

REVIEW by Misha 2007

Does “Sensual Belly Dance” sound like a cringe-worthy work? I wasn’t sure what to expect when I first saw the package. But Blanca does a great job of explaining her take on “sensuality” without leaving her viewer feeling uncomfortable or coming across as too silly herself. Blanca explains that sensuality is about communicating what you’re feeling to others and, of course, this works great for a dancer. She shares her ideas of translating one’s inner feelings into a body language viewable by the audience. She describes the use of sensuality as a way to “add a flair of sensual grace and ease to your dance” and speaks about the flow and pacing of one’s performance. Her ideas of really utilizing emotion and storytelling during dancer are not often covered in instructional works and are wonderful to see presented here to a wider viewing audience.

After this intriguing introduction the DVD package offers viewers a little bit of everything from technical tips to improvisational ideas to polishing ones performances. First come two different “Flow” sections, one on technique and one based on simply dancing. Then Blanca presents a short choreography. There’s a demo, a breakdown, and you can even choose to focus on just one part of the practice such as lower or upper body. Next Blanca provides a selection of clips demonstrating a variety of poses, providing watchers with numerous ideas they could add into their own repertoire. And there’s also an additional invaluable resource where Blanca explains the idea of telling a story with dance. This is wonderful for performers seeking a way to give their performance extra “oomph” and also nice for those dancers just beginning to seek the stage lights.

As for the “meat” of the DVD, here’s a bit of info on the Flow sections:

“Fluidity Warmup:” From the very beginning of her “Fluidity Warmup,” Blanca begins to introduce her concept of “sensuality in dance.” The gentle warmup and stretches include some very nice arm work as Blanca explains how to do each stretch in a “sensual” manner, that is with impact and purpose. While Blanca moves through the movements quickly she clearly explains the focus of each (lifting the head, bending at the waist, etc). Although each tiny little flourish may not be broken down, an intermediate level dance could easily follow her clear display of movement. In addition to the stretches, Blanca uses the warmup to review a variety of basic movements including hip slides, reverse mayas, hip circles, and single hip work.

“Technique Articulation:” During this section of the DVD, Blanca explains the nuances of the movements she uses in the combinations. This section is also designed to help you work on your articulation for each movement, improving your range of motion, strength, and balance while dancing. These movements are sort of “mini drills” that would work quite nicely for cabaret dancers.

“Technique Shimmy:” Similar to the articulation section, Blanca gives viewers a separate section for shimmy work. Included are very detailed tips for creating a shimmy that is controlled and matching the music as well as breakdowns for the various shimmies and layers she uses later in the program.

“Technique Progressions:” Here Blanca reviews a number of layered traveling steps. Beginning with the footwork, she later adds on arms and additional hip movements.

“Technique Sensual Poses:” This final section is the cool down for the DVD. Blanca dances through the cool down as the viewer follows along, demonstrating several of her unique poses. Each movement (like snake arms, hip circle, etc) is not broken down, but Blanca does explain each pose clearly.

The next part of the DVD is the “Flow” section. This part is divided into the same headings as the “Technique” and provides viewers with the chance to simply dance along with Blanca. For the most part, the material is the same as that which was covered in the technical sections, although there is some additional arm work, but this time it is fluid and presented as dance movement. The DVD has an option to follow the “Flow” without Blanca’s voice-over and with just the music. There is roughly 40 minutes worth of material, here, providing the viewer with what amounts to her or his own personal class in “sensual bellydance.”

The choreography is surprisingly long for a DVD that already has so much information. As mentioned above, the combinations are demonstrated and explained after Blanca performs the full piece. The combos are rather quickly shown *but* all of the information has already been broken down in the Flow sections. Blanca’s work is a cabaret piece with a lot of emotion and a great practice work for those seeking to learn to put more expression in their dance.

What worked for me:

- I really loved the way Blanca breaks down movements. She uses a lot of visual imagery and creates a clear picture of each move. Blanca even uses some really creative visual aids to impart her ideas.
- Separate technique sections. This was really nice as a dancer could go to each section and just review that particular part (so working on the transition/progressions as opposed to having to go all the way through a choreography like in some other DVDs).
- The pose idea section – it was great to see the different ideas for poses and, also, to see some of them executed in different ways.

What may not work for you:

- If you are not used to opening your stance a bit as you dance you may find some of these movements and combos to be challenging. Blanca’s movements are lush and full, often requiring a fairly open stance in order to really get the look of the move.
- I stress again that this is a DVD for more experienced dancers. A baby belly may become quickly overwhelmed by the speed at which the material is covered. However, there are definitely concepts here that will benefit new dancers, and this is certainly a production that they could “grow into.”

- The red backdrop/lighting. The hues reflecting on Blanca are pretty, but after 40 minutes can make your eyes a bit fuzzy.
-