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# Banafsheh



Internationally-acclaimed sacred dancer and choreographer, Banafsheh has blazed a unique trail in contemporary dance "fusing ancient forms with a postmodern punch" (LA Times)." Born in Iran, her electrifying and wholly original dance style embodies the sensuous ecstasy of Persian Dance with the austere rigor of Dervish whirling – and includes elements of Flamenco, Tai Chi, and Gurdjieff Movements. Banafsheh is internationally recognized for her fusion of high-level dance technique with spirituality. Rumi lives through Banafsheh!

Known for her innovative movement vocabulary, Banafsheh comes from a long lineage of pioneering performing artists. Her father, the legendary Iranian filmmaker, theater director and actor, Parviz Sayyad, hailed as the Charlie Chaplin of Iran is the most famous Iranian of his time. Banafsheh is one of the few bearers of the authentic Persian dance form in the world, an innovator of Sufi dance previously only performed by men and a pioneer in a fusion style she has created called Dance of Oneness®. Banafsheh's form is what "for the first time one could call contemporary or modern Persian Dance– a dance with its own artistic language, neither Eastern nor Western. The dance form created by Banafsheh Sayyad can only be called the Banafsheh Dance, representative of Persian culture much like how Flamenco is particular to the Spanish culture..." (prominent Iranian critic, Shokooh Mirzadegi).

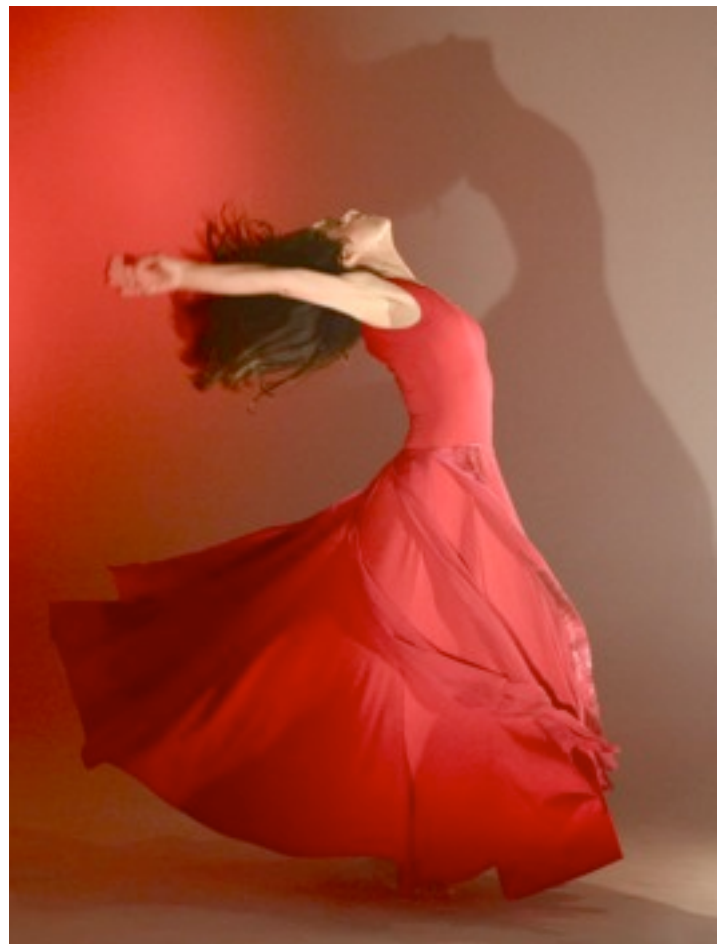
A recipient of the Irvine Foundation Grant in Choreography, Banafsheh holds an MFA in Dance from UCLA where she taught Persian dance. Her solo work as well as ensemble performances with her dance company NAMAHA have been presented extensively in festivals and by presenters in North America, Europe and Australia where she has gained tremendous acclaim. She recently presented the closing night concert at the Festival of Sacred Arts at Teatros Canal in Madrid, and performed and taught Master classes in her residency in the Dance Masters Series at the Dance Center of Columbia College in Chicago. Banafsheh holds annual sacred dance workshops in her second home base of Turkey and tours the world with her performances and teaching residencies.

Banafsheh performs solo dances with recorded or live music with up to 4 musicians from the highly acclaimed Persian/World music ensemble, ZARBANG ([www.zarbang.com](http://www.zarbang.com)).

"Banafsheh is one of the greatest sacred dancers I have seen" - **Deepak Chopra**

"As an embodied mystic of the divine feminine, Banafsheh's presentations are not performances but transmissions which transform your vision of dance forever. Dancer and dance become one initiatory flame of grace" - **Andrew Harvey**

"Part whirling dervish, part flamenco femme fatale, sensuous and audacious, Banafsheh's dance is a mesmerizing foray into the body as trance mechanism; a DNA strand, supple, fluid and noble, come to life." - **Los Angeles Times**



# Programs



Banafsheh performs in a wide variety of venues ranging from proscenium theaters to alternative spaces such as churches, temples and outdoor stages. She performs solo work with the option of 2 - 4 musicians and an orator.

## *Into the Vast*

Banafsheh and ZARBANG's exuberant evening-length work explores the theme of surrendering to the inner being, seated in the temple of the Heart. Contemporary Persian music and dance merge with Flamenco and Sufi ritual in this concert of passionate improvisation. The recitation of Rumi in English interspersed with the original Persian nuance the evening. This program is with 4 musicians, with or without an orator.

## *En/trance*

In this full-evening program, Banafsheh explores the theme of trance as entering into union with the Divine. Based on the ceremony of the Whirling Dervishes, she interprets the 4 stages of the ceremony through dance and spoken word. This program can be presented with recorded music or with 2 - 4 musicians.

## *Eshq – Love's Wild Fire*

Banafsheh offers a dance and live poetry evening with scholar and mystic Andrew Harvey. This full-evening program can be presented with recorded music or with 2 - 4 musicians.

The essence of the Sufi path of love and of Rumi's vision is "Eshq", the Persian word for "love" — the wild passion of love that burns in every cell for the Beloved Creator. Banafsheh and Andrew take the audience on a holy and explosive journey into Eshq through a marriage of Banafsheh's ecstatic dance with Rumi's most poignant texts and Andrew's inspired teachings.

"Banafsheh's dance is a holy ritual, a joy to the spirit and an opening of the heart." - **Marianne Williamson**

"A master performer in action, the quintessential professional in her field not only as a dancer but as an artistic interpreter of Rumi" - **Caroline Myss**



# Outreach



Banafsheh works with presenters to create dynamic educational programs for youth and adults. These programs provide the opportunity for dancers and musicians, non-dancers and musicians, artists, health and education professionals, and members of the community to experience dance and spirituality in a variety of ways. Banafsheh's educational programs have been presented in schools, colleges and universities, museums and cultural centers.

## School Assemblies/Performances

Banafsheh's interactive assemblies and performances provide K-12 students exciting experiences of participating as audience members of a live performance either in the familiar setting of their school or in a theater setting. Programs are combined with historical and cultural information on Persian dance and typically last up to 60 minutes.

## Adult Classes, Workshops and Residencies in Dance of Oneness®

Workshops (3 hrs), Master Classes (1.5 - 2 hrs)  
Extended Residencies of 1 - 2 weeks for a full immersion

A transformational teacher, healer and Licensed Acupuncturist, Banafsheh's workshops are "life changing". Her pioneering program Dance of Oneness® is designed to support our living at our fullest potential through loving our body, our Self, and living as a Messenger of Love. Dance of Oneness® is a new form drawn from a synthesis of Sufi teachings and trance dance, Tai Chi, Persian Dance, Flamenco and Middle Eastern tribal dances. The poetry of Rumi, the Gurdjieff Work, the Chakra system and Chinese Healing Arts form the theoretical groundwork. Dance of Oneness® can be tailored for dancers as well as non-dancers. Banafsheh has taught Dance of Oneness® across North America, Europe, Turkey and Australia.

Topics include:

- Introduction to Dance of Oneness
- Dance of the Chakras (all levels)
- Sufi Dance (all levels)
- The Mystical in Dance: Technique & Choreography (Beg. & Intermediate / Advanced)
- Contemporary Mystical Persian Dance (Beg. & Intermediate / Advanced)
- Rumi and the Way of Ecstasy with Andrew Harvey

## Lecture Demonstrations

Banafsheh and musicians engage in lecture demonstrations in a variety of settings. Topics include Rumi, Sufism, Sufi Dance & Music, Persian Dance and Women in the Middle East

## Pre- and Post-Performance Question & Answer Sessions



# In the Fire of Grace

(Can be screened as part of Outreach Activities)



## Dancing Rumi's Journey of the Soul

A DVD of Dance and Passion

Banafsheh Sayyad and Andrew Harvey

In *IN THE FIRE OF GRACE*, Banafsheh interprets five stages of the soul's archetypal journey to union with the Beloved in movement that marries as Rumi's mystical vision does, the serene peace with the fierce gorgeous passion of the divine. She is accompanied by Andrew Harvey as the voice of Rumi, summoning her deeper into the flames of death and rebirth.

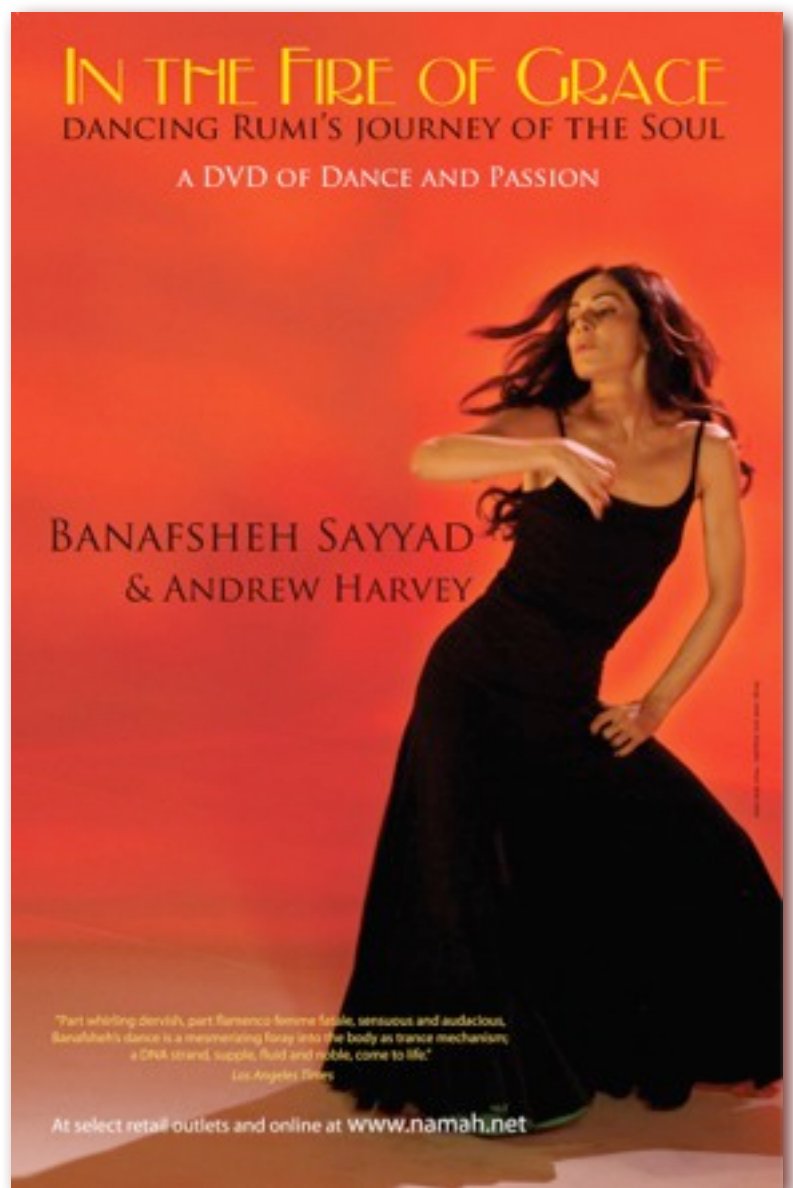
Andrew Harvey is the renowned mystical scholar, Rumi translator, poet, spiritual teacher, writer of over 30 books and architect of Sacred Activism. Harvey's Rumi is a thunderous, poignant Shakespeare of the soul, catching one unaware and making retreat impossible. The dances are illumined by discussions exploring the urgency of Rumi's message to our turbulent world and the devastating, glorious paradoxes of the mystical journey.

Music by ZARBANG, Davoud Azad, Dr. L. Subramaniam, Pejman Hadadi and Babak Sharifi

Special Feature: Interview with Andrew Harvey and Banafsheh Sayyad

Subtitles: Persian and Spanish

Length: Feature - 55 minutes,  
Interview - 30 minutes



"In watching Banafsheh dance, I knew I was witnessing a master performer in action."

**Caroline Myss**

# Selected Engagements



## International

*Residency: Performances & Workshops, Tanzhaus, Dusseldorf (annually 2005 - Present)*

Gallus Theater, Frankfurt, Germany

Gasteig, Munich, Germany

E-Werk, Freiburg, Germany

Kultur Verein, Karlsruhe, Germany

AudiriAx, University of Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany

Musik Halle, Hamburg, Germany

Alte Feuerwache, Cologne, Germany

Odeon Theater, Vienna, Austria

Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, England

University of London, England

Salle Centrale Madeleine, Geneva, Switzerland

Musikhalle, Zurich, Switzerland

Sodra Theater, Stockholm, Sweden

Kulturhuset, Stockholm, Sweden

Lordag, Gothenburg, Sweden

Cosmopolite, Oslo, Norway

Kulturkirken Jakob, Oslo, Norway

Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium

Teatros Canal, Madrid, Spain

Templo Debod, Madrid, Spain

Paruquea del Retiro, Madrid, Spain

Mercat de Les Flors, Barcelona, Spain

Puertas de Castilla, Murcia, Spain

Tropentheater, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Delft Aula TU, Delft, Netherlands

Caerana di San Marco, Treviso, Italy

Teatro San Fedele, Milan, Italy

Centro Culturale Candiani, Venice, Italy

Teatro San Fedele, Milan, Italy

John Bassett Theater, Toronto, Canada

Toronto Performing Arts Center, Toronto, Canada

Jane Mallet Theater, Toronto, Canada

Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

Salle Marie-Gerin Lajoie, Montreal, Canada

University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada

Orpheus Theater SAIT, Calgary, Canada

Milner Library Theater, Edmonton, Canada

Centennial Theater, Vancouver, BC, Canada

Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada

Kaymeek Centre, Vancouver, Canada

Chan Center, UBC, Vancouver, Canada

Capilano College Theater, Vancouver, Canada

Dorothy Winstone Theater, Auckland, New Zealand

University of Technical Science, Sydney, Australia

Karralyka Centre, Melbourne, Australia



# Selected Engagements



## National

*Residency:* Performance & Master Classes, The Dance Center of Columbia College, Chicago  
University of Chicago

Tilles Center for the Performing Arts, New York

Fashion Institute of Technology, New York City

Alwan Center for the Arts, New York City

Redcat Theater, Disney Hall, Los Angeles

UCLA Dance Department, Los Angeles

LA County Museum of Art, Los Angeles

Henry Fonda Theater, Hollywood, CA

Los Angeles Theater Center, Los Angeles

Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, CA

Torrance Cultural Center, Torrance, CA

Huntington Beach Library Theater, Huntington Beach, CA

Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco, CA

San Mateo College, San Mateo, CA

California State University Fresno, CA

Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA

Neuroscience Institute, San Diego, CA

Cambridge Multicultural Arts Center, Boston, MA

Brigham Young University, Utah

Eisemann Center, Dallas, Texas

Madonna University, Detroit, MI

Conant Center, Atlanta, Georgia

Museum of History & Industry, Seattle, WA

Hollywood Performing Arts Center, Maimi, FL

Knights Center, University of Miami, Miami, FL

Centro Austriano, Tampa, FL

West Charleston Performing Arts Center, Las Vegas

Old Dominican University, Norfolk, VA

Post Theater, Atlanta, GA

Glen Echo Dance Complex, Maryland

## Special Appearances

ABC Home with Deepak Chopra, New York City

Saban Theater with Marianne Williamson, Los Angeles

Esalen Institute, Big Sur, CA

Kripalu Center with Coleman Barks, Lennox, MA

Sacred Art of Living and Dying, Bend, Oregon



# Critical Acclaim



"If the television show, "Are You Hot?" had a fraction of the heat that choreographer-dancer Banafsheh generated at Japan America Theater, the show would have been a hit. Talk about sensual: Iranian-born, locally based Banafsheh, a purveyor of trance dancing and unabashed hair tossing, presented "En/trance", two hours of exotic music and dance that fused ancient forms with postmodern punch. Banafsheh continuously brought down the packed house with theatrical flair. The flowing chiffon and velvet harem-like costumes - including veils that would make Salome jealous - helped amp up the startlingly beautiful whirling dervish moves."

**Los Angeles Times**

"... ZARBANG built a richly coloured surface for the many-faced dance of Banafsheh who has the ability to combine different traditional roots to create one expression of dance. Her uniquely fluid and supple hands and arm movements fit perfectly to the crystal clear and transparent sounds of the Santur."

**Badische Zeitung, Germany**

"A group of performers who challenge stereotypes about Iranian identity, ZARBANG and Banafsheh's work is entertaining and revolutionary, both."

**Hadani Ditmars, Vancouver Sun**

"Prayer #7, a breathtaking trance dance would be right at home in a modern dance concert. The dancers spiraled in tandem and around one another, expanding and contracting space. Though never touching, the dancers stayed in touch - with one another and some force that propelled them. Banafsheh's solo, Axis of Love impressed because of her pure and transparent response to the music as performed by the fabulous ZARBANG."

**SF Bay Guardian**

"The perfect way to open ritual aspects of Persian dance to a wider audience while preserving the sense of participating in something sacred."

**LA Weekly**

"Banafsheh has mastered the lore of traditional Persian, flamenco & tai chi movement."

**Los Angeles Times**

"Banafsheh, a font of exquisite perpetual motion, is a temple frieze come to life, a one-woman whirling dervish, trance spinning to a glorious percussive track by Pejman Hadadi as she beckons us into her exotic world."

**Los Angeles Times**





# Critical Acclaim



"In her bravura improvisational solo 'Search', Banafsheh gloried in her hard-won technical prowess: initially swirling a translucent veil in complex patterns as she whirled, then lashing her hair rhythmically, next striking deeply sculpted flamenco poses accented with bursts of authoritative footwork and finishing with bold, mercurial undulations sustained by a spectacular command of balance."

**Los Angeles Times**

"Banafsheh's trance dance was mind-blowing. She whirled as if possessed."

**Los Angeles Times**

"Beneath the Veil's polished production design successfully celebrates the very culture whose excesses it skewers, thanks to the choreography by Banafsheh."

**LA Weekly**

"Director Jon Lawrence Rivera creates an electric ambience in Beneath the Veil, including sublime design elements and splendid dance sequences to a drumbeat, choreographed and performed by Banafsheh."

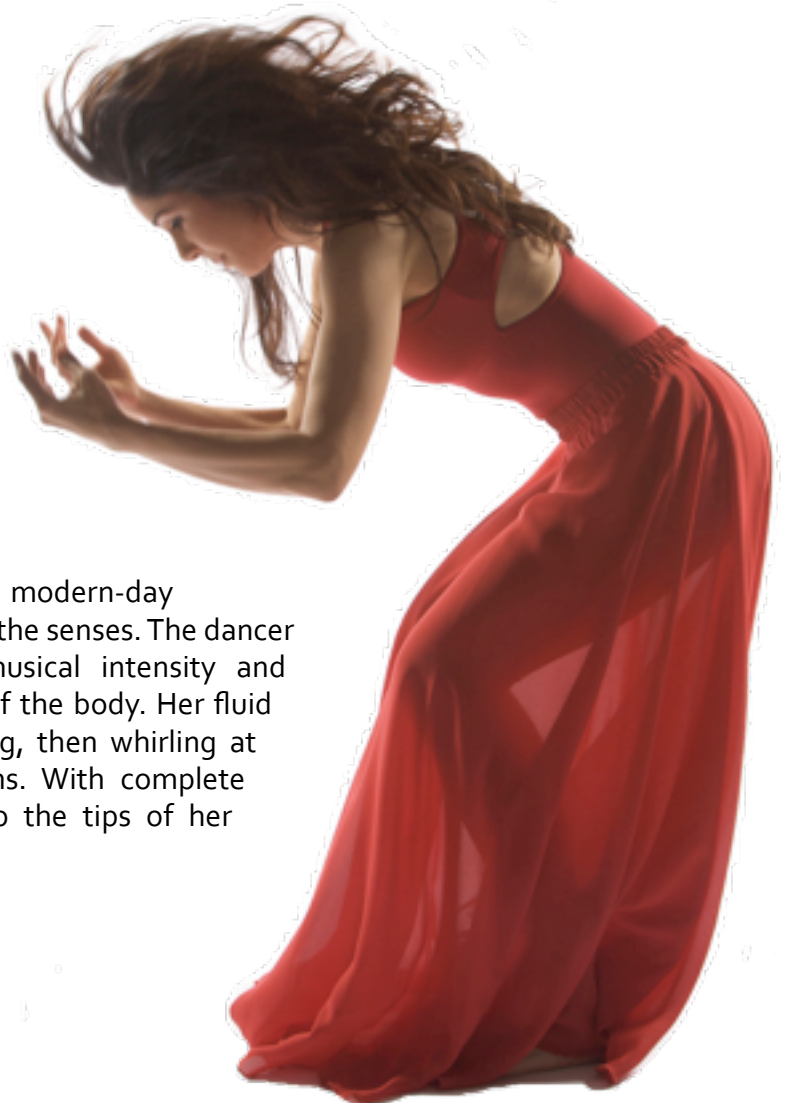
**Los Angeles Backstage West, Critic's Pick**

"The highlight of the night was Banafsheh ... amazing to watch ... she moved fluidly enough to be part of the music, depicting the ultimate Persian woman ... moving perfectly in circles for three minutes without a flaw. Like the whirling dervishes of Sufism she spun in a trance to reach the point of perfect meditation."

**Red Magazine, Salt Lake City**

"The fascinating dance and sounds of Persia, the modern-day Iran, transformed the concert hall to a landscape for the senses. The dancer and choreographer, Banafsheh translated the musical intensity and intricate nuances of ZARBANG with the language of the body. Her fluid movements in constant dynamism, at time floating, then whirling at high speed, opened our sights to new dimensions. With complete mastery of her body, she exuded power down to the tips of her fingers."

**Badische Zeitung, Germany**



# Critical Acclaim



“From the very beginning of Banafsheh’s performance, I realized that we are faced with something entirely different and distinctive from what has commonly been called Persian Dance. Banafsheh’s dance was not only a highly artistic and virtuosic work both in terms of choreography and execution, but also for the first time I was witnessing a dance that one could call contemporary or modern Persian Dance – a dance with its own artistic language, neither Eastern like Arabic, Indian and Chinese, nor Western as in Flamenco, Modern European. This is a dance close to the essence of Persian culture with harmonious movement, insight, and deep connection to the music and above all, beautiful. The dance form created by Banafsheh Sayyad can be called the Banafsheh Dance. Much like how Lezgi Dance is reminiscent of Azeri culture or Flamenco is particular to Spain, Banafsheh Dance can be representative of Persian culture. Banafsheh Dance has another beauty, which comes from being borne in a period where dance is forbidden in our country. In essence, Banafsheh Dance is a heartfelt expression of our cultural and artistic needs that have been long oppressed. Luckily, unlike most of our modern music, both inside or outside of Iran, Banafsheh Dance is not backwards and regressive artistically, it is actually advancing on the path of becoming international.”

**Shokooh Mirzadegi, A Woman’s View**



# Review

**EL PAÍS** edición impresa



Review of Banafsheh's live performance *Into the Vast* in Madrid, Spain on March 15, 2011, featured in Spain's leading newspaper, *El País*

## **Voyage of Separation of Soul from Body**

The dance performance *Into the Vast* invokes the hypnotic essence of Persian dance

By **MIGUEL PÉREZ MARTÍN** 3/16/11

Presence, trance, surrendering to hypnotic tribal music, were all elements of the intricate performance created by Persian dancer Banafsheh, the Persian percussionists of ZARBANG and Greek musician Matthaïos Tsaourides for the closing night of the Festival of Sacred Arts at Teatros del Canal in Madrid. *Into the Vast* is much more than an hour and a half of entertainment. It is a voyage rich with feeling that surpasses all common sense to demonstrate the separation of soul from body, just as Turkish Dervishes do when they whirl to enter into trance.



**Blue Dress: The Invocation of the Divine.** Banafsheh dances softly to the rhythm of the water drum, her arms moving in hypnotic slow motion up towards the sky. Each movement is intensely meaningful as if calculated to the smallest millimeter, as a voice claims in Persian and then in English, the poetry of Jalāl-e-Din Rumi: 'I cried, oh my hypnotised heart, where are you going? Silence, said the Emperor. She comes towards us'. Sayyad, accompanied by the lament of the Greek Pontic Lyra of Tsaourides, realizes her inner voyage to abandon her body. After her gradual departure, the musician enter into improvisation gradually building towards a climax.

**Black Dress: Abandoning the Body.** Banafsheh dresses in dark and frill to dance to the rhythm of the Flamenco Cajón, without abandoning the gracefully subtle movements of Persian dance. At this time, she asks herself: 'When will I acknowledge my own divinity?' This is not a replica of traditional Persian dances; it is an innovative fusing of the tribal, the ancestral, and the modern. The years of devotion to contemporary Persian dance are apparent in her movements and gestures which have earned her great recognition in North America, Europe and Australia. In the background, the musicians start to join in the trance and surrender as the dancer whirls with her long mane floating in the air. The music transports us to the plains and the deserts, to the wind that blows between the sand dunes, and the Pontic Lyra carries hints from Baroque Masters and Balkan songs.

**White Dress: The Joy and the Glory.** The music accelerates and Banafsheh, in white, and a red veil in her hands, is out of her body. The instruments travel through different genres of music: from dervish mysticism to tribal rhythms, from savage to Bulería. Banafsheh dances with heartfelt bewilder - as she has also

studied Flamenco - to arrive at an earthy dance with legs in wide stance, and from there, onward to her endless whirling. She loses her face between her voluptuous manes and hits her chest as she dances without stopping. The audience has now been driven crazy and do not resist to move their heads, shake, and break into a clapping rhythm while the music accelerates and the trance is converted into a shared climax throughout the concert hall. All the way from the balcony to the orchestra, the audience follows the rhythms with their feet, rotating their heads in circles and whistling. The music comes to a robust stop and the lights go up: the soul, that had escaped from the body, now returns. The bliss of the voyage converts into unstoppable applause.

spotlight



# Banafsheh

BY FELICIA M. TOMASKO

Master of mystical Persian dance, when Banafsheh teaches or performs, she moves with an attitude of liquid gold pouring over silk velvet. Banafsheh embodies what it means to dance with abandon, what it means to fully live the ecstatic poetry of Rumi, of luminous moonlight on radiant silver clouds. Watching her dance is to glimpse something both otherworldly as well as fully grounded in the momentous meaning of the present.

For Banafsheh, dance is a connection with the divine, with the infinite, and is an expression of oneness with the universe through this artistic language. To create the soundtrack for her practice, she often collaborates with skilled sacred musicians, including the heartfelt Tony Khalife.

Banafsheh and her friend and colleague, Andrew Harvey, the mystic who frequently writes and speaks on sacred activism, the poetic words of Rumi, and the path of the sacred, together created a DVD called *In the Fire and Grace*. She spoke to LA YOGA while still unpacking from her recent trip to Turkey, where she led the retreat: *Dance of Oneness, Upward Spiral of Love*.

**Felicia Marie Tomasko:** When you dance, what do you call upon for inspiration?

**Banafsheh:** I call upon the Beloved, which in essence is all-that-is, so everything inspires me to dance. I dance to become empty, exorcising myself of emotional buildups, so that the Divine music can play through me. Rumi likens the human body to the ney or the reed flute. He says, "We have two mouths like the ney, one mouth is hidden in the lips of the Beloved."

**FMT:** How do you connect with music when you dance?

**B:** I become the music. Sometimes, I feel I am one of the instruments in the orchestra, other times I am the whole orchestra.

**FMT:** How do you connect with music as a performer and as a teacher?

**B:** As a performer, I echo the music and feel moved by it, especially when I improvise with musicians where we create in the now as a group channel for Divine music. As a teacher, the music is sometimes the source of choreography and other times I begin with a choreography I want to teach, then I choose the piece of music based on the sequence. In my classes I use music to open people's hearts, wanting for them to connect deeply with themselves, with the dance, and with others.

**FMT:** What was the impetus for creating the DVD: *In the Grace of Fire*?

**B:** I have been performing and touring since 1999 and have an extensive archive of concert footage, which I have never released to the public despite the great urging from my audiences. Shortly after I began teaching and performing with my dear friend and colleague, Andrew Harvey, he urged me to create a DVD of our work together. From this kind of presentation, I could see a real value emerging. I see my work and offering as an invitation to all, especially women, to break through resistance and express themselves fully, as has been my own journey as a Middle Eastern woman finding herself in dance – one of the most tabooed public activities in the region.



**FMT:** What makes *In the Grace of Fire* different from your live performances?

**B:** There is no live audience: It's literally me and the Divine. Having not had much experience with dancing purely for recording, I approached the filming experience like a dance with the Divine. I performed the dances from beginning to end without stopping and repeated them a number of times.

**FMT:** What has been the response to the DVD thus far?

**B:** The response I have received is much more than I had hoped. People feel inspired by the invitation to embody the Transcendent fully: in both peace and passion as outlined in the five stages of the path in the DVD. People tell me that seeing this helps them to live knowing that everything that happens in our lives is an act of Grace, or in other words, to live love.

**FMT:** Speak about your collaboration with both Rumi and Andrew Harvey.

**B:** The poet Rumi has always been my spiri-

tual guide and teacher. He brought Andrew and I together at Kripalu in 2007, when we began teaching and performing the five stages of the spiritual path as set forth by Rumi – The Call, Falling in Love, The Dark Night, Union, and Living as the Lover. Collaborating with Andrew has been an amazing journey as he so passionately and utterly has given all of himself to our offering, supporting me so completely along the way and encouraging me to take flight.

**FMT:** How does your study of Chinese Medicine and healing connect with your work in music and dance?

**B:** I approach dance and music as a way to heal, to become whole. Chinese medicine teaches us about the management of our energy, the meridians being like our energy flow channels and focal points. My teaching is in part based on meridian energy flow, and I have also developed movements for each of the seven bodily chakras. I dance with the intention of being open to that vast field of healing, and

by embodying myself fully in each moment – thus being empty to channel light, love, and grace.

**FMT:** How does Yoga connect to dancing for you?

**B:** The process of calling on the Beloved, being open to heal and to be divine, be the Oneness through dance – is a kind of Yoga. In this manner, Yoga and dance for me are connected processes in that they both develop and prepare the body to be a channel for light and love in the world, and one is essential and integral to the other.

Banafsheh teaches regularly in her current home city of Los Angeles as well as throughout the world.

For more information on *In the Fire of Grace*, Banafsheh's teaching, performance, and retreat schedule, as well as her certification in Dance of Oneness®, visit: [Namah.net](http://Namah.net)

Felicia M. Tomasko is the Editor-in-Chief of LA Yoga.



# Sufi Dance



Dance as a sacred practice is a meditation in movement that is peaceful, liberating and passionate, integrating all aspects of ourselves, both the spiritual and the sensual. It's a way to embody ourselves fully in the NOW, transforming what keeps us small, broken and limited to greatness, wholeness and vastness on a level that both surpasses the mind and informs it simultaneously. It is a letting go of the unnecessary that bares us down to our essence, a shedding of the veils that keep us from experiencing what it really means to be alive. And what it really means to be alive says the Dalai Lama is to "embody the transcendent" - living the infinite in the finite day to day life - in all aspects of my life.

The sacred Sufi dance of Sema or whirling as practiced by the Whirling Dervishes is a journey to embody the transcendent. Sema which literally means to listen is a meditation in letting the chaos of the voices in our head quieten down so we can listen to the voice of the Beloved in our heart. The ceremony of the Sema consists of seven sections, replete with great meaning and deep symbolism. The fifth section which is the actual whirling portion of the ceremony maps out a complete spiritual path in four part known as salutes or Selams. The first salute is the complete recognition of the whirler or Semazen of the existence of the Creator - the testimony that YES the universe has divine origin and not only have I been simply created but created in the image of the Creator. The second salute expresses the Semazen's recognition of the Creator within all that is created, namely seeing the holiness in all people and all of nature leading to a sense of reverence for all. The third salute is the annihilation of the self in the Beloved Creator. It is union, synonymous with the highest station in Buddhism known as Nirvana. Interestingly, the more one sees the holiness in others and in nature and feels reverent towards the created, the deeper annihilation, the truer the union with the Beloved.

The beauty of the path as outlined by the Sema is that it doesn't end with union, but goes further. The fourth salute expresses service. True embodiment of the transcendent is to serve the Beloved in the world, to help others reach their highest potential. With the right palm reaching up in an outstretched arm, the Semazen receives the light of grace descending down to her heart which then she gives to the world through love reaching out from the facing down palm of her left outstretched arm ... receiving and giving love.



Traditionally Sufi dance has been primarily a male dominant expression. Banafsheh is one of the few women who has innovated the tradition and performs and teaches Sufi dance. Her innovation is not only in the fact that she is a woman dancing the form, but she has also innovated the vocabulary of the form. She is welcomed in Turkey as a leading master of the form whereas in her own native country of Iran, women's dancing in public is banned all together.



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