

Title: Pop, Lock, and Shimmy  
Instructor: Michelle Joyce  
Level: Intermediate and Advanced Belly dancers  
Info: 95 minutes

Mystified by the nuances of the drum solo? Or are you looking for a DVD that will sharpen your pops and locks? Maybe you'd like a new choreography or are you seeking a new drill set to add to your regular practice schedule? Believe it or not, this DVD covers all these bases and more. Michelle Joyce has created a DVD that will suit a variety of tastes and still manage to be one that many intermediate and advanced level dancers can return to use again and again.

Here's a breakdown of the DVD:

“Warm up:” From the very first part of the video, viewers can tell that Michelle Joyce is not only a talented belly dancer but also an incredibly informed fitness professional. The warm up portion of the DVD consists of gentle stretches and movements designed to get your blood pumping. During this section, Michelle gives excellent pointers that will benefit anyone implementing a workout plan. From explaining each stretch and emphasizing proper technique to describing the benefits of holding the moves for a minimum of 10 seconds, there are a lot of little informational gems in even this first section.

After first stretching the entire body, the warm up moves into a section designed to review and drill one of the main movements that will be featured in the DVD: hip bumps. Michelle continues the warm up by offering a drill section that covers both traveling and stationary hip bumps, as well as interesting ways to embellish the move and a unique and challenging portion designed to improve balance. As with the basic warm up, these movements are clearly defined and explained. Michelle does an excellent job of describing the muscles that are driving the movement and continues to do so throughout the video. The overall pace of the warm up is very comfortable. It is one that certainly prepares the body for what's to come but is not so exhausting that it will prevent viewers from continuing on with the DVD.

“Warm Up Drill:” The final part of the warm up is the “warm up drill.” Designed to prepare viewers for the movements and overall attitude of a drum solo, this is a great opportunity to practice a drum solo drill set. First, the entire drill set is demonstrated without music. During the breakdown, Michelle continues to share the secrets of snappy locks and pops, explaining just which muscles to use and even describing how *\*not\** to do many of the movements. Then Michelle adds music and the fun begins! There is literally about 3 to 5 minutes of combination drilling. No mere 30 seconds of demonstration here! Instead viewers can really have the opportunity to *\*practice\** the drills along with Michelle and reap the benefits of following drills that incorporate dancing along with repetitively challenging the body.

“Combinations:” After the warm up, the DVD moves into the combinations section. In total there are 7 combinations on this DVD (but there’s much more, too, including various shimmy drills and other sections of the choreography that are broken down but do not necessary rate as a full combination). Michelle has cleverly created combos that, on their own, provide viewers with excellent stand-alone drill sets. Each combination can be reviewed and refined in order to improve one’s technique. Overall, the combinations are both interesting and challenging enough to keep one intrigued even if they’re being used in the standard drill format of repeating the movements over and over and over. The combinations work incredibly well together, too – in addition to working as stand alone drill sets or they can be strung together for a full drum solo choreography (and, yes, that \*is\* covered later on the DVD!). Combinations are executed with counts and feature movements that include many hallmarks of a drum solo. Certainly the pops and locks the title implies are included as are a variety of layers. Another nice touch is Michelle’s construction of combos that utilize a variety of body views and speeds.

Each combination is divided into three parts. First, Michelle demonstrates the combo and then explains the movements used in it. The breakdowns are clear and concise. As this is an intermediate to advanced level DVD, it is assumed that dancers have a knowledge of basic movements so Michelle does not take the time to describe how to do a shoulder shimmy or execute a maya. Instead, time is spent offering excellent suggestions on making sure the movements are properly executed in a sharp and crisp “drum soloesque” manner.

After the explanation, viewers have the opportunity to practice each combination at both a slow and fast pace. The slower paced drill time offers a wonderful chance to really refine and improve each movement. And the pacing is perfect – right along with the music yet not too speedy to overwhelm the viewer. The faster pace is, of course, more challenging than the slower section but it is set at a speed that is still manageable.

For those dancers seeking to simply practice the combinations in succession, there is a “Quick Index of Combinations” that allows one to flip in between the combos and practice them in succession without any breaks for title screens. In the “Nonstop Practice” section, one can also review the varying speeds without stopping for any breakdowns.

“Shimmy Drills:” This section was quite possibly my favorite. Here Michelle presents three unique drill sets, similar to the warm up drill, designed to really get your body moving! This is where the “shimmy” comes in – while many of the combinations included shimmies these drills really utilize a variety of different shimmies along with different layers. Both the types of shimmies used and the included layers are fairly complicated and will definitely challenge more experienced dancers. There are three drills in this section: a shimmy drill, a layering drill, and a shimmy and lock drill. As with the combinations, these drills are first demonstrated and then clearly explained. And then, of course, there’s time to put what you’ve learned into practice!

“Choreography:” Michelle’s drum solo is a really cute, sassy piece that is comprised of the 7 combinations featured on the DVD as well as the shimmy drill and several other movement transitions. The choreography section allows the viewer to preview the entire piece in small sections and then in the entire succession. Since the combinations have already been broken down, there is not a particular step-by-step breakdown of the combination in succession.

A performance off the DVD “By Dancers for Dancers Volume 2” is also included on this DVD. The first performance is lovely and simply classic. The second includes the absolutely smoking drum solo and is great to see performed in a full, dazzlingly beautiful costume.

What worked for me:

- The DVD was VERY clear and easy to see with great sound levels – overall excellent production quality.
- Michelle not only breaks down the movements but also seems to be very well versed in the anatomy and physiology behind each one. However, she does not use overly technical terms or go into too much depth but instead gives viewers enough information to understand what is happening without becoming overwhelmed with confusing jargon.
- I’m a huge fan of drills, and it was wonderful to see an instructor create something that would work as drills that was beyond simply repeating the same movement over and over again. So far, most of the DVDs that feature “drills” simply repeat movements (ie 100 hip bumps on the right. repeat.). While repetition is certainly beneficial, it can quickly become boring. Michelle’s take on drills in her warm up – the idea of drilling a combination of movements rather than just one single movement – is a fresh new approach and great to see on an instructional DVD.
- The descriptions of what a “sloppy” movement would look like contrasted with a crisp one that would be appropriate for a drum solo. It was great to hear just what delineated the two and how to execute one versus the other.
- As Aziyade said in her review, this is a DVD that has so many useful components (from the actual full choreography to the drills to the combos which can also be drilled) that it will get a LOT of play in my practice routine. This is an incredibly well-rounded DVD and one that will benefit any dancer looking to improve their locks and pops (and, yes, that would be BOTH cabaret and tribal style dancers!).

What may not work for you:

- This is absolutely, positively a DVD for more experienced dancers. While some “intermediate-level” DVDs are actually quite easy, this one is definitely a challenge. This makes it incredibly fun and useful to dancers who’ve been shimmying for a while, but for newer dancers this is definitely a video to use once you’ve become familiar with a basic belly dance vocabulary.