

# Peptides and the Mind/Body Orchestra

## Shamanic Healing in the Zar and Sema Rituals

by Katya Faris

Because of my study of the Zar and Sema rituals of the Middle East over the last ten years, I have been particularly interested in the powerful transformational aspects of trance dancing. Although the healing influence of music, dance and ritual has been evident throughout history, scientists have only recently been able to explain its basis in physiology. The emerging field of psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) and the study of the mind/body connection provide insight into the relationship between biochemical changes and emotional/psychological states. My understanding of certain experiences during trance dances was deepened by a reading of *Molecules of Emotion: The Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine*, by Dr. Candace Pert, and helped to explain why such rituals are holistic methods for healing minor psychological and immune-mediated diseases. This article will briefly describe the

Zar and Sema ceremonies, their potential for healing, and the conditions under which these rituals are likely to be most effective. It will also provide a summary of current PNI research, and use it as a lens to better understand the healing properties of these specific ritual dances.

Although the term "shamanic" is not normally

used in the Middle East to describe the Zar and Sema ceremonies, they are similar to shamanic practices in other parts of the world, which also typically have a focal leader. Both the Zar and Sema use music and dance to promote healing through *tarab*, the Arabic term for musical enchantment, which is the aim of both secular and sacred Arabic music. The vehicle for *tarab* in the Egyptian Zar is the rhythm, whereas in the Sema it is the melody that produces the main sound for healing.

Zar is an exorcism ritual that is purported to rid the participants of mental or physical "dis-ease." It has its roots in Sub-Saharan Africa, but is also found in Egypt, the Arabian Gulf, and the Sudan. Sema, a whirling dance of the dervishes, is originally from Turkey but has spread to many other parts of the Islamic world via the Mevlevi Sufi Order. Music therapy techniques are incorporated into the rituals, and prescribed by the Sheikh of the *tekke* (Turkish), or *tariqa* (Arabic), much as western medicine is used to heal patients.

Both dances have pre-Islamic origins, and because they continue to be widely practiced, have been begrudgingly accepted in the Islamic world as *bid'a* (innovative), instead of *haram* (forbidden). There is also an acceptance in Islam of the belief in *djinn*, or spirits, and it is believed that possession by these spirits can make one ill, usually with mental depression, which can lead to physical disease. *Djinn* are determined to be either good or bad.

However, the spirits have a reputation for being unreliable and deceptive, and some would say, fickle and self-interested, much like children. Their possession of one's body is regarded as unnatural, and a return to wellness requires the expulsion of the negative foreign spirit (Pellerito, p. 3).

### Zar

Music and dance are central to the Zar ritual, which uses methods common to other trance dances. Repetitive motions such as rocking, circular movements, head swaying, repetitive chanting, and percussion are typical, and the ritual could also include the smoking of hashish (*Ibid.*). The family of the patient hires a group of Zar musicians and drummers, and the ritual often takes place at the patient's home or at a saint's shrine (Roth, 1995). The drummers' task is to

find the *duq*, or particular rhythm that resonates with the patient's demon, and only that specific rhythm can bring the patient into trance and expel the negative spirit (Ali, 1991). Each rhythm is paid for separately, and some experimentation may be required before the *duq* of the demon is found (*Ibid.*). Thus, the healing of the mind/body



On March 8, 2002, Shaikh Kabir Helminski addressed a Festival of World Sacred Music, *Jahan e Khusrau*, in New Delhi and offered a Sema ceremony with the Whirling Dervishes of Turkey. (See: [www.jahan-e-khusrau.org](http://www.jahan-e-khusrau.org))

Photo: courtesy Shaikh Kabir Helminski

that I believe is possible when real trance or *hal* (state of grace) is achieved is not without its financial aspects.

The performance of Zar is not always done to remove *djinn*, however. Eleanor Abdella Doumato, author of *Getting God's Ear: Women, Islam, and Healing in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf*, conducted her research in the Saudi town of Najd, where Wahhabi Islam had taken firm root and has forbidden such polytheistic practices. In order to study the Zar Doumato had to travel outside of Najd. Attacks of melancholy, hysteria, anger, excess foolish talk, delirium, fainting, convulsions, or symptoms of illness that could not be diagnosed or do not respond to medical treatment, would fall into a different category than possession by malevolent spirits. Here the term Zar does not so much refer to the ritual, but is used closer to its literal translation, "visitor" (Doumato p. 171). For them the Zar is a spirit, an invisible being that enters the body of the opposite sex and demands things for the possessed.

There are societies of women in many areas in the Arabian Gulf and North Africa who congregate in each other's homes specifically for Zar ceremonies. In Saudi Arabia, most of the musicians come from East Africa (Doumato). The *Umm az-Zeraan*, or head female leading the Zar, are often marginal women in society, often East African black women. Women in Islamic Saudi Arabia remain in their homes much of the time, and do not venture out unless accompanied by a male family member. Isolation

is common among women who have not been educated and do not work outside the home. Also, some women are too old to keep up with the rapid expansion of westernization that separates families from the traditional Arabic community lifestyle. These societies offer a communal experience for women that might not otherwise be available. The rituals provide an antidote to isolation and depression, and have become increasingly popular, possibly because the need is so great for women to congregate and share one another's stories. The supportive social atmosphere of these Zars plays an important role in facilitating the trance state and promoting healing.

In the Middle East, the Zar is a lower class phenomenon, and frowned upon by the Islamic establishment because of its polytheistic possibilities (Pellerito, p. 4). However, the upper classes will often hire Zar drummers to come into their homes for a private ceremony, for which they are paid handsomely. Even though the educated elite may discredit the Zar, they still indulge themselves in the "superstitions" of the *fellahin*, the country people, and their pre-Islamic ancestral traditions. In such circumstances healing may or may not take place because it is entirely dependent upon achieving real trance, and the cultural norms influencing the environment may affect the patient's psychological openness to the experience.

### Sema

The Mevlevi Sufi Order in Konya, Turkey first practiced the Sema, a trance-inducing dance, in Turkey. Sultan Velad, son of Mevlâna Jalâluddîn Rumi, founded it in the 13th Century after Rumi's death. Rumi's family had fled Balk, Afghanistan, then a part of the Persian Empire, during the conquests of the Turko-Mongol tribes, eventually settling in Konya. A wandering dervish mystic named Shams I-Tabriz, or "the Sun of Tabriz" (Iran) served as an inspiration for the scholarly Rumi. Although the nature of their relationship is a matter of controversy in the current Sufi world (C. Helminski), it is widely accepted that the spiritual love Rumi felt for Shams compelled him to whirl in ecstasy and to write insightful poetry which is still considered among the world's greatest. His band of followers evolved into the modern day Mevlevi Sufi Order. The late Dr. Celaledin Celebi of Istanbul, Turkey, a direct descendant of Rumi, was, until recently, the head of the Mevlevi Tariqa (Order). He appointed Kabir Helminski, currently headquartered in Aptos, California, to represent the order in North America. (See: [www.sufism.org](http://www.sufism.org))

In the early days of Rumi, the whirling was quite improvisational, and would last until the wee hours of the morning. No set ceremony took place, and both men and women participated in the dancing (Bolat). The Sema, translated as "time of listening" (K. Helminski), is thought to have its origins in pre-Islamic shamanism of Central Asia. The dance symbolizes the revolution of the stars of the universe around the sun, and the practice of whirling is likened to a spiral staircase that helps the dervish reach Oneness with Allah. It has been incorporated into the spiritual ascension practice, or *tariq*, of Islamic mysticism, and is symbolic of the spiral ascension of the soul through the seven heavens of Islam towards Allah, represented by the heart in the physical body.

However, over time the practice became influenced by fundamentalist Islam, and more dogmatic. Women were banned from whirling, and the whirling became more strictly ceremonial and not open to improvisation (Bolat). However, in modern Turkey women are now permitted to whirl once again in public; they do not wear the traditional white gowns and pants of the men, but instead wear various colors (Larsen). The public ceremonies held now in Turkey are often for tourists, as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire meant the end of the *tekkes* as valid religious places of worship. During the Sema, trance is the link that brings the dancer into contact with Allah, and is the focus of the ceremony. I would speculate that the independence of the Sema from the

social and financial situations that may affect the Zar allows for more frequent achievement of trance in the Sema.

Even though the Sema is used for spiritual purposes, it is also used to promote physical healing. The ancient Turkish practice of music therapy is incorporated into the ceremony through the use of various *ayins*, or compositions, that are written especially for the Sema. A different *maqam*, or scale, is chosen for the *ayin* for that day's ceremony, or for a certain patient's treatment, dependent upon the kind of vibration needed (K. Helminski). For instance, the *maqam* of *Hijaz* is used for sensuality; the *maqam* of *Nihavendî* for humility; and the *maqam* of *Ussak* gives one a philosophical perspective of "the big picture" (Bolat).

### Trance: an Effective Healer

At the beginning of my beginner's level Middle Eastern dance classes I have typically used whirling to help the class center our minds, and get our circulatory systems moving and our muscles warmed up. During a series of classes in 1996, one of my students was a stroke victim who had not had the use of her right hand since her stroke seven years earlier. After about a month of attending class, I got a call from the student early one morning. She was so excited: her hand had started to work again! This is the story she told me: we had whirled in class the night before, and the next day she had felt a peculiar warmth in her body, and particularly, her head. She said that late that evening before bed she saw a purple light superimposed on her vision, like a color gel on a stage light. She did not think much of it, until the next morning when she saw a green light in the same manner.<sup>1</sup> Then about an hour later her hand started functioning again! She said that all of the movements she had done in class, particularly the whirling, seemed to get her brain and nervous system "rebooted" (although there may be other therapeutic factors involved outside of dance). Also, she stated that the meditative aspects of whirling seemed to be the most beneficial movements for her. In whirling, the right hand points up to Allah, and the left hand down to the Earth. Energy travels along this path while whirling to the left, counter-clockwise. The dance invokes the spirit, so it is interesting that her right hand would be the affected one. I do not purport to have any skills as a shamaness: I simply showed her the tools, and her body figured it out on its own. This personal example illustrates the power of trance and meditation to heal not only the spirit, but also the physical body. It is this interconnection between spirit and body that provides the foundation for healing through trance.

Gabrielle Roth is a dancer, teacher and writer who has studied the role of trance dancing in many cultures, and refined certain principles into a framework for achieving trance/ecstasy. She has coined the term "urban shamanism" to denote the type of fusion trance dance she teaches in her NYC classes, and discusses in her two books, *Maps to Ecstasy* and *Sweat Your Prayers*. She has developed a Five Rhythm method that initiates trance: 1) Flowing, 2) Staccato, 3) Chaos, 4) Lyrical, and 5) Stillness. Music from each category is played, and the dancer improvises, allowing the subconscious mind to rise to the surface and be experienced through the body. Universal archetypes are ascribed to each rhythm. For instance, the feminine is seen in Flowing; the masculine in Staccato; the struggle between genders and the human animalistic nature in Chaos; in Lyrical, the angelic, higher force that humans aspire to; and in Stillness, reaching God. Her method often helps one achieve trance, but not always. Most people, Roth says, get stuck in Chaos, where loss of control is essential. Many have issues with their childhood/parents, or social circumstances with others in their environment, that are mirrored in the gender archetypes. Some cultures would call this possession by spirits or ancestors who are unwilling to let them go. Losing control over one's body or mind is very scary, and not everyone can surrender to the rhythm. But losing conscious con-

trol is what “reboots” the neural pathways of the body/mind, and helps one connect with the subconscious mind. Once one loses control and moves through Chaos, the next stage, Lyrical, is simply heaven. In this ecstatic stage endorphins are released in the body, and healing occurs. The trance state has been entered, and there is a lightness of body. Stillness is known as deep meditation—one encounters God within, the voice of the Superior vs. the Inferior subconscious mind. In Stillness we connect with our deeper understandings and inner wisdom.

### Psychoneuroimmunology

Science has long accepted the idea that the mind and body are intimately connected, and new information about the underlying physiological basis for this connection is constantly being uncovered. Why is trance so effective in healing? What can science tell us about how sound, emotion, and spirituality affect our physiology?

I recently came across the following quote in my Yoga teacher’s journal:

Peptides are the sheet music containing the notes, phrases, and rhythms that allow the orchestra—your body—to play as an integrated entity. And the music that results is the tone or feeling that you experience subjectively as your emotions. (Pert, 148)

I was excited to dig deeper, to find explanations for what happens in the body that makes trance so effective a healer. When I read Pert’s book, *Molecules of Emotion*, I was amazed to find that science was just beginning to prove what yogis have known for a long time—the mind and body are intimately connected, and mental processes such as meditation can be instrumental in healing the mind and body. Strong emotions also have a powerful effect on the body: the music and movements of Middle Eastern dance evoke deep emotions. The outer world reflects the inner world. Remember the Hermetic adage, “As above, so below.”

A general overview of the emerging scientific discipline of Psychoneuroimmunology, or PNI, which studies the chemical links of the body’s different systems that share information, will help to explain why the release of endorphins is essential to physical and mental healing, and why they are important factors in immune-mediated disease. PNI studies how:

(1) Psychological factors that an individual experiences and that activate neurons in the brain (2) modify the production

and release of neuropeptides and endocrine hormones that (3) alter the function of the immune system, which then (4) increases the susceptibility of an individual to diseases that are normally prevented by a healthy functioning immune system.

(Rabin, 4)

PNI has discovered that peptides are produced all over the body—not just in the brain, but by the endocrine and immune systems as well. A “peptide” is a specific kind of ligand, or a kind of protein/sequence of amino acids; basically, one form of the body’s drugs. When two molecules bind together, the second molecule is called a “ligand,” a broad term for many kinds of substances that bind, such as neurotransmitters, GABA, glycine, histamine, acetylcholine, etc.; steroids (a kind of hormone made from modified cholesterol), such as testosterone, estrogen, progesterone, etc.; and peptides, such as oxytocin, the endorphins, cholecystokinin (CCK), bradykinin, angiotensin II, and several more (Pert, p. 25 and p. 67). Peptides make up the largest group of ligands by far.

A main component of emotions in the body is the endorphin/opiate receptor function. Out of all the peptides, this combination has the greatest effect on the emotions, or the pleasure/pain continuum. These small molecules have a very big job. For example, one

of the peptides, Oxytocin, is responsible for the “bonding” which takes place between mother/child, lovers/spouses, and with one’s community for safety. Certainly these bonds are necessary for not only emotional well-being, but also survival.

In 1984, Francis Schmitt of MIT coined the term “informational substances” to describe ligands. These chemical information substances travel the extracellular fluids circulating throughout the body to reach their specific target-cell receptors. Alongside the well-known synaptic circuitry of the brain, there exists a parasympathetic, or parallel system. His new work suggests there are almost an infinite number of pathways for the conscious mind to access and modify the unconscious mind and the body (*Ibid.*, p. 139-141).

This research has been no small feat, as science does not like to talk about “non-things” such as emotions or the soul (Pert, p.21). PNI, a new field of science that has formed over the last twenty years, has its basis in the belief that the central nervous system, and especially the brain (neurons and the informational substances secreted), the endocrine system (the hormones secreted), and the immune systems (particularly the macrophages and lymphocytes) are all linked together, and more importantly, that they communicate (Rabin, 1999). Just as this new field is shedding light on how the body’s different systems communicate, it is also providing insight into the bridge between “left brain” (logical) and “right brain” (intuitive) thinking.

Where do the peptides bond? They bond to receptors. They are a “single molecule, perhaps the most elegant, rare, and complicated kind of molecule there is” (Pert p. 21). Fundamentally and reproductively speaking, the ligand is the masculine of the molecules, and the receptors are the females. Receptors have a molecular weight of 50,000 units, and when they start to hum, shimmy, and vibrate (dance!) on the surface membrane of a cell, they do not tear apart, as other molecules would, such as water that has a molecular weight of only 18. Rather, they float on the surface membrane, “snaking back and forth...much like lily pads floating on the surface of a lake” (Pert p.22), waiting to send information deep inside the interior of the cell.

Then, how do the ligands and receptors mix? It is very similar to the process that enzymes, a catalyst inducing protein, undertake with their substrates. It is a very specific and selective process called “binding.” Only opiates such as endorphins can fit into opiate receptors, or only Valium-like peptides fit with Valium receptors. However, some ligands are so much like others, such as aldosterone and estrogen, that the receptor is fooled and binds with either of them. A standard image used to describe the process of binding is “a key fitting into a lock.” The receptor is the part that the ligand binds to, but the region of a protein is called the binding site

(Zagmond, 1999). The ligand, or informational substance, will bump into the receptor, slip off, and bump on again, binding as it bumps. A better visualization might be, “Two voices—ligand and receptor—striking the same note and producing a vibration that rings a doorbell to open the doorway to the cell” (Pert, p. 24). (Could the physical or emotional impact of music have an effect on this vibratory relationship of ligand and receptor, somehow producing a healing effect?) After the message is received, the cell transmits the message deep into the cell’s interior where it changes the state of the cell dramatically. The life of the cell is dependent upon these ligands—they are the directors of the cell’s activities, ranging from protein manufacturing, to opening or closing ion channels, to name just a few.

So, what makes peptides so special? What differentiates them from other kinds of ligands, such as neurotransmitters and hormones? It is their mode of transportation, their communication! Neurotransmitters need a synapse to cross the cleft between cells in order to get to their receptor site; hormones need the plasma in blood to travel to their receptor site; and peptides need the extracellular space, such as blood and cerebrospinal fluid, to get to their receptors. These extracellular fluids allow a peptide to travel long distances in the body if the peptide is not manufactured near the receptor site (Pert, p.26-27). Since peptides are all essentially made from amino acids/protein molecules, it is their mode of communication that differentiates them one from one another.

If the emotions aren’t just produced by the neuropeptides in these “emotional” parts of the brain, where are they produced, held and released? What is this mysterious “mind/body connection”? We know that these peptides can travel through the extracellular fluids to all parts of the body. Could it be possible that these peptides are getting stuck in various bodily organs and are producing “dis-ease”? PNI researchers think this may be the case. Additionally, it is apparent that the endocrine and immune systems of the body communicate with the brain in regulating peptides, and therefore emotions.

There are two different schools of thought on the mind/body connection: one is that of physiologist William James and the other of his student Walter Cannon. James’ theory held that emotions “trickle up” from the body to the brain, and then we make judgments about them. As an example, suppose that while driving another car almost hits us, and immediately our sympathetic nervous system kicks in—our heart beat increases, our gut contracts, we start perspiring, and then we think, “Wow!” Without thinking first or making an emotional assessment of the situation, our body reacts, much like in a muscular reflex arc. But Cannon thought that James’s theory was wrong. Instead he maintained that emotions “trickled down” from the brain using the peptides secreted from the pituitary gland to the hypothalamus through its connections in the neuronal pathways to the brainstem, producing various responses in the body. Therefore the “cause” of the emotion would originate in the above-mentioned emotional areas of the brain. Which theory best describes what actually happens? Knowing what we now know about peptides, both theories are correct (Pert, video).

Through the operation of peptides, emotions have a profound effect on the immune system. These peptides also interact with the immune system to break it down and bring about disease. Ed Blalock, an immunologist, discovered rather by accident that some immune cells known as lymphocytes were secreting endorphins, the mood-altering peptide, and that the receptors for these peptides were also on the lymphocytes (Pert, p.161). Basically, this makes the immune system a floating endocrine system with this function. These cells “chemotax,” or pick up the scent of pep-

tides in the extracellular fluid, and latch them onto their receptors. Virtually every peptide produced in the brain has a receptor on the immune cell surface. Not only that, but peptides produced by immune cells, such as interleukin-1, which induces sleep and aids the body in healing, also have receptors in the hypothalamus, the cortex, glial cells, and the tough membranes around the brain (Pert, p. 164). This exchange of molecular information between the brain, endocrine, and immune systems confirms that there is communication between them.

Stress greatly alters the function of the brain, endocrine, and immune systems. Sleep and eating patterns change, usually involved with the lack of hormonal discharge (Rabin, p.5). When our "defenses" are down, we get sick. Knowing what we know about the connection between neuropeptides and the immune system, it is clear that emotional stress can also wear down our immune defenses, and allow disease to disrupt homeostatic balance.

The psychophysiology of anxiety illustrates the impact stress has on the mind/body connection. The parameters that measured the effects of anxiety in laboratory tests were: electromyography, finger pulse volume, skin resistance, gastric motility, respiration rate, eye blink, plasma amino acid concentration, plasma free fatty acids, growth hormone, palmar sweating, and forearm plethysmography. Also noted for changes were heart rate, respiration rate, blood pressure, plasma corticosteroid concentration, urinary steroid and catecholamine excretion (Brambilla, p. 487-88). To note precisely how all of these factors changed with anxiety would be too lengthy, but suffice it to say that stress turns on the sympathetic nervous system—heart rate increases, gastric motility ceases, blood vessels dilate, respiration increases, etc. Adrenalin is known to be a hormone released during stress; it aids in the "flight or fight" response. Also cortisol, a hormone released from the adrenal cortex, inhibits the activity of the immune system. In today's world of high stimulation and excitement, our sympathetic nervous system is constantly being turned on for "false alarms" of danger; this in turn leaves us in a constant state of unnecessary stress. One obvious way to tone down the effects of these anxiety-ridden states and turn off the sympathetic nervous system is to calm oneself so that the parasympathetic nervous system can resume its job—in other words, meditate!

It is important to recognize at this point that PNI is a science in progress. Much research has been done on the negative effects of psychological states on homeostasis, but more study is needed on the positive effects of psychological states on the body. It is just possible that neural-immune signaling in the form of laughter, strong personal and social support, determination, and the will to overcome adversity can help a patient overcome an immune-mediated disease, and keep it from recurring (Felton, 1991, p. 117-18).

I have included in this article just some of the fundamentals at the molecular level of how various systems of the body communicate and influence each other's functions in reference to the body's homeostatic balance. We can say with certainty, however, that

psychological stress has physiological consequences, particularly with the immune system and its ability to fight off foreign antigens, even if these "antigens" are from one's own body as is the case with autoimmune diseases when the body attacks itself.

Our body naturally produces very effective mood-altering drugs, in the form of endorphins, which facilitate healing. We can learn how to tap into the body's rich resources by adopting behaviors which promote not only emotional well-being, but also a more disease-free life and increased longevity. Middle Eastern dance is a stress-reducing physical activity that profoundly influences our emotional states, integrating the mind/body connection and deepening our spiritual experiences. By honoring the rich cultural heritages of trance healing traditions, we are brought closer to our authentic selves.

#### Footnote

1. I find it an interesting correlation with the Indian chakra healing theory of the body/mind. Purple is the color of the 7th chakra of the crown, representing Oneness with God, and green is the 4th chakra of the heart, and corresponds to love.

#### Bibliography

- Ali, Aisha. "Dances of Egypt". Video. 1991. Los Angeles, CA. Discs. Associated Research in Arabic Folklore (ARAF).
- Bolat, Latif. Personal interview. October, 1998.
- Felton, David B. "A Personal Perspective in Psychoneuroimmunology" in *Psychoneuroimmunology, 2nd Ed.* New York, NY. Academic Press, Inc.
- Doumato, Eleanor Abdella. *Getting God's Ear: Women, Islam, and Healing in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.* Columbia University Press, New York, NY. 2000.
- Helminski, Camille. *Jewels of Remembrance.* 1996. Putney, VT. Threshold Books.
- Helminski, Kabir. "Returning: The Mevlevi Ensemble". Music CD, intro liner notes. 1994. Brattleboro, VT. Interworld Music Associates.
- Larsen, Sura Gail. Personal communication, 1998.
- Pellerito, Patricia, aka Najwa Al-Qamar. "Trance Cultures of the Middle East". 1997. Copyright pending.
- Pert, Candace B. "Emotion: The Gatekeeper to Performance—the Mind/Body Connection". Video. 1999. Port Chester, NY. National Professional Resources.
- Pert, Candace B. *Molecules of Emotion: The Science Behind Mind-Body Medicine.* 1997. New York, NY. Touchstone Publishers, Simon and Schuster.
- Rabin, Bruce S. *Stress, Immune Function, and Health: The Connection.* 1999. New York, NY. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Roth, Gabrielle. *Maps to Ecstasy.* 1989. San Rafael, California. New World Library.
- Roth, Gabrielle. *Sweat Your Prayers.* 1997. New York, NY. Putnam Special Markets, Penguin Putnam, Inc.
- Roth, Gabrielle. "Secret Egypt". 1995. Video. Mystic Fire Video.

*Katya Faris has been dancing in the traditions of the Middle East for almost 13 years. She received her B.A. in International Studies with a concentration in Cultural Anthropology from Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana. Her interest in Middle Eastern music and dance led her to become the principle dancer of Salaam Music and Dance Ensemble from 1997-1999. Since then she has been conducting independent graduate research in the Anthropology, Near Eastern Studies, Central Eurasian Studies and Folklore/Ethnomusicology Departments at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana; she is applying for graduate programs in the above fields for 2003. Ms. Faris is the director of the IU Middle Eastern Dance Club where she teaches beginning students, as well as mentors new performers. She also heads Katya Faris Productions, an entertainment agency for local dancers to perform in various cultural venues. Ms. Faris' goal is to further the education of Middle Eastern dance by pursuing the ethnography of dance performance.*