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## DANCING FOR THE WORDLY SORT

**By Deena Douara**

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Dana Tai Soon Burgess travels to Pakistan, Bulgaria, and Panama to become a better person and professional. He researches Asian folkloric songs in Peru. He [talks](#) about point-to-point harmony.

Dana Tai Soon Burgess is a dancer, but one more interested in cultural exchange and taking care of his dancers than in hitting the Euro-American hotspots with flamboyant acrobatics.

Burgess is in Egypt with a few members from his modern [dance company](#), DTBS & Co, as a US cultural envoy, training dancers over the course of two weeks in Cairo and Alexandria in his technique and performing for two nights at the [Opera House](#). The trip represents a sort of modern dance homecoming, as Burgess explains that [modern dance](#) took its original inspiration from ancient Egypt.

The early modern [dancers](#) about 100 years ago, including legendary choreographer Ruth St. Denis, were inspired and intrigued by hieroglyphic poses and first sought to emulate them with 2-dimensional stances. Burgess explains that the "rediscovery" of the ancient world, including the Near East and Egypt, came at a time with artists were getting disconnected and disenchanted with the technological revolution of their time and longed instead for spirituality, finding "new ideas of what culture could be."

This fascination with Egypt is evidenced through Denis' "Egypta" production and dancer "Isadora" Duncan, who changed her name to mean "daughter of Isis." While modern dance has evolved into a more fluid expression, Burgess explains that remnants of the original style of modern dance get transmitted through mentorship between dancers.



Photo courtesy of [www.movingforwarddance.com](http://www.movingforwarddance.com)

While Burgess and dancers don't always speak the same language, he says dancers communicate through movement in "another whole language," which can become an even more intimate form of communication.

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"Interaction between cultures is what really feeds me as an artist," says Burgess, who has worked and performed in India, Ecuador, Latvia, Korea, Colombia, and Bulgaria, among other countries. He himself is Spanish and English-speaking, California-born, with a Scottish-Irish-American father and a Korean-American mother.

For Burgess, the cultural exchanges, the "sharing of ideas," truly is an exchange, and one which seems to be both personal and professional. "I have always felt like an intersection of two different worlds." He says he is not much interested in the mainstream Euro-spots but rather, but goes instead to places he doesn't feel he "knows enough about," where he feels there is more opportunity for cultural dialogue.

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What Egyptians communicate through their dancing is telling of their culture. Burgess says people who live within close proximity of each other in an urban environment tend to [dance](#) more quickly and closer to each other than those from rural areas. He noticed, for example, a difference even between dancers in Alexandria, with a slower pace, and in Cairo, who danced more aggressively.

One Cairo dancer and choreographer who participated in the training sessions, Tamer Fathi, said what he appreciated was the DTSB technique, which is healthy on the body, movement efficient, and emphasized head-tail alignment.

Fathi does not think modern dance is appreciated or understood in Egypt. "It's not part of the culture." He explains how the opening night in a large Opera hall for a major modern dance production "El Ghaybuba" saw only 9 attendees. He feels if Egyptians saw good examples though, that they could be wooed over to the free, expressive style that is winning converts across American and European dancers.

Burgess and his company will present an overview of modern dance and excerpts from works choreographed by Burgess at the Creativity Center in the Opera House, June 1 and 2 at 8 pm.



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