

# Charlottesville offers hip entertainment

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The downtown mall is Charlottesville's very own piece of Europe. Outdoor cafés, live entertainment, pedestrian walkways and culturally diverse food can all be found within this eight-block radius. One of the attractions, Bashir's Taverna, encompasses the true style of the downtown mall. It provides entertainment, exotic cuisine and is an experience not to be missed.

Bashir's Taverna captivates one's senses within moments of entering the restaurant. It is aglow from the red lanterns placed at each table and adorning the walls. The tantalizing aroma of crisp phyllo dough and meat and fish simmering in Algerian and Moroccan spices reaches all corners of the restaurant. The North African and Mediterranean cuisine is a great incentive to visit Bashir's, particularly when coupled with live entertainment. Every Saturday at 7:30 p.m., Bashirgoers enjoy a half-hour of professional belly dancing.

When I visited Bashir's with a few friends, we were not disappointed by the entertainment. The performer that evening was Alexandra Bourque-Snyder, whose stage name is Lela, and she was radiant in her red and black sparkling costume. Lela teaches belly dancing at ACAC in Charlottesville, as well as cabaret-style belly dancing at UVA's Belly Dance Club. Amalia Habibi is another regular performer, and

she teaches the belly dancing short course at UVA. As Lela danced, her bare feet delicately following the path set out by her hips, the owner, Bashir Khelafa, drummed the beat to accompany the rhythmic chimes of Lela's coined ensemble. The energy in the room was high, as people in the restaurant could not resist clapping along to the mesmerizing undulations of the dancing and sharing in the owner's contagious enthusiasm.

That evening, we savored our three-course meal of artichoke appetizers, salad sprinkled with olive oil and our individual main courses. At our table there was a vegetarian medley including humus and falafel, a saffron chicken entrée, and the Bastilla, a Moroccan specialty. In a Bastilla, chicken, eggs, and crushed almonds are baked in phyllo dough and topped with cinnamon and powdered sugar. It is an intriguing dish with an incredible texture, and the sweetness gives the chicken a light and refreshing taste. As we polished our plates and watched the remainder of the belly dance performance, Bashir bounded into the audience and grabbed one of my unsuspecting friends to partake in a dance with Lela herself. The audience cheered him on. It was glorious.

In addition to belly dancing on Saturdays, there is live music on Friday nights, and on special occasions a Flamenco dancer performs to complement the Mediterranean tapas



*Courtesy of [www.bashirs.com](http://www.bashirs.com)*

**Amalia Habibi** dances while Bashir Khelafa plays in the background at Bashir's Taverna in Charlottesville.

served. Regardless of the day or week, you will undoubtedly enjoy the international cuisine and warm ambiance at Bashir's Taverna.

The downtown mall is well worth a visit. Whether you are in the mood for crepes, tapas, gelato, fondue, dumplings, decadent wine and cheese platters, or pizza (the law school staple) the downtown mall has it all. In addition to the palate-pleasers and the eclectic shops lining both sides of the street, there is a great array of entertainment: live bands, plays, street performers, art galleries, ice skating and—at Bashir's Taverna—belly dancing.