

SCENES

BELLY DANCING has a bad image, there's no doubt about it. At best, it's just background entertainment to enhance the authenticity of a Greek restaurant; at worst it's a stag-film euphemism for whore, much like "French model." The field is loaded with no-talent bump-and-grinders.

Morocco has been trying to make the dance form legit and respectable for some time; "I figure even the guys who come to slaver and leer can be made to enjoy tasteful Mideastern dancing if it's well done. The human body moving gracefully is always going to be sensuous, so there's no need to add burlesque touches to make the performance sexy."

She performs mostly in night-clubs, where she has to fight to keep her self-respect and make the audience take her art form seriously, but feels she's usually successful. "I always give a rap about belly dancing being a beautiful art form, an ethnic folk dance with religious significance. Belly dancing has sexist connotations, but it was originally performed as a verification of women's importance. The rolling motion of the hips and stomach is imitative of the contractions of childbirth, and the whole commu-

nity, men and women, danced to assure a successful harvest and acknowledge women as the source of all life. Victorian morals perverted the original meaning, and now the only women in the Arab world who perform the dance are prostitutes. That's why belly dancing has become synonymous with seamy sex and strippers."

Morocco says that preceding her dance with this little explanation has yet to turn customers off. She wants to spread the word that belly dancing outside its customary raunchy habitat is beautiful, and has just received a grant from the state-funded Creative Artist Public Service Council to do so.

Meanwhile, between club dates, Morocco performs at political benefits and is becoming a regular on the artist-activist scene, especially around SoHo. Last week she gave a free performance at the Kitchen, a multimedia theatre on Mercer Street in back of the Broadway Central Hotel. It was such a success that she'll be giving an encore February 28 at 8.30., this time right next door in a setting that would seem even less congenial to the belly; dancing—stereotype—the Mercer Cabaret, a small gallery and jazz club at 240 Mercer Street, best known for its late-late jam sessions