

A bride, a groom, a belly dancer

Margate native Soraya El-Khouby has performed belly dances at weddings all over the world

BY DAVE ENSCOE



There are so many things to consider when planning a wedding: the invitations, the gown, the flowers, the menu, the belly dancer. The belly dancer? OK, not every couple wants a belly dancer at their reception, but for those who do, Soraya El-Khouby is ready, willing and more than able. She's been practicing the ancient art of belly dancing since she was 4 years old. She's performed at Atlantic City casino nightclubs since she was a teenager and her unusual talent has taken her all over the world, including Casablanca, where she danced for the King of Morocco.

Over the years she has also performed at hundreds of weddings.

"I focus on Egyptian, Lebanese and Moroccan weddings," Soraya says. "They're usually at casinos and banquet halls. I've done weddings at the Ram's Head Inn and hotels in Philadelphia, Cherry Hill."

While Soraya is of Syrian descent, she had a fairly typical South Jersey upbringing. She grew up in Margate, graduated from Atlantic City High School and earned a degree in cultural anthropology and sociology at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. She's been married for seven years to a doctor who, she says, is very supportive of her career.

But belly dancing was always her first love. Shortly after she finished college she formed her own company, Soraya's Mid-East Dance and Music Productions, which provides entertainment for casino events and banquets as well as weddings.

"I have a lot of personal and professional expertise in creating upscale party and exotic wedding receptions whenever Arabian nights entertainment or event design is needed," says Soraya, who is also a vocalist who sings in English and Arabic. "I provide bands and DJs who play trance



(1) Soraya poses with the bride at an Egyptian wedding, (2) performs a belly dance during a Lebanese wedding and (3) dances with the flower girl at the same wedding. "My belly dancing show is so family friendly that I brought a little girl into the act and showed her a few moves to the delight of the audience," she says.

and techno as well as traditional Arabic songs and pop music, which is very popular in Egypt now.

"If decor is needed, I can create the look of the ancient Egyptian pyramids amid the misty Nile with the exotic feeling to truly transport my clients and their guests into a realm of a gorgeous, unforgettable "Arabian Night" full of history, mystery, magic,

folklore and culture. I also work with Middle Eastern caterers."

For her performances Soraya wears authentic garb that she designs herself and has custom made in Egypt.

"I have a lot of beading, coins, flowing fabrics and sequins," she says.

A self-taught belly dancer, Soraya says her dancing is a

- continued on page 30

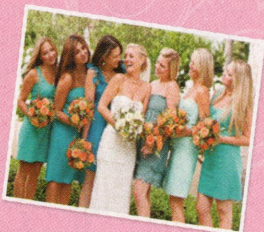
Making Memories

IS OUR SPECIALTY!



HENRY'S

Your Bridal Party Headquarters



- Unique gifts for the Bride
- Mother of the Bride
- Bridesmaids & Attendants

1236 Boardwalk • Ocean City, NJ
609-398-4238 • HenrysOC.com



HENRY'S

407 Washington Street Mall
Cape May, NJ • 609-884-0334

MAKE YOUR EVENT EVEN MORE MEMORABLE WITH

BOARDWALK Photo Booth Rentals

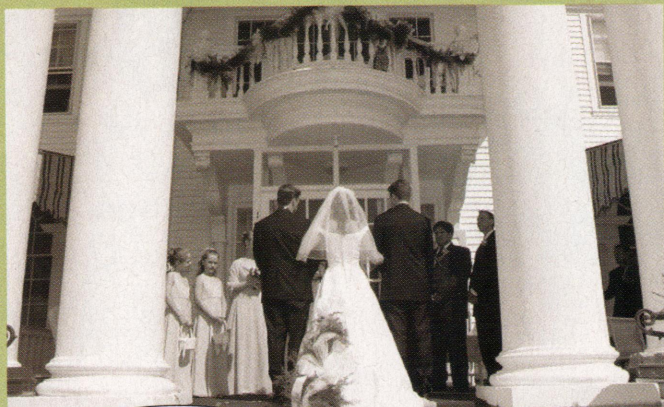


WEDDINGS • SWEET 16's
CORPORATE FUNCTIONS
FUNDRAISING GALAS
ALL CELEBRATIONS

609-742-4110

www.boardwalkphotoboothrentals.com

Email: info@boardwalkphotoboothrentals.com



psi love you
Peter Shields Weddings

Photography: Tim Joyce

Peter Shields Inn & Restaurant masters the art of wedding bliss

Ceremony settings include our magnificent beach, beautiful front lawn or indoors on our traditional grand staircase

The Peter Shields Inn & Restaurant offers Zagat recommended, fine dining with impeccable service

Our expert wedding planner will assist you with an intimate affair for 20 or a larger reception of up to 120 guests


This beachfront, Georgian Revival mansion offers nine romantic guest rooms. More than 100 additional accommodations are available for your guests just steps away on Beach Avenue



1301 Beach Avenue
Cape May, NJ 08204
609.884.9090
petershieldsinn.com

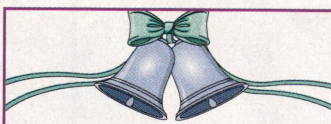


Go to the chapel in style!
Wedding Trolleys®



GREAT AMERICAN TROLLEY COMPANY, INC.
 Jeanne Flitcraft
 Wedding Coordinator

800.4.TROLLEY
 800.487.6559
 609.884.0450
 www.gatrolley.com
 Email: weddingtrolleys@yahoo.com



ABC's of Love

**Ceremonies
 by Divine Design**

Rev. Elizabeth McGlinn
609-335-5503

COMFORT REACHES NEW HEIGHTS

Angela Nuran Shoes



- Pillow Top Comfort for All Day Wear
- Soft, Flexible, Non-Slip Suede Soles
- Adjustable Toe & Ankle Strap To Fit Any Foot
- 2 1/2" to 4 1/4" heels

Bella Mi
 @THE STUDIO

By Appointment Only
 Call Kathy Bucknam 609.576.3660
 www.bellamiathestudio.com
 bellamiathestudio@gmail.com

WEDDINGS
 PROMS • GALAS
 SPECIAL EVENTS



Ultra Comfortable,
 Elegant & Sexy

Located Inside Mazzeo Studio 111 S. Egg Harbor Rd. Hammonton, NJ 08037

- Belly Dancer, continued from page 29

"I have a lot of personal and professional expertise in creating upscale party and exotic wedding receptions whenever Arabian nights entertainment or event design is needed."

- Soraya

combination of traditional folk and belly dancing of the Middle East and other parts of the Mediterranean such as Egypt and Morocco.

"I take my favorite parts and give it a modern flair while never debasing the true artistic vibe," she says.



Soraya says most of her weddings include a ceremony known as Zaffa, an ancient wedding march performed to an Egyptian drum rhythm.

"I perform Zaffa before the event begins to announce the bride and groom and wedding party to the guests," she says. "It's a ritualistic Egyptian tradition that is also used by the Lebanese and Moroccans, whether they're Muslim, Christian or Jewish. It's a non religious celebration of the bride and groom."

Later in the evening, Soraya will perform a more traditional belly dance.

"I always try to be conservative at weddings," she says. My costumes are less revealing. The brides like it because it's very family oriented."

While many of Soraya's wedding performances are


RAM'S HEAD INN
 Elegant Weddings, Exclusively Yours

9 West White Horse Pike • Galloway, NJ 08205 • 609-652-1700
 www.RamsHeadInn.com

wedding cakes by

The Bake Works

celebration cakes
 favors, cupcakes
 shower cakes
 seating charts
 cake balls...



1205 Tilton Rd
 Northfield, NJ
 407.6000

www.thebakeworks.com

Middle Eastern or Mediterranean themed, she occasionally dances at traditional American style ceremonies.

"My shows are perfect for people of all ages and ethnicities," she says. "A lot of the weddings are mixed marriages with two sides of the family from different religious denominations. There will be a Middle Eastern side and an Irish side. And most of the people on the Irish side will be seeing belly dancing for the first time."

Soraya is also committed to erasing stereotypes about belly dancing.

"Belly dancing is very misunderstood," she says. "Sometimes people think it's like stripping. It is not. It's an ancient, cultural art form, and I will never turn it into something it's not. I try not to Westernize my work or take it

out of context, which can turn the belly dancing into a disjointed circus side show or in bad taste. It's not going to be done in a way that might upset grandma."

For more information on Soraya visit bellydancebysoraya.com, youtube.com/NJBellyDanceEvents or twitter.com/SorayaAgency



ONE ATLANTIC

CATERING
EVENTS
WEDDINGS

609.343.9902
www.oneatlanticevents.com

Quality Jewelry at Affordable Prices



We Carry a Large Selection of Wedding and Special Occasion Jewelry

PALACE DIAMONDS

◆ Your Local Family Jeweler for Over 50 Years! ◆

Jeweler on Premises • Custom Made Jewelry

609-645-8251

ENGLISH CREEK SHOPPING CENTER | 3003 BLACK HORSE PIKE | E.H.T.



Golden Inn

2013 PICK
the knot
best of
weddings

*The Brides
Have Spoken...*

Start planning your dream wedding at the beach that was rated #5 in the U.S. for beach destination weddings.

All-Inclusive Packages starting at
\$100 per person

For more information contact

Michael Emens | emens@goldeninn.com

BEVERLY CLARK
CERTIFIED WEDDING
PROFESSIONAL

(609) 967-2129 • goldeninn.com

Oceanfront @ 78th Street, Avalon, NJ

