



Chelydra

“Dancer With An Attitude”

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“Professional” Is More Than Being Paid

When I was what Amaya (NM) charmingly calls a “baby dancer”, I thought that being a Professional Dancer meant getting paid for performing. None of my teachers or troupe directors made any attempt to disabuse me of that notion.

Over the years, as my skills and repertoire matured, I realized that they should have broached the subject. Being a professional dancer is not in the least about being paid. It is about presenting a an overall performance package that meets a subjective, but nonetheless meaningful, set of standards:

- **Technique**

Your movements should be crisp, clear, and finished, and you should be able to walk gracefully, use your arms confidently, and maintain an elegant body line. You should be able to cleanly layer movements 2-3 isolations deep, and perform your layered combinations comfortably, without obvious tension or stress.

- **Stage presence**

You should be able to present a serene, self-assured appearance, and be able to hold the attention of the audience for the duration of your performance. You should be at ease with the emotions you are expressing, and not feel silly or uncomfortable. Your facial expression should change appropriately with the mood you are presenting, and your focus should vary throughout your dance.

- **Movement repertoire**

You should have enough variety in your repertoire of steps to support the length of your performance without excessive repetition. Your movement repertoire should include stationary isolations, traveling and turning combinations, and level changes. You should be able to adjust the size and scope of your movements to fit the space in which you are performing, without losing the discipline and character of your dance.

- **Musical selection and interpretation**

You should choose your music because it speaks to you on an emotional level. You should understand and be able to identify the rhythms behind the music, and be able to interpret the various moods it presents. You should be dancing because of, and with your music, not using your music as a background accompaniment to a series of steps.

- **Costuming**

Your costume should fit you, and be clean, pressed, and in good repair. All of the pieces should look like they belong together as an ensemble. Your costume should indicate that some time, money, and thought went into its creation.

- **Consistency**

You should put the same effort and energy into every performance, regardless of the venue. Whether you are performing on a concert stage or at a public festival, a family event, or a nursing home, you should apply the same standards of preparation and presentation. There is no such thing as a throwaway performance.

- **Choice of venue**

You should choose your performance venues with care, making sure that your performance will be treated with the respect it deserves, not promoted as a carnival side-show to attract a crowd. Where and how you choose to dance reflects not only upon you, but on all dancers before and after you.

- **Separation of dance and private personas**

You should treat your performance as a business venture, not an opportunity to socialize. This is especially important at intimate venues such as restaurants, where socializing with patrons can blur the line between performer and private individual, and perpetuate the myth of dancer as a loose woman or a prostitute.

A professional dancer takes each and every performance seriously, and strives to maintain a high level of skill and presentation. As you can see, it involves much more than payment for services rendered.