



The Adventures of Baksana Renaissance Faire 2026 Program Notes

Introduction:

Baksana Ensemble presents 4 original episodic sets at Renaissance Faire performances, in a hybrid historical/modern fashion. While much of our music and dance is rooted in folk stylizations from Egypt, Turkey, the Levant and the Balkans, we'd like to mention 3 important things. 1. Many of these dances are living, culturally specific, creative expressions that have adapted over time and continue to do so. We are "harkening back" but also looking to the present and future of these art forms. 2. Baksana has respectfully adapted elements for stage presentation and we acknowledge and honor that many of these dances are done at community celebrations. Not all are "performed" in their original contexts and have become modernized as stage performance styles over time. 3. See our list of teachers and resources at the end of this program...

Ensemble Performers:

Bevin Victoria: Composer, Narrator, Vocals, Davul, Derbekki, Finger Cymbals, Dance
Carla Michelle: Kaşıklar, Accordion, Derbekki, Frame Drum, Finger Cymbals, Dance
Danielle Elizabeth: Director, Mandolin, Riqq, Davul, Derbekki, Finger Cymbals, Dance
Elise Morris: Davul, Riqq, Frame Drum, Dance
Kaya Hellman: Composer, Derbekki, Accordion, Melodica, Davul
Makēda Gershenson: Viola, Derbekki, Frame Drum, Finger Cymbals, Dance
Morgan Fay: Violin, Davul, Riqq, Finger Cymbals, Dance
Ryan Pletcher: Trombone, Frame Drum
Special Guests: Kristen Lavavej (frame drum, finger cymbals, dance) & Kyle Briar (Melodica, Trombone)

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Overall Episode Notes

- **The Enchanted Drum:** So much happens at the eclectic, sprawling marketplaces. Trade & commerce as well as other types of excitement and serendipitous meetings... you never know what magic you might find amongst the stalls and halls! This story is about how Baksana “happened” upon a magical drum that needed just the right energy to unlock its gifts. Story written by Danielle Elizabeth.
- **Pen Pals:** At Renaissance Faires, Baksana envisions ourselves as emissary entertainers, employed and sent by the Sultana to woo and impress foreign courts into giving the Sultana what she wants. BUT - Did you know that Safiye Sultana and Queen Elizabeth ACTUALLY wrote each other letters in real life?! It's true! History provides receipts of correspondence, some directly political and some more casual, between the two royals. This story is an example of their friendly discourse, as well as a reminder that Political leaders are still as absurd today as they always have been, and so is the rat-race they have us all running. Story written by Morgan Fay.
- **The Crossing:** There was much trade and travel throughout the lands occupied by the Ottoman Empire (boo, empires), which during the European Renaissance encompassed areas from the borders of Iran, throughout the Balkans, the Mediterranean and North Africa - all the way to Morocco. For this mission, Baksana is carrying special trade from England, courtesy of Queen Elizabeth and needs to cross diverse terrain and defeat a fearsome foe to deliver gossip and packages to the Sultana in Constantinople. They get a little turned around along the way, but when faced with adversity on the path of life we firmly believe that community support will get us through! Story written by Kaya Hellman.
- **D'Nile:** After defeating the Desert Guardian, Baksana is almost home, but still has to sail up the Nile and deliver the gift from Queen Elizabeth into the hands of the Sultana. Chaos ensues aboard a Falluca, Egyptian river-boat, and they must overcome a clumsy catastrophe in order to complete their mission. Come spend time with the flora and fauna of the Nile valley, and see how the language of music and dance touches the hearts of all. Story written by Elise Morris

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Individual Pieces:

Baksana Dance Vocabulary Improvisation (*seen in The Enchanted Drum and D’Nile*): In 2013 Baksana Director Danielle Elizabeth began work on a group improvisational format of dance phrases that could be put into any order on the spot to create unique and fun dances. No performance of Baksana Dance Vocabulary is exactly the same twice! The dance movements come primarily from Egyptian Raqs Sharqi (Raqs Sharqi - “dance of the east”) and Turkish Oriental (Turkish expressions of Raqs Sharqi) dance styles. The dance combinations are paired with mini-compositions of dynamic finger cymbals that support and accent the movements. Over the years, other members of Baksana have contributed to the vocabulary. Often in our sets, we dance to an improvised rotation of Arabic rhythms on drums. To learn more and take our trainings, visit: <https://baksanaensemble.com/bduonline/>

Baksana Theme Song (*seen in every set!*): Inspired by bardic storytelling through song, with a touch of contemporary musical theater. It is a fantastical introduction of a traveling band of musicians and dancers. Audiences are welcome to sing along! Music by Bevin Victoria, co-choreographed by the ensemble.

Dabke (*seen in Enchanted Drum*): This is a line dance found throughout the countries of Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Jordan. Often accompanied by big bass drums called Tabla Beladi. Each region has unique stylizations. People hold hands or arms and keep rhythm with their stomping feet. Sometimes the leader of the line will dance more acrobatically with jumps, kicks, and getting low to the ground. Often scarves, sticks, or beads are twirled as well. It is a dance of celebration and joy, and also a dance of resistance and mourning. Representing the strong, community-oriented, resilient spirit of the people. Music by Bevin Victoria. Choreography by Carla Choleo.

REFERENCES:

<https://youtu.be/KqCePDdPGQk>

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=IHEPgQ_po2Q&feature=youtu.be

https://youtu.be/ZO_a8vHWq40



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Individual Pieces

Falluca Party (*seen in D’Nile*): A falluca is a style of Egyptian river-boat that commonly sails the Nile. The ensemble finds themselves upon such a vessel and showcases assaya (stick), pot-balancing and baladi style dancing found throughout the valley. Music by Bevin Victoria. Choreography by ensemble members. Arranged by Elise Morris.

Mesheh Iteru (*seen in D’Nile*): An ode to the Nile’s most classic and revered creature, the crocodile, or “msh/mesheh” in the Kemetic language (Ancient Egyptian). Iteru is the Kemetic name for The Nile river, which translates as “Great River.” This fantastical piece is performed to woo a mythical “queen of the crocodiles” into helping the ensemble. Music by Bevin Victoria. Choreography by Elise Morris.

Ozianauri (*seen in Enchanted Drum*): This choreography was gifted to us by one of our teachers, Mr. Ozgen (with the exception of an improvised playful section added by Danielle). It is in an Turkish 9/8 rhythm and inspired by the Roman Havasi, aka Turkish Roman, style. We set Ozgen’s dance to an original piece of music written by Kaya Hellman.

REFERENCES:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5FswLiP-wk>

<https://aslahan.com/turkish-romany-dance.html>

<https://babayagamusic.com/Encyclopedic-Dictionary-Ethnic-Arts/turkish-romany-dance.htm>

Party Party Yeah (*seen at the end of every set*): Named as an homage to K-Pop fans (Morgan is a big fan) This piece is a bombastic, energetic, “get up and dance” celebration. Concept & Choreography by Morgan Fay. Music by Bevin Victoria and Kaya Hellman.

Ploudiu (*seen in The Crossing*): Inspired by Buçimiş - a music and dance style in 15/8 they do in Bulgaria, and the song was named after a Bulgarian town, Ploudiu... The song was written by Kaya with folk-dance choreography by Danielle.

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Individual Pieces

Reda Ru (*seen in Enchanted Drum*): Finger Cymbals are an ancient instrument with early variations found in Greece, Egypt and China. Called by many names, we know them in Baksana as Sagaat (Arabic) or Zils (Turkish). We play them not as mere dance accessories, but as the dynamic percussion instruments they truly are! This piece is an homage to 2 of our great inspirations: The Reda Troupe (Egypt 1959-1990) and Hahbi Ru (California, USA 1980-2012). Music and choreography by Danielle Elizabeth.

Rhythm Randomizer (*seen in Pen Pals*): Kaya thought it would be most amusing to challenge the ensemble with mix-meters, different ways of counting rhythms. Achievement unlocked! We perform a mind-bending exercise of switching meters from 2/4 through 8/4 and back, set beside a Malfuf rhythmic improvisation.

Saidi E (*seen in The Crossing*): In Upper Egypt, there is a martial art called Tahtib, practiced with long bamboo sticks. Dancers around Egypt mimic these martial movements with the assaya (sticks), adding spins and twirls, taps and flips... and of course some fancy footwork. Music by Paul Evans. Choreographed by Danielle Elizabeth

REFERENCES

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWFsRAnE3ak>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GANahqsMpHo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C750ZbRqC9Q>

Sultana's March (*seen in Pen Pals*): Designed to wow and impress, this piece was conceptualized and choreographed by Morgan Fay. Inspiration was drawn from contemporary marching bands as well as traditional Ottoman marching bands. The middle section features a Romani 9/8 rhythm, a nod to the importance of musical and cultural contributions of the Romani peoples, marginalized and mistreated by the ottoman empire and current society, and their inspiring perseverance throughout time. Music written by Kaya Hellman.

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Individual Pieces:

Sword of Truth (*seen in The Crossing*): Sword dancing is a historically ambiguous element of North African dance, with stories told of Bedouin dancers entertaining ottoman troops, similar to how Raqs Assaya dancers mimicked Tahtib martial artists for entertainment in Egypt. The historical accuracy of these sword-dance stories is somewhat debatable, however dancing with swords is now a highly technical, modern element commonly seen in Raqs Sharqi dance sets. We find it fits well with our renaissance faire performances. YES, the swords we dance with are made of REAL, SHARP metal. NO there areno tricks when balancing the swords, nothing sticky or magnetic involved... just lots of practice and skill. It is dangerous, acrobatic, mesmerizing, and because it's Baksana... it's also fun! Choreography and Music by Bevin Victoria

Tricks for Tea (*seen in Pen Pals*): Showcasing some acrobatic elements, this piece has Arabic melodies and rhythms with Broadway style lyrics and expression. Choreography by Morgan Fay. Music by Bevin Victoria and arrangement by Kaya Hellman.

Veil of Deception (*seen in The Crossing*): Originally danced with baskets, Bevin Victoria created this piece based on a reimagining of a historical scene inspired by her research of Egypt during the Turkish Ottoman Empire of companions dancing in a market-place. The signature Baksana costume coats were produced especially for this piece, researched directly to this time-period. It has evolved slightly from Baskets to scarves, but the playful nature of friends causing a bit of mischief rings true. Choreography and Music by Bevin Victoria.



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Educational Resources

Baksana is often asked at our Events: "Where did you learn to dance/play like that?!" Our answer... it's a long story. A collection of many long stories actually, spanning decades of formal and informal education and travel. We are ALWAYS continuing our studies with our music and dance teachers, learning the languages, as well as traveling to Egypt, Turkey, and the Balkans directly to spend time within the cultures. As artists, we allow our own authentic expressions to inspire us as well, and we perform with our hearts on our sleeves for all to enjoy. While we all have our individual artistic journeys and formal training paths, listed below are some of the teachers that have the most influence on the style of Baksana:

Karim Nagi - Arab Arts (Tahtib/Assaya, Sagaat, Dabke)

Mr. Ozgen - Turkish Oryental and Roman Havarsi

Reyhan Tuzsuz - Roman Havasi

Çigi Dilsha - Turkish Oryental and Roman Havasi

Tito Seif - Raqs Sharqi, Tathib

Faisal Zadan - Percussion (darbuka/derbekki, riq)

Rumen Sali Shopov - Davul/Tapan

Hany Morgan - Sagaat (cymbals)

Daniela Ivanova - Bulgarian (Balkan) Line Dance

Heather/Henna - Raqs Sharqi

Rachel Brice - Modern Fusion, Group Improvisational Formatting

The Salimpour School - Raqs Sharqi and folkloric dances

We are also inspired by others who have come before us in the lineage of American west-coast Renaissance Faire performance: Hahbi Ru, Bal Anat, and Silk Road Caravan.

Follow us on social media:

@BaksanaEnsemble



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Thank You

An ENROMOUS THANK YOU to our major sponsors at Studio Datura in Portland, OR. Studio Datura hosts events and Raqs Sharqi and Fusion dance classes with local teachers as well as internationally acclaimed artists. Visit studiodatura.com for info!

This material would not exist without the unwavering support over many years from our families and loved ones (especially our children who are at countless rehearsals and shows). We appreciate them SO MUCH! We are also SO grateful for the generous guidance from our teachers, the infinite inspiration from our local creative communities and most importantly - the artists and communities from the cultures these songs are inspired by.

The director would like to highlight the devotion of each and every member and special guest to Baksana Ensemble. The generously creative spirit. All the yes-and-ing. Thousands of rehearsal hours, persevering through moments of challenging material. Dedication to continued learning and research. Balancing Baksana's multi-layered production elements while living life and raising our families. Keeping "our sights set higher than the astrosphere"

And of course... THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR FANS!!!! For your presence and engagement at our performances and on social media, for the curiosity and love, for the tips/donations, merch purchases, feedback, singing along and getting up and dancing with us and so much more! Live entertainment is ESSENTIAL to humanity and we are honored to get to share our creations with all of you.

xoxo, Baksana Ensemble





The Adventures of Baksana Album Notes

Baksana Theme Song Lyrics:

There are stories that are told from the days of old
back when mysteries were set in stone.
Tales to entrance full of music and dance,
of the greatest band of travelers the world has ever known!

Baksana, HEY! Look over here!
A ragtag group of seekers from far and near.
Baksana, HEY! We never fear.
The path to our destiny is clear.

Let us regale you a tune of when we swam across lagoons.
Set sail for many a sea far and wide.
Playing tricks, we dance along and hope to move you with our songs.
The way the moon gently sways the mighty tide.

Baksana, HEY! Let's give a cheer!
From misty mountains, to red sands and new frontiers.
BAKSANA! Hey! Look over here!
Our sights set higher than the astrosphere.

BAKSANA! Hey! We are sincere!
And woe to any who dare try and interfere.
BAKSANA! Hey! What's that you hear?
It's the sound of those who always persevere.

Forsooth or fable?
Will we truly be able
To change the course of history and time?
What force has brought us here from our distant lands...
You'll find out by the end of this line