of the highlights of the evening was a solo performance by Saqra, an internationally acclaimed instructor and performer. Her skill and love for the dance were obvious and her ease on stage drew the crowd in--quite literally. A group of local women, fresh graduates from Saqra's belly dance workshop, were brave enough to get up on stage with their instructor and show us what they'd learned.

Thanks to the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture and the Yukon Arts Fund for helping to bring such wonderful talent to town.