Cecilia Medeiros, whose stage name is Samar, demonstrates how to unwrap a veil during a belly dancing class she teaches at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette.

"The tradition is to get on the table. Middle Eastern audiences expect you to get on the table. You spill the drinks, and both the men and women throw money at you."

— Cecilia Medeiros, dance instructor

Bragg discovered it was both, but she also discovered that belly dancing is impossible to master in only two months.

"I did it strictly for exercise — it's fantastic for the abs — but I wouldn't dare do this in public," said Bragg. She said she'll probably go back for an intermediate class if Medeiros offers it in the fall.

Medeiros' journey to Lafayette began when she met an oil company employee in Brazil. She married the Louisiana native and moved to Lafayette.

Medeiros learned to dance starting as a 7-year-old child, watching Gypsies in her hometown of Rio de Janeiro.

The Gypsy women, she said, "put more of a Latin twist into it" as they danced and read palms for money around the town square.

Belly dancing, explained Medeiros, consists of many styles usually noted by country of origin. South American Gypsy belly dancing is more similar to the sensuous Brazilian Lambada or the rumba.

The more traditional, commonly recognized belly dancing is usually the Egyptian style.

Bragg said she found the music, which Medeiros recommended that students buy to practice with at home, defined the type of dancing.

Arabic, for example, is "slow and foreign," but Lebanese is upbeat and much more pleasant to dance to.

"People think belly dancing is just standing there wiggling but they're totally wrong, it's much more," said Kay Clark, a 41-year-old student of Medeiros' spring class. Clark said half the students were college-age, and the other half were women about her age.

Most were there for the exercise. Clark attended belly dancing seminars and found that the best belly dancers — the ones, for example, who can flip coins up and down their stomachs — are 40-50 years old "because it takes that long to learn."

Medeiros teaches the history of the dance in her sessions. Clark said she learned that belly dancing has been around since Cleopatra's time.

"There is a certain aura that you as an individual bring into it. It can be a very sensual dance," Medeiros said.

Dancing professionally under the stage name Samar (Lebanese for summer), Medeiros prefers to perform for Middle Eastern audiences, which she said are more sophisticated and knowledgeable about belly dancing.

"The tradition is to get on the table. "Middle Eastern audiences expect you to get on the table," Medeiros said.

"You spill the drinks, and both the men and women throw money at you."

For information on lessons or belly dancing engagements, Medeiros may be reached at 295-2378.