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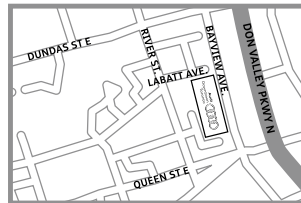
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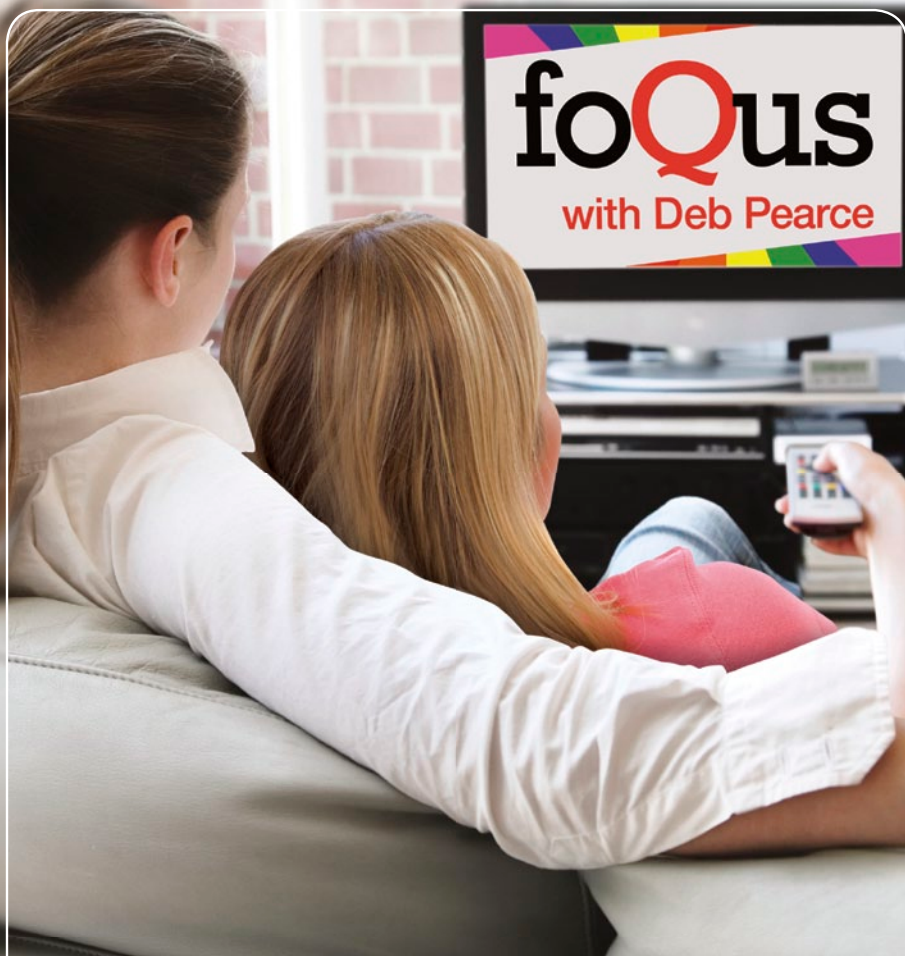
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From the Publisher

Publisher



"Let me introduce you to my party people in the club..."

...Club Noir that is. This is where the central story of this issue, "Burlesque: The Story of Cherie," takes us. There we witness a few days in the lives of the *Burlesque* dancers in the club, their mafia boss-lady and her shady hoodlums. As is customary to this magazine, disguised in a fun light fable, we dig into society's perceptions of roles and genders: the tomboy, the effeminate man, the masculine woman, even the married pervert. Hope you enjoy it!

We have been working on this for over a year, when driven by eternal devotion to Cher, I went to see *Burlesque* with my best friend as an outing for my birthday. I'm aware that half the population didn't like it, but come on folks what happened to just a good old fashion, fun, silly musical? I adored it and as I left the theatre with my friend Raymond, I turned to him and said: "Guess what PinkPlayMags' next winter cover will be?"

Of course, singing the finale song over and over as I was leaving the theatre was not the only reason for us to devote a whole issue to burlesque. I have been hearing and seeing a resurrection of this fabulous art form everywhere, so it rang as a timely topic.

I would like to thank the talented Melissa Benner for dreaming this up with me. We enjoyed building the characters and creating their backgrounds in our heads to help us envision our story. Many thanks as well to everyone who was part of the cover and main story shoot. They were wonderful and I truly appreciate them for putting up with an 11 hour day.

Now, this being the last edition of the year I want to relay to you a few personal notes:

First, to my amazing community and its allies. Thank you for embracing the idea and spirit of the Inspire Awards, an initiative I am humbled to say was founded by myself at PinkPlayMags and championed by some wonderful partners such as: PFLAG Canada (with PFLAG Durham Region and PFLAG York Region), Church Wellesley Village BIA, Ontario

Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, Rainbow High Vacations, Pride Durham, Club 717, PositiveLite.com, and Deb Pearce from Rogers TV's *foQus with Deb Pearce*. So many other sponsors, organizations and community spirited individuals are involved that space won't allow me to mention everyone, but these awards could not happen without them. I cannot wait to see what kind of great work we can do together, and how many heroes and everyday folks from our community, who make such a difference in the world, we'll be able to honour and celebrate now and into future years.

Four years ago we launched PinkPlayMags and from the first issue you, the readers, have made me feel so proud to be working on such a well received and praised publication. My whole life I dreamt of something like this and your feedback encourages me to do the best job my team and I are capable of. I'm blessed with the most talented people a publisher could dream of working with. I wanted to establish a creative entity, beyond just a magazine, and more of a celebration of different themes and ideas. Seasonally, for the last four years, we've taken you on journeys from love and sex, to pulp fiction; from diving into the horrors of Halloween, to venturing into the world of geekdom; we touched on education, the diverse fabric of our city and the feminine influence throughout history; you've laughed at our comedy, enjoyed our nostalgia of the '80s and been pampered by our decadent luxury. So, thank you for taking the time to read our magazines and for writing in to tell us how great of a job you think we've been doing.

Next year, we have a plan to take you on a journey like no other. So buckle up, enjoy this issue, and wait for much more to come, as we continue working our hardest to give you a magazine you love to read.

My best personal wishes to you and yours, and Season's Greetings on behalf of my team.

Antoine Elhashem

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**Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Trans, Leather, and Queer
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Free • Winter 2011**

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Manny Machado, Wrong Note Rusty

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Burlesque: The Story of Cherie

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fabulous dancers of Skin Tight Outta Sight:

Tanya Cheex, Sauci Calla Horra, CoCo La Creme,

Honey B. Hind, Anastasia, Foxy Finale, Mena von Fleisch.

In the shadows: Leanne Price, Melissa Benner.

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From the Editor

Editor



Every once in a while I stumble across a theme here at PinkPlayMags that I have only a passing knowledge of. Burlesque is just such a delicious discovery. As I pulled the various pieces of our latest magazine together, I found myself with a completely new understanding and appreciation for this classic art.

I've seen pictures of Bettie Page and while I know virtually nothing about her, ever since I can remember I've been strangely attracted to women in stilettos, garters and stockings with a seam up the back. I really ought to see her bio-pic *The Notorious Bettie Page*, starring Gretchen Mol. I've always found classic cheesecake pin-up girls from the '40s and '50s very glamorous. I have yet to see the movie that inspired this issue, but *Moulin Rouge* is one of my all-time faves.

It's funny though, I've never been attracted to these women sexually, and I've never been interested in dressing up like them, and yet these images never fail to rivet my attention. I think it's their boldness at being so sassy, so seductive and so powerful in their sexuality that I've always loved. If you've ever seen Monica Bellucci in *Brotherhood of the Wolf*, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Let me tell you, when I discovered my first beefcake drawings—the lusty images of George Quaintance are a personal favourite—my mind was blown! Suddenly my desires made sense. I've always been a sucker for a lascivious grin and a come-hither look.

For the better part of a year, my friend Jay Bone, the gaybourhood's resident comic book artist and all 'round geek lover, has been infatuated with Toronto's very happening burlesque scene. I've heard the stories and seen the many images he's drawn while inspired by the shows

he's attended and while at Dr. Sketchy's anti-art sessions at the Cameron House. I never managed to find the time to make it to a performance, and now, as I put the finishing flourishes on our Burlesque Issue, I am grandly kicking myself for missing out on a good time.

Go Google Jett Adore, or Dita von Teese. Go on, go do it right now, I'll wait.

WOW! Huh? There is so much more to their act than these artists just taking off their clothes. When you put the playful tease back into stripping, you get burlesque. Where over-the-top glamour meets saucy seduction is where you'll find my g-spot—I just LOVE a tease! It's taken me a while to fully realize that, but working on this edition has turned me into a fan-boy. And to think, for years now, Toronto has had a wildly thriving burlesque community and I'm only now discovering it. I'm always late to the party it seems.

I have to take a moment out to thank two sinfully helpful people, without whom our glossy pages wouldn't be nearly as steamy: the aforementioned Jay Bone and the gorgeous Tanya Cheex. They really opened my eyes to discovering a world I always knew I lusted after, but never realized was just down the red-lit, back alley of my neighbourhood.

So, slip into something more comfortable, grab the key with the silk tassel, and come on up to our boudoir. We've got a lusty good time awaiting you, full of foxy girls, hunky guys and delectable treats to tantalize you, fanning the flames of desire to keep you warm throughout the cold winter months.

Hope your holidays are decadent and we'll see you come the New Year.

Jeff Harrison

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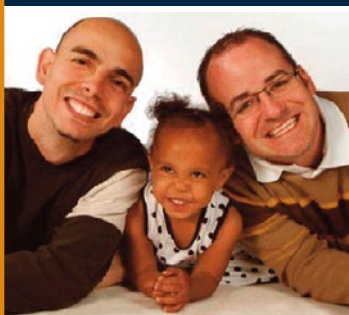
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Burlesque:

The Story of Cherie

Concept & Direction Antoine Elhashem
 Story . . Antoine Elhashem and Melissa Benner
 Lyrics Melissa Benner

Starring

Cherie Miss Ivy
 Selma Leanne Price
 Butch Melissa Benner
 Male Dancer/Cherie's Lover Mardi Reid
 Male Dancer Fabio Goncalves
 Janitor Andrij Dykowskytsch

Performed in collaboration with Skin Tight
 Outta Sight: Tanya Cheex (Founder/Artistic

Director), Sauci Calla Horra (Producer), CoCo La
 Creme, Honey B. Hind, Anastasia, Foxy Finale,
 Mena von Fleisch

Photography Kevin Slack
 Assistant Marlon Solomon
 Makeup Myles Saxton
 Assistant James Courtney

Shot on location at Grand Luxe Events Boutique
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 Story of Cherie" are reserved. Any unauthorized duplication is
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Meet the town's most talented dancer, the
 city's snazziest dresser, Club Noir's shining
 star... Cherie!

*Oh, how we adore you, Cherie.
 From your décolletage,
 and your je ne sais quoi,
 to your alluring coquetterie.*

*Please tease and enchant us, Cherie
 fan our fires with your finery,
 make us squirm in these hard seats,
 we beg for sweet mercy, Cherie.*



*A little glitter here,
a dash of sass right there,
a quick kiss of your favourite lipstick
polishes up those dazzling wares.*

*Go check the rear view mirror, girls,
adjust your ample assets.
Full speed ahead, for patrons wait,
all done up, undone and breathless.*

*The velvet curtains part,
to let in the crowd's full heat.*

*Girls sashay out
and steal your hearts,
with each suggestive beat.*

*...Introducing Skin Tight Outta
Sight and the lovely, luscious Cherie!*



Club Noir's owner is powerful and fierce—a gold star mafia goddess. Selma calls the girls her precious property, and has her sights set on Cherie:



*Whatever Selma wants, Selma gets!
And little woman, Selma wants you.*

The bodyguard, Butch, agrees that Cherie is "A nice piece of sass."



But love has arisen, unbidden, behind the scenes—igniting passion and sparking jealousy.

Then late one night, thinking she's alone, Cherie bares her heart in song:



*Dearest boy, what I want you to do
A lady would be too shy to say.
Lucky I'm not a lady then,
'Cause I want you to take me,
then take me away.*

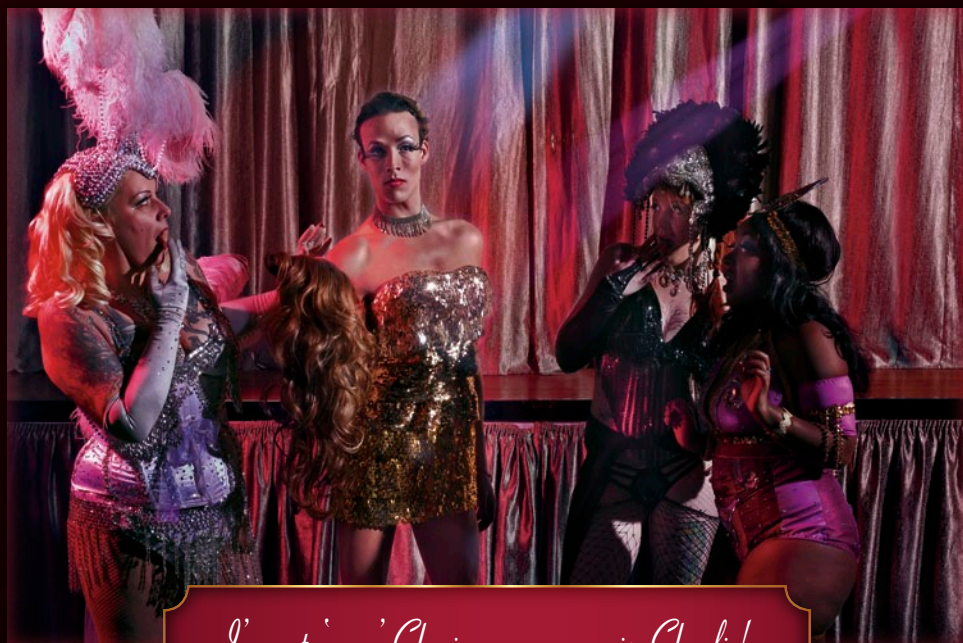
When Cherie awakens from her lovestruck reverie, she finds the married janitor, panting along in harmony.

The star attempts to flee the scene, only to discover another watcher in the wings. Selma's rage is overpowering:



*I'll have you yet, Cherie... or throw
you to the streets!*

Tensions rise high as a black garter on a creamy thigh until Cherie reaches her limit. It's time to reveal her secret:



I'm not 'your' Cherie... my name is Charlie!





In a place far, far away, we find our heroine; happy, well, successful... and living like a queen.

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Teasing & Pleasing

TORONTO'S NOT-SO-SECRET WORLD OF **BURLESQUE**

By Scott Dagostino



Left to my own devices, I'm a very introverted person," says 25-year-old photographer Greg Wong. That seems a strange comment coming from a man who boldly stripped off his clothes for a massive crowd of partygoers in 2008 and has been doing so ever since.

It was at Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, during the 2008 New Year's Eve party hosted by Shane MacKinnon, that Wong became "Wrong Note Rusty," the latest member of Boylesque, an all-male burlesque troupe formed earlier that summer. "I went to the debut show at Pride and loved it," Rusty says, "I was totally turned on but I had an intellectual boner as well. I was being teased in a really fun, cheeky way."

That's what burlesque is all about, says Tanya Cheex, founder of the troupe Skin Tight Outta Sight, who have been performing in Toronto for nearly 15 years. "It combines sex, theatre, dance, comedy, performance art and circus sideshow." In her own career, Cheex says, "I was influenced by old men's magazines, Russ Meyer movies and things my

grandmother had told me about burlesque that she had seen back in its golden age."

While the original meaning of the word burlesque meant a satire or comic parody, the use of striptease in the early vaudeville routines soon gave it the racier meaning. It was Lydia Thompson and The British Blondes who first raised eyebrows in the 1860s by wearing flesh-coloured tights on stage. Just the illusion of nudity caused a sensation and over the next few decades, clubs in Paris like the Folies Bergère and the Moulin Rouge became known the world over for their scandalous dancing-girl revues.

North America later followed suit. In 1907, Broadway impresario Flo Ziegfeld opened the famous Ziegfeld Follies. Copycats sprang up cross-town, thanks to the Minsky brothers, in Toronto at the Star theatre, and the Gayety in Montréal got the girls on stage to reveal as much as the police would allow.

By the mid-30s, burlesque was being shut down by morality squads and US Supreme Court mandates, but not before artists like Mae West and



Girls of the Ziegfeld Follies



Skin Tight Outta Sight



Lili St. Cyr

Gypsy Rose Lee had become household names. In Germany, the Nazis' rise to power crushed the Weimar-era arts scene that included burlesque, as depicted decades later in the musical and film *Cabaret*.

During the war years, it was all about pin-up girls like Sherry Britton and Betty Grable, but burlesque saw a resurgence in the 1950s, especially in Paris, London and Las Vegas. Tempest Storm was a fiery redhead dancer, Lili St. Cyr would take a soak in her transparent bathtub and, most infamously, Bettie Page starred in many a bootleg bondage film. Those movies were an inspiration to Cheex. "There's so much energy and charisma to her," she says, "Even when Bettie was doing something 'bad,' she looked like she was having fun."

By the late '60s, burlesque was mainstream, its influence obvious in the TV sketches of *Laugh-In* and *The Benny Hill Show*, but it became a casualty of the sexual revolution. With porn and strip clubs taking over the boogie nights of the '70s, the striptease now looked quaint and outdated. "The art was lost," says Cheex. "No more live bands...The '80s were the golden age of porn." Burlesque was dead.

Tanya spent the next decade as a stripper, a dominatrix and, oddly, a drag queen. "I got my start performing in drag bars like 501 with Bitch Diva and Georgie Girl," recalls Cheex. "I'd be a Marilyn Munroe impersonator and I learned hair and makeup tips from my drag mothers. Scarlett Fever was a big influence. She was gorgeous." Cheex's love for burlesque might have remained dormant but, by the end of

the '90s, a strange nostalgia for the '50s and '60s was taking hold amongst people not even born back then. Blame it on *Austin Powers*? Groovy lounge music and swing dancing and rockabilly and yes, burlesque were back in fashion.

Writer/performer Sasha Van Bon Bon is often credited with leading the burlesque revival in Toronto. She danced at gigs with Jack the Ripper and the Major Players as one half of the Dangerettes, who soon began eclipsing the band. "I wouldn't say we took over the show but our performances and costuming became a central focus," she says. Upon meeting Kitty Neptune in 2000, they created the Scandelles burlesque troupe. Meanwhile, Cheex was hosting lounge parties that similarly led to her forming her troupe, Skin Tight Outta Sight.

"There was no template," Cheex says, "There were performers in LA and New York, but no one local." She and Van Bon Bon occasionally performed together at the Pilot or Lee's Palace and developed what she calls "a friendly rivalry."

As Van Bon Bon describes it, "I pioneered, then took off in my canoe. She pioneered but stayed to cultivate the land."

"Becoming a burlesque producer has been fun," says Cheex. "The difference now is that most women are producing their own shows. Back in the day, it was male-dominated but it's generally a women's thing at this point."

Fun isn't the first word Van Bon Bon uses, however. Despite several successful shows, "We just can't do these large productions anymore," she says. "It's ridiculously impractical... Everybody wants to be treated with respect but when you're managing 17 people and you have three dollars and a paper clip, sometimes you just can't offer it," she sighs.

While Sasha admits that her temper was often bigger than she'd like, Rusty adds that a burlesque performer's ego can be a complicated thing. "Some people are very protective of their character," he says. "They have a stage persona that is very different than who they really are." As he's said, for instance, he's actually shy. "I've never been to Hanlan's Point and I don't know if I can." It's a fear of "casual public nudity" that's strange even to him: "I've danced on the hood of a car



Gypsy Rose Lee



Bettie Page and Tempest Storm

in my underwear," he laughs, but in truth, "you're never really naked on stage. There's always a barrier. You're under layers of makeup and costume, being up on stage, blinded by lights. People always comment on your courage," Rusty says, "but really, some of these performers are very guarded."

This is a problem, he says, when disagreements arise. "The burlesque community tends to be very 'collective,' which can be a good and bad thing. Nobody feels like they have an all-encompassing perspective so nobody wants to take on the role of spokesperson." A classic argument in burlesque circles, for instance, is what separates the striptease from stripping. "I do hear a lot of anti-sex-work rhetoric within the burlesque community," says Rusty, "Things like, 'Those were just stripper moves' or '___ is just a dirty stripper.' They insist, 'Burlesque is classy! It's art! It's above stripping!' I don't take offense if someone calls me a stripper."

"I've seen artistry in stripping," says Van Bon Bon, "The

people saying this have negative attitudes toward sex-work themselves. They don't want to be aligned with people they perceive as immoral or as social outcasts, but I think being a burlesque dancer carries more stigma than being a stripper. I've seen so much goddamn horrifying burlesque, I'd align it closer to a bunch of children dancing around after naptime and apple juice than to stripping or any form of adult entertainment. It's a ridiculous snobbery."

Having worked in both professions, Cheex admits, "When I started stripping, I thought it would be like burlesque. It wasn't. They didn't care about my gloves and gowns," she laughs, "but we're all sisters. Some of the best burlesque performers are former strippers. It's still about sex. You still have to seduce."

"You can't just pull things out of your underwear drawer and go on stage," Cheex continues. "When burlesque is done badly, it's really embarrassing because of the vulnerability factor. And unlike a bad band or bad comedy, if people see a bad burlesque show, they might never return."

"Well, I think we could all stand to rehearse a lot more than we do," Rusty jokes, but he's seen the flip side of bad performing too: "Sometimes we get awkward audiences. Burlesque is a style of performance that heavily relies on audience participation." A quiet audience, he says, is a disaster but Cheex insists that the key to that problem is a strong emcee, someone who can let the audience know how to participate. "Miss Conception, Sky Gilbert and Keith Cole have all hosted our shows," she says and Cole is a particular favourite. "He really knows how to push people's buttons and I like that. Burlesque should be challenging."

Indeed, a challenge from Keith Cole is what led to the creation of Boylesque. Founder Benjamin Paley went to a Skin Tight Outta Sight show at the Gladstone in the summer of 2007 and says Keith made an unexpected announcement from the stage: "Ben has told me he's going to do an amateur burlesque performance for you!" It was awful because, he laughs, "I had a pair of really frumpy underwear on, but I'd



Boylesque



Jett Adore. Photo by Kenneth Morris

“ You can’t just pull things out of your underwear drawer and go on stage... ”

had a few drinks and went through with it.” Having loved watching burlesque ever since his uncle snuck him into a show on Coney Island when he was about 15, Paley says this was, “a light-bulb moment: why aren’t more men doing this too?”

Some had. Shane MacKinnon had led the Beefcake Boys for a time but, as he said in an interview in 2006, “A lot of people were intrigued by the idea of an all-boy burlesque group, but when it came time to perform, they always backed out.”

Paley wrote to Van Bon Bon for advice through her column in *NOW Magazine*. “I was reaching out for mentoring,” he says, “but there was an assumption that I was only getting into it for the money.” He felt hurt by her sharp response, one she doesn’t deny. “I discouraged him,” she says, “Don’t think for a moment you’ll be riding around in limos here.”

This is true, says Cheex, but for her at least, “It’s becoming more and more possible to make a living. I’m getting close to quitting one of my part-time jobs.”

Having gone ahead with Boylesque undaunted, Paley now says, “We’re pretty high in demand, both by the novelty of being boys and by people really liking what we do, we’re getting a lot of bookings.”

Even for corporate parties, which seems bizarrely mainstream, but Van Bon Bon can see it. “Those Boylesque boys are cute,” she says, “They’re really coy and sexy in their cute little underpants. There’s nothing threatening about them. They’re perfect for a corporate environment.”

“Straight guys who’ve been dragged along by their girlfriends tend to come back on their own accord because they really liked the show. You can read that however you will,” Paley laughs, “but I think they enjoy the art and the comedy of it, even if they don’t find the guys attractive.”

Like it or not, Paley says, male burlesque tends to be funny. “We’re just less used to seeing men in that role,” he says. “Sexy Mark Brown” is the lead male member of Skin Tight Outta Sight and he told the *Ryerson Free Press* in 2009, “When you don’t have boobs, it’s not really the same effect. Not to say that there’s no seductive aspect to it at all, but it’s not really what I’m going for.”

“When we first started Boylesque,” says Rusty, “we assumed we’d have a

Girls of the Ziegfeld Follies



really strong gay male following but that hasn't really been the case. I think gay guys like watching us, but they don't like us making fun of being watched." The coyness of burlesque is a tough fit with a gay male culture used to the bluntness of porn. "We had an awkward gig at the Barn," Rusty admits. "It was the underwear party, surrounded by guys already more naked than we were!"

"Most of our audiences are a mix of men and women," says Paley, "There's a real different energy between all-women and all-men audiences."

Cheex notes, "Lesbians get crazy-rowdy at our shows. It's great, but we also get a gay following because our costumes and concepts are so overblown. We're basically drag queens."

"It's amazing to me that there's still so much burlesque going on," says Van Bon Bon.

"I don't know how this city supports as many troupes as it does," marvels Rusty. "Les Coquettes do four or five fully-produced shows a year and they're excellent."

Yes, agrees Van Bon Bon, "Les Coquettes are super snazzy! Just beautiful costumes."

"One of the wonderful things about doing burlesque in Toronto is there's such a huge community," says Cheex. She rattles off a list of favourites: Keela Watts, Chaos Divine, Fionna Flauntit, Dolly Berlin, Coco Framboise and Roxi DLite—the first Canadian performer crowned Queen of Burlesque in Las Vegas. "They've done their homework," Cheex says. Meanwhile, there are excellent troupes like the Shameless

Dames, Miss Mitzy Cream's Kitten Revue and, a favourite of Rusty's, the Cinnamon Hearts.

And all of them are gearing up for Valentine's Day. "There's always like five burlesque shows going on around Valentine's Day," says Van Bon Bon. "People get competitive."

This year, Cheex says, Skin Tight Outta Sight will be teaming up with Boylesque for one major Valentine's Day show. "It's my favourite," she says. "It's fun and raunchy and anything goes."

Van Bon Bon admires "these amazing tenacious women" who honour the history of burlesque but says, for her, burlesque has been a springboard into theatre. While working on a remount of *Les Demimondes* for Buddies in March, she plans to retire the Scandelles brand in favour of Operation Snatch, named after the shameful 1953 incident in which the BC government abducted the children of dissident group the Sons of Freedom, who protested naked. "Kitty and I have always considered ourselves political nudists," she says. "I am a huge fan of aggressive nudity."

Burlesque is flexible enough to accommodate all these things, Van Bon Bon says, "You can make it whatever you want."

For Rusty, it was a way "to push my own boundaries and challenge myself. I wanted to do something I could look back on as a really fun time in my life." It's amazing how far a sense of humour, a little courage and some very fancy underwear will take you.

Scott Dagostino is a Toronto-based freelance writer, whose manner of taking off his cloths resembles corn shucking. The art of burlesque can teach him much.

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Beguiling Your Babe with Beatific Beets

by Karen Fulcher

Has the cold has kept you indoors and do all the office chocolate, eating out and cocktail parties have you feeling full, sluggish and maybe not so healthy? The holiday season can be a little rough on our bodies. The liver, gall bladder, kidneys and digestive system have been overworked affecting our energy levels, clarity of skin and more. Still, it's the holiday season and who wants to launch into a cleansing smoothie based diet now? Thinking about consuming healthy meals during festivities can conjure up brown rice and *boriing!*

Not so! I set out to get a local chef to teach me how to make a sexy, seductive menu for an evening set to impress—the caveat: it had to be healthy, vegetarian, easy to make and, as much as possible, local. Executive Chef of Fabarnak Restaurant, Eric Wood, relished the challenge. (Fabarnak, 519 Church Street, open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 8:30pm, Saturday 9am to 4:30pm).

When I asked him whether it would be difficult, since he normally creates dishes with meat, he explained, “I don’t think of food as vegetarian. I love everything that comes from the ground and I think people eat too much meat. There’s a lot of unconsciousness when it comes to eating. There’s also hypocrisy with vegetarians relating to seasonal foods and sustainability.”

“If you are going to eat locally, there’s nothing wrong with using your freezer. Canning, pickling, drying, preserving, salting, curing—all that stuff, that’s what Fabernak is all about. A lot of people think about sustainability as burlap and granola and really hardcore, but it isn’t. It’s about getting back to where we began. There’s this whole movement—people are reclaiming



skills. Why is everyone obsessed with cupcakes right now? People want comfort. And times are tougher. [Sustainability is about] being able make things stretch that so when you can buy 30 cents a pound tomatoes in the summer and spend an afternoon canning, do it. It’s not just this hipster elitist thing to can!”

“A favourite chef of mine, Peruvian chef Javier Wong said food is both precise and violent. For me, food’s all about sexuality and violence. It about things colliding and at that collision point is when things are really the best,” Wood told me, explaining his cooking philosophy.

This is a perfect place to start. Cooking as an act of passion (no matter what you are creating) will come across in your meal. Wood chuckled and added, “I wanted to use [my skill] as a tool to meet people—well, particularly, to meet girls... When you paint, you appeal to one sense, music is another. With food you get to play



with all five senses at the same time including fantasy and nostalgia. You're invoking memories. Food makes you think of something you want or someone you were."

Wood invited me into the bright, colourful and loud Fabarnak kitchen. He stationed me in front of the centre prep area and displayed the *mise en place* (having everything prepared and ready for assembly in small containers). Wood created a super-simple and healthy, three course meal themed with beets! He explained, "You can prep everything in advance and [you'll be seen as] clever because you've done the whole dinner around the beets."

Wood's menu (a dinner for two): Savoury Beet Tartar; Woodsy Mushroom, Sage, Salt-Roasted Beet and Pear Pasta; and Beetroot Red Velvet Cupcake topped with Vanilla Ice Cream, Caramel Beet Drizzle and Rosemary. (Or EdgyVeg's alternative dessert, Candice's Chocolate Coconut Cake).

For the tartar:

- 1 cup chopped roasted beets
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh rosemary
- 4 tbsp chopped capers
- 2 tbsp chopped jalapeno
- 1/2 cup chopped pickle
- 4 tbsp chopped roasted red onion
- 2 tbsp grainy mustard
- 3 tbsp crushed garlic
- 1/2 cup Filipino banana ketchup*
- 2 quail eggs* (or substitute: mashed avocado)

**Both the ketchup and quail eggs can be found at Asian grocery stores*

For plating the tartar:

- Hot pepper (or parsley) infused oil
- A few sprigs of spring mix greens

For the pasta:

- Fresh pasta (if you can't find fresh semolina pappardelle, get fresh lasagna sheets and slice them into long, thick strips)
- 2 roasted pears (Anjou or Bartlett)
- 1 cup julienned roasted beets
- 1 1/2 cup edamame beans (shelled, frozen, Ontario-grown)
- 2 tbsp fresh sage leaves
- 2 chopped shallots
- 1 1/2 cup reconstituted mushrooms (dried chanterelle, shiitake or substitute) plus 1 cup broth from reconstituted mushrooms
- 1/3 cup chopped walnuts
- 1/2 cup smoked blue cheese (optional)

For finishing pasta:

- 1 tbsp butter
- 1 squeeze of lemon
- A few drops of truffle oil

For cooking:

- Kosher salt (enough for roasting beets, onion and pears)
- 1/2 cup cheap red cooking wine
- Canola oil





For cupcake:

Simple white cupcake mix
1/3 cup of puréed roasted beets
1 tsp pumpkin spice (cardamom, cinnamon, clove)
Vanilla ice cream
Caramels (about 10)
Whipping cream



Salt-roasting Magic

Prior to your special meal, spend some time prepping. Wood suggests using Kosher salts. "Roasting with salt doesn't make your food salty. It wicks away outside moisture and the food retains the juices inside. Use [this technique] with thicker skinned foods." And you can reuse the salts!

Preheat your oven to 350°F. Wash beets, remove the stems and roots. Peel outer skin from onion, leave whole. Pour Kosher salt to completely cover the bottom of an oven-safe dish large enough to distribute beets and onion. Cover the vessel with tin foil and roast vegetables between 1 to 1 1/2 hours depending on how large the beets are.

While the beets are in the oven, wash two Anjou or Bartlett pears and arrange in another smaller dish covered with Kosher salts. At the 45-minute mark, add

your pears to join the beets and roast until tender.

Strike while the oven is hot! Follow the directions on the cupcake box but add a small amount of shredded beets and 1 tsp pumpkin spice. To save energy, pop the cupcakes into the oven timing it to coordinate with the veggies and pears.

Creating Your Mise en Place

Remove beets, onion and pears from the oven. Allow to cool and using clean, cotton gloves, or a towel (to prevent stains on your hands), rub off the skin from the beets. Get containers with lids to store the differently sliced beets. Finely chop the beets into cubes about 1mm in size for the tartar; julienned strips for the pasta; the rosemary, capers, jalapeno, pickle, roasted red onion, crushed garlic, shallots can all go into a dish together. For the pasta, remove leaves of sage, the core and stem of the pears and cut pears length-wise into thin slices. Boil water and soak mushrooms until soft, then slice into thin strips. Retain broth for later. Seal the containers and refrigerate.

The Vegan Voice

I spoke with Food Coach, "EdgyVeg" Candice Hutchings (candicehutchings.com), to get her take on the menu. She was pleased. "Beet tartar is a perfect dish from a nutritional standpoint. Beets are a super-food. Any food with that kind of colour is packed with antioxidants." If you are serving garlic and don't want it to sour your romantic meal, Hutchings suggests you, "remove the little root in the middle of the clove. That's what causes the lingering bad breath—a little Italian trick!"

Depending on how well you know your guest, Hutchings recommended to, "Avoid legumes and beans. Edamame may cause some discomfort if [your guest] has sensitivities or allergies to soy. Avoid canned beans altogether, but soaking dry beans and lentils help increase the nutrition and reduce the gas-causing effects."

Being a raw foodist and vegan, Hutchings eschews dairy "because it makes you feel heavy and it's hard to digest at the end of a meal." Hutchings offered to share a raw, seductive substitute for the dairy dessert that can be made in advance and refrigerated. "I've made this cake for my colleagues and they just don't believe that it is completely vegan and raw!" Here's Hutchings' recipe which you can make in advance as well.



Candice's Chocolate Coconut Cake

Flourless Cake:

- 3 cups walnuts
- 1/4 tsp sea salt
- 1 cup pitted dates
- 1 tbsp vanilla extract

In a food processor, break nuts down. Add dates and vanilla and process until nuts bind together to form a cake batter. Squeeze batter together. If not sticky enough, add more dates or a tbsp agave.

Cashew Whipped Cream:

- 1 cup cashews
- 1/2 cup coconut oil
- 1 tbsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup water

In a food processor, blend all ingredients until smooth.

Hazelnut Sauce:

- 1 cup hazelnuts
- 2 tbsp agave syrup
- 2 tbsp coconut oil, warmed at room temperature
- 1tbsp cacao powder
- 3 tbsp water, as needed

In a food processor, blend nuts until they have formed a butter. Add coconut oil and agave and blend until mixed. Add cacao and as much water as needed to desired consistency.

Toppings:

- 1 cup chopped almonds
- 1/2 cup shredded coconut (unsweetened)

Divide cake mix into two parts. Form two cake rounds by lining a cake pan with saran wrap and pressing dough down with hands. Flip pan and removed saran wrap. Mix whipped cream with vanilla. Top first cake round with hazelnut sauce, then half of the cashew cream, followed by chopped almonds. Top with second cake round, remaining cream and coconut and refrigerate.

Setting the Tone

Now that you've got your dishes safely prepped and stored, turn your attention to creating a dramatic and seductive environment. Dim lights, light candles (stick with unscented; no competition with your meal), arrange pillows to encourage a relaxed environment and put something sexy on the stereo.

Think about the table. Go with cloth napkins and plan which dishes to use. Wood suggests using large plates and prefers white, saying they are like "a blank canvas for the colours of the food."

Preparing in advance will help you appear relaxed and more able to entertain your guest. When your guest arrives, serve a cocktail! If you want to stay local, Wood recommends serving an Ontario bubbly (such as Chateau Des Charmes Brut) but a sparkling Spanish Cava is a traditionally good pairing with the beet tartar. You can increase its appeal by adding a colourful berry like pomegranate seeds or fresh raspberries and serve it in a champagne flute.

Hutchings offered up a nonalcoholic option. "Bubbly water is European sexy! Experiment by adding unusual ingredients like fresh thyme and citrus. Or rim a glass with grenadine and cane sugar and mix a fruit nectar with Perrier."

Ready, Set, Go!

Once your guest is comfortable and sipping on your welcome drink, it's time for you to assemble!

Get your tartar plates out first. Wood used a ring mold approximately 7cm in diameter for the tartar but if you don't have one, you can use a small can with the top and bottom removed. Mix all the ingredients together. Use the banana ketchup as a binder. If the beet mixture isn't holding together, add a little more ketchup.

Drizzle a bit of the pepper oil on two plates. Wood advised, "Leave [the oil] where it lays, just go for it and don't fuss." Place your ring mold in the centre of each plate and gently pack the beet mixture into the molds to about 4-5 cm in height. Let set for a few minutes while you fry the quail eggs.

Wood used a really hot pan and a little canola oil. Carefully, crack the quail eggs. You may need to use a serrated knife to create an opening in the shell so that



you can quickly pour the contents into the pan. Cooking the eggs is quick—you want the yolks to be soft. Remove from the heat, add a pinch of salt and pepper and place a lid on the pan for 10 seconds just to set the tops.

Gently remove the mold from the beet tartar and slide the egg on top of each portion. If you are using avocado instead, mash a small amount and use in place of the eggs. Add a few leaves of spring mix to make the plate pop and serve!



CANDACE HUTCHINGS, THE "EDGYVEGGIE"

The Main Event

Begin by adding what Wood calls the holy trinity: garlic, shallots, and mushrooms to a hot pan. "I don't recommend using a nonstick. You want that *Maillard* factor to happen." When sugars and protein/amino acid turn brown and create flavour in response to heat. Wood chose the ingredients for a reason. "Sensuality in flavour comes from 'umami' that fifth flavour and that comes from glutamates. Mostly meats have it but mushrooms and quinoa also have natural glutamates. It gives a dish that richness."

Cook the mushrooms, shallots and garlic and hit it with a little red cooking wine. Start with a small amount and add more if needed. You want to reduce the wine into a caramel-like consistency called *au sec* (nearly dry). Toss in the pears, edamame and sage.

After heating these items in the pan, add the beets. "Don't add your beets too soon or they will off colour your dish," cautioned Wood. Add about half of the mushroom broth and more if necessary to create a glaze for the pasta. Finish by folding in some butter for sheen and added richness and a quick squeeze of lemon to accentuate the umami.

Wood suggests everyone have a slatted or mesh dipper to cook pasta in because when it is done, you simply lift it out of the boiling water. "Don't overcook or handle your pasta too much," he told me. Toss the pasta with the hot ingredients and once everything is coated, use tongs to aim for the centre of the plates and pile the pasta high.

Drizzle a few drops of truffle oil (don't overdo it—less is more), crumble a small amount of smoked blue cheese and sprinkle the top with a few walnuts and some fresh sage leaves. Voila! Wood recommends pairing the pasta with Ontario wine, like Angel's Gate Chardonnay.

The Finale

Candice's cake can simply be sliced and served as is. You can add some colour with a mint leaf or two and drizzling the plate with beet juice!

For the cupcakes, melt the caramels in a pan on low, slowly add puréed roasted beets and whipping cream to the melted caramels until it becomes a thick sauce. Warm two cupcakes then top them with ice cream and top that with the caramel beet sauce. To finish, sprinkle with fresh rosemary. Wood explained why his dessert is best matched for an intimate evening. "The dessert isn't too sweet and the rosemary has astringent properties so your mouth doesn't feel coated and thick. You won't even need to brush your teeth." (wink)

Veggies can be luxurious and sexy because they help your body feel loved, pampered and cared for. Of course, you could skip all this work and take your date to Fabarnak or hire Hutchings to give you and your guest a cooking lesson for lovers, but I do recommend the effort!

Karen Fulcher is more Dionysus than Diana when it comes to food and indulgence but plans to balance that in the New Year.



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Strings of Passion

by Janet Collins

Back home in Toronto for a few days, Ronnie Burkett is squeezing in some family time before heading out West for the next leg of his latest show, *Penny Plain*. "I get to text and phone John (his partner, jazz singer, John Alcorn) when I'm on the road, but it's not like I get to talk to Robbie and Daisy (the couple's beloved terriers) and I miss them like anything!" Burkett says. Well if Ronnie is thinking it—that means there could be a texting terrier or two in a future production of his Theatre of Marionettes.

For those of you who might not know (a Ford brother perhaps?), Alberta born Ronnie Burkett is a critically acclaimed, internationally known master puppeteer. His puppets aren't furry, ping-pong eyed creations for the juice-box set, although he says he's done his share of that and appreciates the genre. His puppets are beautifully sculpted works of art, vehicles for his storytelling to adult audiences, which brings us to *Penny Plain*.

"It's a bleak little play and certainly in Edmonton and Calgary I'd say, critically, it's got the best reviews I've had in years," Burkett says as if completely surprised. The play is set in the drawing room of Penny Plain's rooming house where she sits out the last 3 days of the world while news reports float in the air and a cast of assorted characters zip in and out with their own dispatches.

"There's nothing more dreary than an eco show," Burkett admits. "I'm sorry, I'm actively trying to reduce my own carbon footprint. You know, I don't eat factory farmed or thinking, emotional animals anymore and I don't own a car which is almost reason enough for them to take my Alberta birth certificate away." Burkett, a long time fan of Dr. David Suzuki, says the inspiration for *Penny Plain* came from Suzuki's answer to an interview question. "They asked Dr. Suzuki, 'With all of these things going on with the planet, will the world survive?' And his response was: 'Well the world will survive—we may not.' I'm paraphrasing him but that's the gist of it. And in that moment I just realized our arrogance towards this garden if you will, and how we think the end of the world means the end of the world, when in fact there's 7 billion of us and we just don't get that *we're* the problem."

But all is not lost. In true Burkett fashion, you can't go to the dark place without a lot of laughter. "There's moments of laughter in the show, moments of complete, ridiculous laughter—which is my way of dealing with bleak, I think," Burkett says, then adds, "I mean, I make a lot of crap up in this play, it's a fantasy, it's not real, but there's enough that hits close to home that I think discusses our times and I'm a firm believer that art should be a witness or a mirror. The only thing worse than preaching on stage is having huge, opera-sized, lofty ideas you can't control. But really, the theatre for me is a place of feeling and discussion and thought and not a place for a soap box, so I had to invent a story that was actually entertaining—go figure!"

When asked about where he gets the ideas for his characters he says, "My answer to that always gets a laugh but it's completely true: I ride public transit. They're on display for me all the time. Jubilee's mother, Queenie, she was outside of the Starbucks in my neighbourhood one day and started yelling at me. I had a little discussion with 'crazy yelling lady' and I came home and went—okay thank you muse, and started writing her down. And Jubilee really is me on public transit. I used to daydream so beautifully on public transit, but you

can't daydream anymore because you have to listen to people performing one half of a conversation all the time. One day I just had had it with a streetcar full of young, nattering girls talking very indiscreetly about their boring little lives and thought—argh! I'm just going to follow them home and end them, but a) that's really misogynistic and b) that's really going to get me in trouble and I'll go to jail. So I thought I'll just have to invent a character. She's one of those great monsters and I learned years ago you can't soften the blow with characters like that, you have to let them be themselves." He adds, "Ah, Jubilee is my great vent. I think if I didn't have Jubilee my head might explode. That I get to go on stage and do her every night has made me quite calm and (long pause) normal."

Burkett himself is a case study in the unlikely. He had no career path for becoming a puppeteer, let alone a world famous one, but he credits his parents and his daydreaming for helping him find his way. Popular lore has it that one fateful day his 7-year-old self randomly pulled out the "P" volume of the family's

set of *World Book Encyclopaedias* and cracked it open to the pages on puppetry purely by happenstance. "I just knew that this craft, this art form would satisfy my desire to make things and make voices and act and design sets—kind of said it all just looking at those two pages."

"The great thing about my parents is that they never exactly said yes," Burkett recalls, "but they absolutely *never* said no, which is great parenting." As a child Burkett performed shows for \$50 a pop thanks to his Dad and the family car. Looking back on it with great

affection he realizes what a labour of love it was. His Dad would take time off work, load up the car and drive all over northern Alberta, sometimes even staying overnight in a motel. "But I'd get that \$50 cheque and just clutch it in my hand until I could get home to the bank. What I didn't realize was that my dad was actually subsidizing me. I never offered to pay for gas or anything. I was all about profit margin," he laughs. His parents also weren't fazed when at age 14 he asked to go solo to a puppet festival in East Lansing, Michigan.

But the list of unlikely doesn't stop there—he met the masters of puppetry on that trip, among them, Bill Baird whose *Lonely Goat Herder* puppetry appears in the *Sound of Music*. He formed long standing relationships with that group of men he refers to as his "Old Boys."

And now, one of his all time favourite puppets sits proudly on his bookcase as a result of yet another long term relationship. As a child Burkett was an ardent fan of *Hi Diddle Day*, a puppet show shown on CBC once a week out of Ottawa. "I still know that puppeteer, I wrote her a fan letter when I was 10 and 44 years later we're still dear friends. The main character was Mrs. Gertrude Diddle—the campiest, gayest puppet that has *ever* been on T.V. Like an old tranny, really. And a couple of summers ago a box arrived at my studio and it was the original Mrs. Diddle.





She sits on my bookshelf—she's the patron saint of us all. I'm sure there are other middle aged gay boys who loved Gertrude Diddle as much as I did, I just haven't found them yet."

Burkett describes himself as a shy person and has been prone to stage fright. He says he can snap himself out of it pre-performance by recalling his brief time at Brigham Young University. "When I was in college I did a stint as a nude life model for the Art Department and the first time I did it I thought, 'Oh my God this is going to be so embarrassing!' But as soon as I disrobed it struck me—they are not looking at me like I thought they would—I was like a bowl of fruit. Nobody was lusting after me. *They should!* 'Cause you never know what you have when you're that age: that thin young boy! On stage they are not there to watch me, they are there to engage in a story with these characters. That really helps me."

Story is paramount to Burkett. A master of puppetry, he's built his own puppets for years and even developed his own signature joint techniques to get them to convey the story exactly as he's envisioned it. He's also built and designed sets, but his favourite pursuit has been writing. "I only started writing plays because there were no plays available for puppets. So like most puppeteers you build the puppets and then you need to give them something to do. The writing of the script has not only become my favourite part of the process, but the most important part. It's my witnessing in a way, which is not to say I don't love building the puppets, but I love building the puppets because I know what they are going to do in the context of this [story]."

"They are the middleman between me and the audience," he says, describing his characters. "There's me above them, and the

audience in front of them and the puppet is the little iconic vessel that we are going to fill from both sides. They are going to fill that thing with the belief that they are alive and I'm going to fill it with my technical stuff to make them think they are alive."

Although Burkett credits daydreaming with giving him a career, he's incredibly serious about his craft. "You'll talk to people who say the theatre is magical and it's a cathedral," he says. "Well not really. It's a service industry when you break it down. I'm like a waiter or chef, people go out at night and plop their money down and I wiggle my bum and entertain them, but when all the elements collide beautifully, then *that's the magic*. And I try to tell people its magic based on technique and repetition and practice—it's not left to chance or a plastic Jesus in the sky. I don't think a lot of young puppeteers get that, without technique, all you're doing is hoping for luck."

Burkett is adamant that he has the best job in the theatre, he gets to write, build his own characters, pick their wardrobe and design the sets, albeit he does have some help at this stage of the game. He revels in being able to crisscross every theatrical discipline. He can't believe his luck. "Whatever happened with that 7-year-old and those 2 pages, I think that was the most amazing thing. I don't run into a lot of people who've known what they wanted to do their whole life." And this year is another milestone for the master puppeteer. "So here we are at the 25th year of Theatre of Marionettes but I've had 40 years as a working puppeteer. That's ridiculous because I'm fabulously young still! When I was 14 my mentor said to me, 'If you want this, you better be prepared to be on the road for 40 years,' and at the time, yes, I put up my hand and said I solemnly vow and all that stuff and here it is 40 years later and *please*—I've got another 25 in me!"

Mark the date: Ronnie will be performing *Penny Plain* at Toronto's Factory Theatre January 20 through February 26, 2012.

Janet Collins is a freelance writer who lives in Toronto with a bossy little pug who is learning to text "cookie pls" and already knows a few things about pulling strings.



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QUEERLESQUE

All the World's Their Stage

by Bryen Dunn

MAD KATE
Photo: Sigreid Dobros



TIGGER

Photo: Roxi Dlite



Burlesque has been entertaining devoted audiences around the world for many years, and it's recently skyrocketed back into the mainstream, with the depiction of the scene in Hollywood flicks such as *Moulin Rouge*, and more recently *Burlesque*. While places like The Crazy Horse and Moulin Rouge in Paris still offer traditional cabaret style burlesque for tourists, there is a more alternative wave of performers and producers shaking things up that are worthy of a visit.

Back as far as 1868, women in male drag were a focal point of a huge scandal in Lydia Thompson's "British Blondes," generally recognized as the first major burlesque show. It continued through with the campiness of Mae West and all her gay and drag queen friends influencing each other. Burlesque performances were actually banned in parts of the United States in the 19th century because of nudity, but its overall appeal never really went away, and eventually resurfaced in many forms over the years.

Gary Beeber is the director of the feature film *Dirty Martini*, and producer of *Gotham Burlesque* in New York City. "The new burlesque movement came directly from the NYC drag scene, modern dance and performance art, and was kick-started by the performers in my film," Beeber explains. "At the time in the late 1980's and early 1990's, these performers didn't realize that they were creating a form of burlesque. *Dirty Martini* was totally inspired by the NYC drag scene, and is now one of the top burlesque stars in the world," he proclaims.



The glamorous Tigger! (www.facebook.com/TiggerJames) claims, "There are

He's also released a rap song, "I'm the Bunny," on iTunes. "I turn 45 in February and love becoming an older glamorous person," he says gleefully.

scads of us queers in burlesque, some of us for many years, and there are new queer men and women joining the fold every year. Back in the 1990's New York burlesque scene there were a couple of us boys doing shows with a small handful of fabulous girls that kick-started this whole burlesque renaissance here. No one really focused too much on me being a man or being gay, because as performers we have always reflected a shared sense of humour, sexuality, and glamour, typically between outrageous women and their gay male friends." In 1992 performance artist Penny Arcade invited him to be an erotic dancer/stripper in her show *Bitch! Dyke! Fag hag! Whore!* played for a year in New York and toured Europe and Australia after that. Tigger! didn't come into being until 1997, and less than 10 years later he became the first crowned King of Boylesque at the annual Burlesque Hall of Fame show back in 2006.

Scotty the Blue Bunny (www.scottymbunny.com) is another who came out of the same scene, and has been performing his special brand of spandex-clad spectacles around the globe since 1996. His website states he sings, plays, offends, cajoles, fiddles, twirls baton, and busts really big balloons with his butt. Pretty impressive for a blue bunny I'd have to say. "I was a closeted suburban kid who moved to New York in 1987, fell in with a few fire-eaters and glass-walkers, and popped out of this much later as a host and MC who could juggle for three seconds," he laughs. He claims that ultimately the reason the world has a big gay rabbit is because of his time spent with the Bindlestiff Family Cirkus. "So many people I met moved away from home to rage and reinvent themselves in New York. I approach the ritual of performing for an audience with love and danger, and vividly remember stage diving and crowd surfing at the Helsinki Burlesque Festival a couple years ago," he recalls. He looks forward to hosting the fifth anniversary of that festival again in February, as well as the 10th anniversary of the New York Burlesque Festival in 2012.

Today, the current burlesque scene continues to entice and stimulate, but the boundaries have been somewhat loosened beyond the traditional vaudeville style acts. Performers often kick up their heels and drop their knickers to rock and roll, hip-hop, and other musical genres. It hasn't been until relatively recently that males have joined the ranks of this predominately female driven form of entertainment. Troupes are now often a mixed lot of female, male, cross-gender drag, and transgendered individuals. It's what is now commonly becoming referred to as Queer Burlesque or Queerlesque within the burlesque world.

Down south, Ace Falcor (fuckyeahqueerlesque.tumblr.com) decided to start a queer burlesque show in New Orleans when she realized there wasn't such a thing. Having performed drag for several years, she thought it was time to give burlesque a shot as well. "In my first act I started off dressed as a submissive leather boy, and as I started to strip I turned into a female dominatrix. Since then, playing with gender and sexuality in my performances has become a staple feature. Queer for me is a political term, not just sexual," she explains. Her first produced show simply titled, *Queerlesque* happened in May 2010, and her next one will be focused on performances by masculine women and other trans-masculine individuals. "Queer burlesque is a passion of mine and there aren't many of us that identify as such, either as performers or producers of shows. I'm also the moderator for the first community queerlesque blog, so hopefully this will bring more of us together," she aspires.

Since 2003, Georgian southern belle Vagina Jenkins (www.vaginajenkins.com) has been gracing stages worldwide with her more classic striptease, a historical recreation of what exotic dancing looked like in the 50's and 60's. Her first performance was at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival where she used the needle, thread, and glue from her tent repair kit to fashion a "Garden of Eden" look from a



Etta James' "Sunday Kind of Love." She's currently working on *1st Beats, Bumps and Grinds*, which will be a touring cabaret of queer hip-hop artists and burlesque dancers. "I'm co-producing the tour with queer Korean emcee SKIM, and we are exploring what happens when hip-hop meets neo-burlesque, and modernizing what cabaret art means in the context of queer communities of colour," she explains.

Performers have always adopted a certain stage persona that they bring to life by way of music, extravagant outfits, and props. Queer burlesque brings this one step further by incorporating sexual identity and ambiguity into the productions. Most of these performers consider themselves to be queer artists, either by sensibility, sexuality, or both. Themes are often political, creative, witty, campy, and most definitely sexy.

On the other side of the Atlantic, *Club Noir* is a travelling burlesque show with its home base in Glasgow, Scotland. Shows take place regularly in Edinburgh and London as well, and incorporate DJ's, live music, comedy, and fetish acts. They also lay claim to being listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as being the biggest burlesque club in the world, often attracting upwards of 2,000 people to their shows. They were the first burlesque club in Scotland and are now the oldest in the UK. "We definitely get queer in all senses, as in Goths, transvestites, transsexuals, drag queens and kings, gays, fetishists, and more ranging in age from 18 to 60. It's probably the most diverse mix of people you are ever likely to see in one room," states show spokesperson Sarah Crawford.

Berlin is another hotbed of a burlesque scene that pushes the boundaries of bizarre. *Clea Cutthroat* (www.facebook.com/cleacutthroat) is burlesque performance artist, model, and member of two outrageous bands, *Eat Lipstick* and *Bonaparte*. She describes herself as the Bloody Anti-Burlesque Diva, an outspoken bitch who eats blood, showers in milk, and throws bibles. "I'm into the ugly sexy, oddly fantastic, upside paradises, glittery

bra and panty set festooned with various silk flowers, and then performed to politics, and rude drag queens. My shows combine punk glamour, cabaret prowess,

long lasting lip gloss, and fetish tendencies to bring a whole new meaning to Grotesque Burlesque," she boasts.

She also produces one of Berlin's most notorious annual events, *The Grotesque Gala*, that provides a platform for alternative artists of all mediums to express themselves in an atmosphere without censorship. "My work is very character based, and a direct reflection of me, my life, my obsessions, and current fetishes. I combine this with my inspirations from pop culture, religion, the occult, gender, and a little added glitter of course." You can catch her in December at The Queen Calavera in Hamburg, as well as at the Cabaret Bizarre & BRÖT party in Zurich. In January 2012, she'll be performing back in her native New York City for the first time in five years.

Mad Kate (www.alfabus.us/index.html) arrived in Berlin in 2004 with the intention of starting a career in feminist performance art. She now hones her skills as a dancer, writer, performance artist, and member of two bands, *Kamikaze Queen* and *Bonaparte*, where she shares the stage with Clea Cutthroat. She's also co-owner of *Exit*, a fashion forward clothing/design store and performance space for the avant-garde. "There will never be enough time to explore all the different women I would like to be, but in each of these personas lay my intellectual and artistic interest in the politics of borders, both between bodies and within bodies. I think the term queer best describes what I do, because I hope that I can link my experience and voice to people of all genders," she proclaims. She's currently developing a solo performance project with another musician that she says will be feminist, queer, political, and aesthetically edgy.

Sheila Wolf (www.sheila-wolf.de/225) is Berlin's Rockabella Drag Queen who has been filming drag performances since 2005, caught her first burlesque performance a year later, and had her first burlesque stage performance in 2008. "As a female impersonator doing drag I don't feel comfortable taking off all my

clothes, preferring to lip synch and mix up gender roles instead," she admits. She's yet another that is changing the face of burlesque with her unique incorporation of drag onto the stage. "I love performing, and will be doing some television stuff, and I'm also planning an outrageous event that combines burlesque and drag", she says. She also maintains an online presence with her magazines, *Queerlesque* and *Burlesque Fashion Index*, as well as a reference guide to queer Berlin.

Finally, *Hedo-Lux* (www.hedoluxe.com) has been a costume designer in Hamburg for more than 20 years, designing pasties, hats and other accessories, often selling them at burlesque shows. Like many others, he didn't think of doing burlesque himself until being asked by other performers. Since then, he's done many events, and recalls a performance at the London Burlesque Festival in 2010. "The most fun is when something goes wrong and you have to improvise. I once was wearing magnets on a costume that heated up, and when I finished my performance I had eight scars to remember that one by," he grins. He often looks for inspiration from eccentrics like Leigh Bowery, Klaus Nomi, and Amanda Lepore. As for the fashion side of things, "I just finished an Arlecchino costume that I've dreamed of making for years, and got to wear it out in public on 11.11.11," he boasts. He's performing next at the Helsinki Burlesque Festival in February.

The annual *Burlesque Hall of Fame* is held in Las Vegas, and gathers all the top performers from around the globe. This year several top prizes went to queer performers, including Reigning Queen: Miss Indigo Blue; Reigning King: Captain Kidd; and Reigning Troupe: The Stage Door Johnnies. In fact, every man who competed for King this year was a gay man, and most went on to win in different categories. As well, there were several queer burlesquers that hit the stage to perform during one of the gayest years ever at this event. It's definitely one to put on your calendar to attend in June 2012.

From the pioneers to the current crop of emerging talent today, there's enough to tease and tantalize every taste. So for your next vacation, add some more sparkle and glitter to your itinerary. Find out where these divas are performing next, pack your bags, but leave your inhibitions at home.

Bryen Dunn is a freelance journalist based in Toronto with a focus on tourism, lifestyle, entertainment and community issues. He has written several travel articles and has an extensive portfolio of celebrity interviews with musicians, actors and other public personalities. He's willing to take on any assignments of interest, attend parties with free booze, listen to rants, and travel the world in search of the great unknown. He's eager to discover the new, remember the past, and look into the future.

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This issue's topic: Femc

Wrong Note Rusty: It's interesting that people who aren't familiar with burlesque often think that male performers doing burlesque must be like drag. I think that in a lot of ways, burlesque is an umbrella term that incorporates many types of performance art, one of which is drag.

Rubie Laframboise: That is true! And I love that there is that overlap. I guess the idea that male burlesque performers must be doing drag comes from burlesque having always been traditionally female. The beauty of it is that Boylesque has evolved into its own entity, and it can have elements of drag, or it may not, but this nevertheless may be the root of the distinct difference between male and female performers.

Wrong Note Rusty: A lot has already been said about the differences between male and female burlesque, probably because stripping is sexual and sexuality can't really be divorced. Women doing burlesque is empowering: it's classy, it's sexy, it's artistic, whatever. With men, it's usually comedic, irreverent, and more often than not, a little bit queer. The typical differences are pretty plain to see—go watch any burlesque show and it's right there in your face (literally). We get it. Men stripping is novel.

Rubie Laframboise: It's good times! At least we're both on the same page with that.

Wrong Note Rusty: I see male burlesque is now reaching the point, artistically and professionally, where female burlesque was at the beginning of the neo-burlesque revival. It is novel, and just breaking ground, and is just about to explode. I think it's exciting to watch, even if it's going to be a bit messy. By that, I think that it's important to note that burlesque as an art form emerged as a cultural response to high brow entertainment. It's

a piss-taking of the mainstream: ladies in lavish outfits getting down and dirty.

Rubie Laframboise: Thankfully, there are a lot of big name performers out there who maintain an awesome sense of humour, and continue to play with parody in various forms. Poking fun/laughing at others is one thing, but in burlesque, the ability to laugh at yourself should never be underrated.

Wrong Note Rusty: I think men doing burlesque right now is the parody of the parody. It's at a stage where we can draw attention to and send up that art form. I think that's why it works so well. While I will say that there are lots of spectacular male performers that are going above and beyond that (Jett Adore comes to mind), I think that at this point in time, if you have a dick, you can jump into male burlesque and be celebrated, even if you're not that great a performer. There, I said it. Whereas, I think it's probably extremely hard to enter the scene right now as a new female burlesque performer because it is so bloody saturated.

Rubie Laframboise: I agree that a male performer entering the scene right now would have a much easier time than his female counterpart getting recognition. For the casual audience member or burlesque newbie, there is a high likelihood that the male performers will stand out more than the female ones, simply because of the novelty factor.

Wrong Note Rusty: Burlesque is mainstream when you can hire Dita Von Teese for tens of thousands of dollars and you can have PG13 movies with Nicole Kidman and Christina Aguilera released in theatres all over the world, or you can go to any metropolitan city and take

Union... we have one!

by Wrong Note Rusty and Rubie Laframboise

Female vs. Male Burlesque



burlesque classes with a whole bunch of other girls for kicks. So I think it's definitely easy to be a sausage in a fish market.

Rubie Laframboise: For a while there, I was ready to begrudgingly accept that this is just the way it was, and that burlesque is turning into yet another sphere where a dick equals success. And I have to admit, I consistently found myself enjoying male burlesque performances more than females ones. However, having seen an increasing amount of male performers in the past year, I finally realized that what it really comes down to in the end, is how provocative and innovative a performer can be—if they have a natural sense for performance and a freaking stage presence! I think that the performers with integrity and skill are the ones that will last—something that is true regardless of gender.

Wrong Note Rusty: I'm curious to see how saturated the male burlesque scene will get. How many men can the scene support? Will it ever be in danger of becoming male-dominated? Will there always be one guy for every ten girls? And will there be supply exceeding demand? Will it self-regulate and squeeze out male performers that don't have what it takes?

Rubie Laframboise: Ooh, intense questions. I could see the male performer population becoming increasingly saturated—why not? People see the kind of response that you guys get, and think—hey, I could do that! It's the same thing all those ladies taking burlesque classes are thinking. Really, we all just want to be loved. And to have our bodies screamed over. It's a nice feeling! But that doesn't mean that getting onstage to perform is for everyone.

Wrong Note Rusty: I totally agree with you about male energy infiltrating an atmosphere. I didn't even think about that, but I guess that's what privilege is, isn't it?

Rubie Laframboise: Yes, and damn you privileged ones with your dicks! Uh...wait, no, I actually don't feel that way. I feel as equally privileged to have a lovely set of breasts and a vagina, even if that means I'm old news to burlesque audiences. In all seriousness though, I think the explosion of male burlesque is great for the scene in many ways, especially in that it a) raises the stakes and forces female performers to up their game, and b) makes it appeal to a wider audience, for whatever your orientation, there is a good chance that in an evening you'll get to see at least one performer you'd like to sleep with. Not to say that's what it's all about, but hey, isn't any performance art more exciting when you're attracted to the performer? In the spirit of not taking myself too seriously, that's the question I'll leave readers with.

Wrong Note Rusty is a member of Canada's premier all-male burlesque troupe, BoylesqueTO. He's been performing since 2008 and has appeared in over 100 shows at big rock venues like the Mod Club and Lee's Palace and high-brow institutions like the Art Gallery of Ontario, Massey College, and CanStage. When not stripping, he is concurrently a professional photographer and also holds three other occupations at a university, a sex store, and an electronics retail chain.

Rubie Laframboise has been performing with *Glamour Puss Burlesque* in Toronto for over four years, and thinks that this is just about one of the best damn things that's ever happened to her. Runners-up for this category include finding true love, and Boylesque T.O. (these may or may not be related). Rubie enjoys writing almost as much as performing, and hopes that this isn't the last time you'll see her in print.

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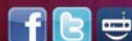
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HOT ARTIST: OLGA BARSKY

by Sherry Hucklebridge

“Ladies and Gentlemen, let me present to you a tale of two drag queens who didn’t know the rules. Queens can fall in love with a woman, they can fall in love with a man. They can fall in love with your mother, but they can’t ever, ever fall in love with each other.” So goes the opening passage of *A Dragged Out Affair*, the Canadian short film written and produced by Olga Barsky, Clair Lowery and directed by Sonia Hong.

At only fifteen minutes long the film is witty, visually stunning and capable of transporting the viewer into a unique world, with unique rules. It stars Heaven Lee Hytes (Derek Gravelle) and Donnarama (Vince Pincente) as two drag queens from opposite sides of the track, who fall in love watching each other from afar. Heaven Lee performs with Miss Conception (Kevin Levesque) at the upscale ‘Velvet Curtain,’ while Donnarama and Daytona Bitch (Dustin Redshaw) work at the run down ‘Rusty Box.’ Eventually the protagonists’ more seasoned co-workers catch on to their forbidden affair and chaos ensues.

Olga Barsky explains the peculiar taboo of a love affair between queens as “the idea that two artists can’t really get along, or two performers might have trouble getting along because they don’t want to share their rightfully deserved spotlight. It is often referred to as *kai kai love*.”

A York University Film School graduate, Barsky decided to write and produce the piece as a tribute to the performers in Toronto’s drag scene. “I’ve been around artists my entire life, and now I work in film, so I am constantly around incredibly creative people. But when I was first introduced to the drag scene, I just couldn’t believe it. I’d never met people who had so many skills,” she reflects. “My mind was blown and I really wanted to come up with something that showcased drag as this beautiful art form that almost happens behind closed doors in the village. So many straight people don’t really know about it, and I wanted to use my knowledge and skill set to bring it to a much larger audience.”

This was a task that would prove difficult to achieve, or even fund, due to the nature of the subject. “When we were first approaching funders we got rejected a lot because drag is such an uncanonized art form. Some of the more bourgeois granting agencies didn’t really understand what we were going for, and didn’t really see the art in it. Actually, at one point, someone suggested that we use ballet dancers with wigs and make-up. We got quite upset, but finally Ontario Arts Council and Reel Asian helped us out and we were able to fund the film,” Barsky recalls.

Once funding was in line, they began the year-long process of turning their idea into a reality. “The writing process was really organic,” she says. “It essentially took place over two nights and a lot of booze at Fran’s. The lyrics just wrote themselves—it is probably the shortest amount of time it has ever taken any three people to write a short film. What is interesting about our process is that we didn’t write it and then cast it, we cast it WAY before. Everyone just had such a strong persona that they brought in, that it was so easy for us to just write



the entire film around them.”

Filming took place over the course of four days at one location, with the art department converting the stage into seventeen

different scenes. “We were humbled by how supportive the community was during the entire process, from helping with fundraisers to donating their time as extras,” Barsky relates of her time on set. “DJ Alex, who actually DJs at Asian Express, did our sound mixing, Daytona did all of our choreography and Donnarama did all of the costumes.

“By the end there were forty-seven costumes that were not only incredibly beautiful, but also helped with the story telling. They were all really literal. In one scene Daytona is setting fire to one of the bars and not a detail was left out: the hair was in the shape of a flame, the bra was made out of match-sticks and there was a lighter incorporated. It was so amazing!”

A Dragged Out Affair has already received positive reviews from its screenings at Reel Asian and Inside Out Toronto film festivals. “We’re getting quite a bit of interest,” she reveals, “so hopefully it will have a pretty long life in the festivals and, I mean, the whole point is that we would love to make a feature, it’s just so difficult to fund in Canada.” For now they are focusing on promoting the short in the hopes that it leads to funding for a full-length film.

Unfortunately, *A Dragged Out Affair* has yet to secure distribution. “We are working on getting copies out to sell. We have a website, so if people are really interested and want to see it they can email any one of us and we’d be happy to help out,” assured Barsky.

For those of you interested in viewing the film, you can contact the producers at www.adraggedoutaffair.com or view the teaser trailer at www.youtube.com/adraggedoutaffair.

Sherry Hucklebridge is currently a student at the University of Toronto and is the new Editor-in-Chief of Durham’s *The Local Biz Magazine*.

Main photo: Olga Barsky. Inset photo: Amy McConnel

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When I think burlesque, I see red and black accented with gold and silver metals, luscious velvet drapes with fringe trim, crystal chandeliers with glass beads and glittery diamonds. Tufted Rococo-era furnishings, like settees and loungers, set upon plush area rugs and of course, I just can't forget the feather accessories. Putting together a room that tastefully comprises any or all of these elements can help you add a new, dynamic energy to your space, especially if you're feeling bored and uninspired by your current décor. Add a little spice, with a style that'll make it easy for you to have a little bump n' grind whenever you want. We all know about burlesque as a form of entertainment, but I'm going to show you how you can take inspiration from this sexy genre to add some flare and excitement in your home, regardless if you rent or own.

The style of burlesque that we have become accustomed to dates back to the 1930's and was made famous by the likes of the legendary Gypsy Rose Lee. If you were fortunate enough to see her story re-told recently on the Broadway stage, featuring the incomparable Miss Patti LuPone, you'll remember how the 2nd act was so much more dynamic after they introduced the characters to burlesque. The costumes, feathers, lace and corsets just took over the entire stage and even from the cheap seats there was no denying the titillating effect it had on the audience.

More recently, the style has been enjoying a comeback and is now being dubbed as Neo-Burlesque and features artists like Dita Von Teese, Katy Perry and of course the stars of last year's hit movie, *Burlesque*, Cher and Christina Aguilera. The neo version of the style is slightly edgier,



SHOW ME WOW ME!

by Manny Machado

encompassing elements like stripper poles, modern dance and over the top props, such as Miss Von Teese's famous life-size martini glass tub. The stripper pole industry has seen a growth in sales in the last few years thanks to the many enthusiasts who enjoy having their very own pole to grind upon. However, for the rest of us who don't have the space or the desire for such an apparatus, there are many other ways to bring the spirit of burlesque into your home.

The easiest way to make a change in your space is with a little paint. When working with the boldness of burlesque's red, orange, purple, yellow and black, a little goes a long way. When addressing your walls, pick a couple of options from your local paint store and ask for sample sizes in order to swatch the selections on your walls before you commit. This will save you the frustration and hassle of having to repaint if the colour doesn't come out as you saw it in store. A little trade secret my painter has shared with me over the years, is to first prime your walls before you paint; what this means is fill any small holes or imperfections with a poly-fill material and then use a tinted primer that coordinates with your colour choice. If you are using a Benjamin Moore colour, opt for their AURA

line of paint as it has the primer already built into it. The time and money saved is worth the extra charge.

Another factor that can affect your colour output is the amount of light you have in the room. If you have large windows and the room is flooded with natural daylight, then don't be afraid to go bold and dark; however, if you don't have much daylight, try a lighter version of the colour.

Wallpaper is still a very hot trend with some very affordable and stylish options available at local big box hardware stores. Damask, paisley and floral prints are all the rage right now and what makes them modern is the scale of the oversized pattern, in amazing contrasts like black and white or red. Both paint and wallpaper will immediately be the focus in the room, so make sure you are comfortable with the amount of wall space you are committing to. I like to add the element of colour to smaller walls or behind larger pieces of furniture, like sofas, media cabinets or armoires, so the furniture doesn't look like it was placed in the room as an afterthought.

Part of the mystique of the burlesque style is the unique furniture. The loungers, for example, that entice intimacy



the other person in the “window”—nobody said you couldn’t play alone. Set the mood with crystal chandeliers and glass beads; install dimmers on all your light switches whenever possible.

Lastly, don’t forget the feathers! Feather boas, fans and quills come in a multitude of formats, everything from dollar store finds to expensive designer options from high-end retailers. A whimsical but stylish way to play up the look is to get a stylish canister or vase and fill it with loose colourful feathers, or a good quality boa. How you decide to use the feathers is up to you, just remember to have fun with your space.

and hint at sexual escapades, the fantasy of catching a glimpse of somebody doing something naughty behind the big chair. Accent furniture, like stools, ottomans and loungers are not only great additions to a space from a functional aspect, but they also make it easy to inject some fun and perhaps stimulate a little naughty behavior. The Rococo-era furniture, like chaise lounges and Louis IX high-back chairs can be found in vintage and antique stores. Keep an eye out for pieces that have interesting features like tufting, button details or nail head trims. Furniture retailers also carry reproductions in a variety of price points, with some very modern finishes like colourful lacquer paints and graphic upholstery, such as zebra or leopard prints. The industry trick to creating a “staple piece”—meaning the item in the room holds the whole look together—is to locate something unique with good bones, that can be re-worked to the way you want it. Older furniture is made of solid materials, like woods and metals and can be refinished and buffed to look new again, while upholstery and cushions are easy enough to change.

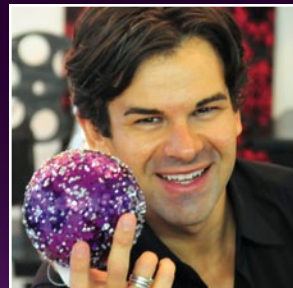
Draping fabric in an area to either separate a space, or create a room division can be a fun and creative way to add some glam to an otherwise boring room. Taking a cue from the burlesque settings, I would suggest velvets, specifically in red. Be creative! Perhaps you’ll want to enclose an area, such as around your bed or your new chaise lounge. In order to draw the curtains closed, and create a cabana-like tent inside, simply attach a couple of points to the ceiling by way of screw hooks or anchors and drape the fabric from the top, allowing for enough to reach the floor. Use interesting tiebacks like fringe trim, or even pieces of leather to keep the panels open. Silk fabrics are also a nice option for your cabana and will be lighter and perhaps easier to work with, enabling the use of adhesive hooks as opposed to making holes in walls and ceilings. I would suggest the easy-to-use hooks from 3M. To finish off the look, try items like purposefully hung mirrors that reflect some element or create a *trompe l’oeil*. This term means to fool the eye and could be something as simple as framing a large mirror with drapery, to create a window. Think of the hours of fun you could have teasing

Making a change in your home tends to inspire more change in other areas of your life, whether it follows the form of burlesque or some other unique theme. I encourage you to own your space and put your stamp on how it looks. Build confidence in your design decisions by starting small, get a sense of what’s right for you then decide how long you want to keep it up. Remember that a completed room means addressing all the usable parts of the space, such as floors, walls, lighting, seating and counter spaces, which then leads to the accents and accessories that will emphasize your desired theme. If you encounter a blockage in creativity ask a friend or family member to give you some feedback. After all, sharing your space with your loved ones goes hand in hand with creating a home.

As this is my last design column to grace these pages, I would like to leave you with these thoughts: your home is your own, so make the space you live in the most important space you ever spend time in. Invest in yourself by taking the time to make the right choices that reflect your style. You don’t have to spend a lot to make your personal environment arouse and motivate you. I hope the ideas I’ve shared with you over the years have inspired you to make positive changes in your homes and that you’ll continue to follow me and my designing adventures wherever they may take me.

Yours stylishly,
Manny

Designer and stylist Manny Machado, believes that having the power to dream means having the power to create. Manny’s unique perspective allows him to transform even the most impossible spaces into something clients are proud to call their own. www.mannymachadodesigns.com





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Whiskey Sour



Fiction by Jeffrey Harrison

Nico took a last drag off his Marlboro and then flicked it into the gutter, before entering Club Noir. It was just after noon, hours before any patrons would be showing up for the glamorous nightlife it proudly offered. He sidled silently up to the bar, where his sister Selma sat, but after a moment realized she was too enthralled with the dance rehearsal taking place on stage to notice he'd arrived. She'd been like this all month, staring at the lead showgirl with heat in her eyes and a smile that Nico recognized all too well: Selma had her mind set on getting something that she wanted and nothing would stand in her way. Her blatant hunger for the female dancer was heinous!

With a final glance, Nico turned away from his sister in disgust, moved down to the shadowy end of the bar and signaled Hal, the bartender. He needed a hair of the dog to clear the sour taste in his mouth that had nothing to do with last night's bout of drinking.

"The usual, Nic?" Hal asked, flicking open his Zippo with single deft hand and lighting the new cigarette Nico had just placed between his lips.

"Yeah, make it a double. Day's not starting out great," he grunted.

Hal complied without hesitation; Nico's foul moods were to be avoided. There was a heated electricity in the Italian's dark eyes and he looked to be itching for a fight. As soon as the shot was poured, Nico snapped it back. The fiery liquid detonated in his gut, sending out heady fumes that woke him up. Better than coffee! The moment his tumbler thudded back down on the worn wooden bar, another was poured for him.

Clinking his gold pinkie ring, the one with the flashing ruby, against the glass, he looked over the man standing across from him. Hal was a beefy guy, but it was all rock solid muscle. The way he moved his broad shouldered body spoke of coordination, awareness of self and space. Nico admired the agility in the way he flicked the clean glassware from out of the small rotating dishwasher and back up to hang from the racks above the bar. Hal was a fighter—he'd proven himself that in the ring many nights this past month. It was a skill that was making Nico some nice cash.

Watching him go about his mundane tasks, Nico caught himself staring at how the material of the crisp white shirt strained over bulging biceps with each movement, how impossible it seemed the sleeves



were able to be rolled up over the thick forearms covered in dark hair, and the way the buttons strained over his chest, threatening to pop off and expose more of his hairy pecs. Unsettling thoughts pushed at the back of Nico's mind and he flicked his eyes away from the flexing arms, instead meeting the man's eyes, which were a startling green, jumping out from beneath black eyebrows. Hal caught his glance and smiled. Nico hastily swigged back his forgotten drink, shoving the dirty, unwanted thoughts of the bartender away and focusing again on his anger at his sister. He *would not* be like *her*!

"Here," he said, pushing a fat white envelope discreetly across the bar as another double of amber liquid was poured into his glass. "Your cut from last night."

"Thanks." Hal took the package and, after a moment's realization it was too bulky to fit in his pocket, jammed it down the front of his pants. Nico's hunger was re-ignited as he watched the white paper packet disappear below Hal's belt, watched as his thick fingers and thumb vanished momentarily from sight behind fitted black cotton to readjust the now sizeable bulge. When Nico looked up, it was into Hal's eyes again. Sweat broke out on Nico's

brow and he jerked his gaze to the stage, downing his refilled drink.

"Careful no one thinks you're packin' heat, 'cuz a package that size can get you in a lot of trouble." The fire from the booze rushed straight to his face this time, as he stumbled to clarify. "Of cash. A package of that size of *cash* can get you into a lot of trouble."

Hal chuckled and poured the Mafioso another. "I'm here until delivery, then I'm off until tonight. Want me to swing by the gym? Maybe we can go over the details of my next fight?"

Nico kept his gaze fixed on the dancers cavorting about on stage. "Yeah, sure, if you want. Come by around five and we'll get you all set up." Feeling back under control, after his momentary loss of it, he nodded toward the stage. "That's one sassy act, ain't it? A dancer like that would be a prize acquisition."

"Sure would," Hal replied, emptying the glass ashtray and giving it a quick polish with his rag before setting it back down on the bar, "if you're into show girls." Nico glanced back at the bartender, and now it was Hal's turn to look away. Was he blushing? "Don't get me wrong, Cherie is something else, but I've always found showgirls a little too high strung for my tastes."

"Oh yeah?" Nico asked, suddenly intrigued. "And what exactly are your tastes?" he pried, the words out of his smart-ass mouth before he could stop them.

Hal met Nico's deep blue eyes and held them this time, each man daring the other to be the first to look away. "I prefer someone solid, down-to-earth. Confident in what they want."

The sudden heat smouldering between the men threatened to boil over as Cherie's number climaxed on stage. The moment was obliterated though, as Selma's old fashioned glass slammed into the bar. "Hal! Another Whiskey Sour!"

"Yes, ma'am," Hal answered and hastened to obey, breaking his gaze with Nico first.

Nico furiously stubbed his smoke out, tossed back the remainder of his drink—including the half melted ice—and stalked out of the bar, angrily crunching on the cubes.

Hal glanced in the mirror behind him after he set down Selma's fresh Whiskey Sour and saw the beads of sweat on his upper lip. So much for playing it cool—he'd almost blown it with Nico. *What the hell was he doing?!*

Months he'd spent working the club for a chance to get some face time with the notorious younger Moretti sibling. The staff at Noir were a tight knit family, so he'd had to start out in the dish-pit, sweating it out in the raunchy back waiting for the opportunity of a staff promotion to come his way. Sure, his buddies on the force had provided the opening by "finding" the stash of cocaine on Marco the second rung bartender. And sure, he was conveniently scheduled to be unloading the day's liquor delivery when the club suddenly found itself short a bartender; however, it had still taken weeks in the new position before Nico had done more than grunt at him.

After nights of small talk over scotch on the rocks, Nico had finally sized him up, playfully grabbed his bicep and asked him if he knew how to throw a punch. Hal cringed at how eager he'd been to join the young Don down at the gym to spar. It had been the break he and the police department had been waiting so long for, is what he told himself at the time. Finally they were getting close to one of the Moretti siblings. Selma had proven impossible to approach, as obsessed as she currently was with

Cherie, the dancer. Nico had been their Plan B, and it was through his sports betting—especially his illegal bare-knuckle pit fights—that proved to be their best in. Things were going exactly as planned, so again, he looked in the gold framed mirror, past the reflected bottles of booze and stared himself hard in the eye: *Had Nico just hit on him? Had he just flirted back? This jeopardized the whole mission! What the hell was he doing?!*

"Yo, delivery's here," said the burly driver, popping his head through the kitchen door just past the bar. Hal nodded and followed the guy out back. A couple hours of mindless grunt work would get his mind back on the job.

At home two hours later, Hal showered the sweat off from unloading Noir's weekly delivery of beer kegs and liquor and then spent the better part of another hour getting ready to meet Nico. He needed to be wired for his chats because there was no telling when the Mafioso would say something they could use as evidence against him. Hal had quickly learned that the normally tight lipped man was quite free with his shop talk when he was at his place of business—the gym. Dancing around the ring sparring, however, left precious little place to put the delicate, but powerful little transmitter. After much experimentation, it was finally set up so the small battery pack nestled at the top of the cleft of his butt, safe from the rigors of the ring, while the mic was threaded through with the drawstring of his shorts and hidden behind the thin material where he knotted them to keep them up. So far it had worked for the most part, no hits below the belt and all, but the rules were pretty much non-existent for fights when the gloves were off. There was no opportunity to fix a mic broken in the ring because of a wild punch. They'd lost a whole post fight chat with Nico the week prior because of just such a calamity.

When Hal arrived at Mickey's, Nico was already suited up and in the ring, waiting for him.

"You're late," Nico said, smacking his gloves together and hopping about on the balls of his feet. "Get him gloved up, Mickey, and let's get this show on the road!"

Hal tossed his bag ringside, unzipped and shucked his threadbare grey hoodie and thrust his hands out for Mickey to slip his gloves on so they could be

laced and taped. Tonight's fight must be something special to have Nico all wound up and eager to get sparring.

"So I think my sister has a thing for that dancer, Cherie," Nico said, immediately throwing an aggressive flurry of jabs at Hal's head, as soon as the bartender had ducked between the ropes and come within striking distance of the lean Mafioso.

"Yeah, I figured so," Hal answered back, dodging the first series of punches and throwing back his own.

"You did, did you?" Nico danced away and Hal mirrored his movement, curious where this unexpected stray topic was headed. "So, what do ya think of that?"

"Don't really think of it at all, I mean live and let live, right? That's always how I've felt." Hal replied, going in for another barrage of blows.

Nico was caught off guard by Hal's response and he took the blows to his abs before finally dropping his gloves to protect himself and dancing away. "Live and let live? Really? That's all you have to say about that?" Nico's return right hook came out of nowhere and popped Hal solidly in the face. He saw stars as he retreated across the room. Nico came fiercely after him. "You have no qualms with my sister wanting to get involved with another woman?" Another salvo of punches chased Hal backwards into the ropes.

"We here to talk about who your sister is interested in bedding, or are we here to talk about us?" Hal huffed, suddenly pressed to keep up his guard.

"Us?!" Nico stopped dead. Before Hal could pull the punch, he clocked Nico hard enough to land the Italian on his ass. The tension in the ring skyrocketed. "What about us?" Nico growled, spitting the blood from his newly split lip across the space between the two fighters.

"Tonight's fight?" Hal replied, momentarily at a loss. "What do we have planned for tonight?"

Nico narrowed his eyes and clenched his jaw tightly, grinding his teeth. "The fight. Nothing to talk about. You go in and you win. Like always."

Hal stuck out his gloved hand offering to help Nico back to his feet, to restore some form of peace that seemed suddenly to be shattered. A moment passed with Nico just glaring at him before taking the proffered help and springing back to his feet again. "No specifics?" Hal pressed. "I mean, you

haven't even told me where it's going to be, or who I'm facing."

"Why you always gotta know all the details? Why don't you let me worry about 'em?" Nico barked, clearly agitated now.

"Hey, Nic, I didn't mean to piss you off. I just figured that what your sister is up to isn't really any of my business."

"Well I'm making it your business and I'm asking you—ah, to hell with you—forget it!" Nico spun on his heel and stalked out of the ring, tearing the tape off his gloves with his teeth and shoving Mickey out of his way when the older fighter tried to help him through the ropes and out of the ring.

Not once in the month of sparring, of idle chatter inside the ring and out, had Hal ever seen Nico this worked up. For the first time in his life, Hal was completely at a loss as how to react. It was clear though that something had to be said, because Nico was definitely on the edge of losing it, and that could cost him the whole mission. Hal followed Nico to the change room. He found him furiously punching one of the lockers, bare knuckled, his gloves having been launched across the room into the showers.

When Hal put a gloved hand on Nico's shoulder to try and calm him down, the Mafioso violently spun on him, grabbing him fiercely by the waistband of his shorts to pull him face-to-face with the gun that was suddenly in his hand.

Hal stared into the barrel of the gun. Nico looked down at the wire and battery pack that had torn loose when he'd grabbed Hal's shorts, snapping the drawstring. Hal's shorts hit the tiled floor of the locker room.

"What the fuck?!" both men cried.

Nico looked incredulously at the small transmitter in his hand. "You're a goddamned pig?!" he roared.

A multitude of emotions fought across the handsome Italian's face—none of them good. Fury at being set up, then surprised confusion eating away at the anger until it crumpled into a look of naked hurt. Standing there in his jockstrap, the muzzle of a gun jammed into centre of his forehead, Hal did the only thing that could save both their sanity. *Fuck the mission*, he thought. He kissed Nico Moretti like his life depended on it.

Jeff Harrison is Editor-in-Chief of PinkPlayMags



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WINTER THE CITY

by Ricky Boudreau



You either love the winter or you hate it.

For those of us who love it, get your sex wax on, polish your goggles and pull out the long johns. For those of us who are not so into winter, start getting your playlists together for your cardio routines and your holiday get-togethers. Either way, it comes and goes and we always get through it. Remember, it's how you react to things. I think it's easier to deal with the chilly season once a plan is in place. Start organizing your events on a calendar: parties, dinners, outdoor activities, work-out schedule and goals, whatever you feel is going to make the months enjoyable for you. We are Canadians and we can't let a little snow and cold stop us in our tracks. We just need to be dressed properly and have a something to look forward to. I personally enjoy the après ski, even though I'm not actually skiing! It definitely helps warm you from the inside out. Or, it's a great time to watch that television series you haven't had a chance to see yet. Whatever it is that you choose to do this winter, I hope it's a great one for you!

This will be my last "In the City" and I would like to thank our editor, Jeff, for all of his encouragement and wisdom, and our publisher, Antoine, for giving our community an entertaining quarterly magazine that is so easy to carry around. It's been a great ride serving as your City Hostess. Cheers to a great Holiday season y'all!

Burlesque

Great Canadian Burlesque – Girlesque 7

January 27th

9:30 pm

Tickets \$35 advance – \$40 door

The Comedy Bar

945 Bloor St. W

416.551.6540

greatcanadianburlesque.com

In keeping with the theme of this *winterplay!* issue, don't miss the Burlesque show at the Comedy Bar. Girlesque 7 will feature performances by Coco Letric, Minnie Tonka, Fiona Flaunit and many others. Definitely a night to remember! Ladies, you may wanna check this out—there are even going to be performances from some Canadian Burlesque Hall of Famers.

TIP: *You may want to have a "Booty Call" lined up for after the show! Just sayin'...*

Shevisions

www.shevisions.net

Here's a production company that you can contact if you are going to host a grand event and want it to be something different. They have pre-made shows that you can hire as well as quite an array of talent to choose from, including burlesque. They are local, in Markham, and would love to help you out.

TIP: *Producer/Creative Director Suzi Horton has an amazing line-up of talent ready to wow you and your guests.*



Burlesque Party

Your place

Date – To Be Determined

If you are hosting a holiday party this year, why not go for a Burlesque theme? If your budget allows, you can hire Drag Queens to come in and do a number or two, as well as have all of your guests come in costume. Parties are normal at this time of year and have yours be the one that all of your friends will be talking about, until the next holiday season. You can play burlesque music and have great names for cocktails like "booty punch" and give out pasties as your guests leave.

TIP: *Costume parties are always a hit and you can play Burlesque starring Cher and Christina Aguilera, or Moulin Rouge starring Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor, and have your guests dress as their fave characters.*

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www.woodystontoronto.com

So our dear, beloved Miss Conception is moving on up in the world. She has booked an amazing gig in Mexico where she will be performing her brand new, live, Broadway-style show! It's at The Palm in Puerto Vallarta (www.thepalmpv.com). Miss C will be there from January until April, 2012. So come on out and help make her bon voyage show a raucous one! You can always check out www.missconception.ca for more details of her shows.

TIP: *Bring some extra cash to show your love and support through tipping Toronto's most amazing talent...I hear that there may be a bit of a "roast" element with Lena Over.*

Cabaret

Hart House Theatre

January 13th to 28th

Tickets \$15 – \$25

7 Hart House Circle

Wellesley & Queens' Park

Gay icon Liza Minnelli starred in the movie version of this show with Joel Gray. It was directed by world renowned choreographer, Bob Fosse, and has some of the most recognizable songs and choreography in musical history.

TIP: *In the history of Hart House productions, this is the first time the young artists are tackling Cabaret—should be great!*



Chicago

Tuesday January 31st – 8 pm
 Saturday February 4th – 8 pm
 Tickets \$59.50 – \$99.50
 Massey Hall
 178 Victoria St.
 416.872.4522

www.masseyhall.com

Chicago has had more than 50 hits—pretty amazing and perhaps I'm showing my age with this one. They've got 18 gold records, a Grammy and a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. They also still have 4 founding members performing with them. Take a walk back in time and check out these boyz and galz.

TIP: This is a great show to take Mom and Dad to for the holidays!

Food

Winterlicious 2012
 January 27th – February 9th
 Prix fixe menus of approximately \$35
 Various Restaurants around the city
toronto.foodontario.com/event.php?event=toronto-winterlicious

This year marks the 10th anniversary of this amazing, culinary event. If you love food, like I do, then you absolutely need to take advantage of the Winterlicious food festival. There are over 100 participating restaurants that offer a great sampling of their menus.

TIP: I would recommend making reservations and early on, so you don't miss out. Also a great date thing to do.

A Taste of Niagara on the Lake – 2012

January 28th; March 10th; April 14th
 \$145/person (includes of tax & gratuity)
 1.877.342.4374
www.atasteofniagara.ca

This 3 day adventure allows guests to take part in eating delicious meals in various restaurants in Niagara on the Lake. It showcases the area's top culinary talents paired with some of the best wines of the Escarpment. Everyone meets on Friday

evening with a wine and cheese get-together, a chance to meet your fellow Progressive Dinner buddies. The main event takes place on Saturday evening where you get to experience a five course gourmet dining and wine pairing. Five of the region's top restaurants participate to excite and stimulate your palate. Your amazing culinary evening begins at the Pillar & Post Inn and from there you will be transported to your first dinner stop, courtesy of Niagara Classic Cabs. You will then complete 4 more journeys until you reach the finale of the evening. The adventure will conclude on Sunday, where you will have the opportunity to visit 5 participating wineries to taste complimentary samples of Niagara wines. If you've been looking for that perfect, romantic get-away with your honey—this is it! Accommodations must be made separately but there is an extensive list on the web site.

TIP: There are only 130 tickets per date so get your tickets sooner than later. Bring along some friends and make it a double date.

Educational

Leonardo da Vinci's Workshop: Inventor, Artist, Dreamer

Until March 18th
 Tickets \$20 – \$29
 Ontario Science Centre
 770 Don Mills Road
 416.696.1000

www.ontariosciencecentre.ca

Leonardo da Vinci is history's most famous artist and scientist. The Ontario Science Centre has an incredible exhibit on right now that is fantastic. It's very interactive and allows guests to not only check out some scale models of his ideas but also a rare chance to look into his "Codices" where he first sketched out his inventions.

TIP: You can purchase tickets online and this exhibition is excellent for all ages.





Free Concert Series – Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre

Until June 6th

FREE

Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts

145 Queen St. West

416.363.8231

www.coc.ca

Open your mind and let yourself experience this amazing series of six concerts: vocal, piano, jazz, dance, chamber and world music. This is a FREE concert series that takes place in the gorgeous Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre that you can see into from University Avenue. It's in that stunning building that is home to the Canadian Opera Company and the National Ballet of Canada. They have put together this wonderful program for everyone to come in and enjoy. It started in late September and goes until early June and happens on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 12pm to 1pm or 5:30pm to 6:30pm. This program will allow you to enjoy both established artists as well as emerging ones.

TIP: *This is an amazing and peaceful way to enjoy a break from work over lunch, or to end your work day. Let all your worries and troubles melt away.*

Tradition

The Nutcracker

The National Ballet of Canada

December 10th to January 3rd

Tickets \$38 – \$133.50

Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts

145 Queen St. West

416.345.9595

www.national.ballet.ca

A holiday season just wouldn't be complete without a visit to the ballet. Perhaps this is a family tradition of yours as well. Sugar Plum fairies dancing around the mouse king and all of

the wonderful costumes—who can forget those handsome men in tights! This show is a feast for the eyes and the imagination.

TIP: *Get tickets that are close to the stage. I love it when you can hear the pointe shoes tapping on the floor, it adds another layer.*

Les Coquettes Toast 2012 with the Sanderson Centre

December 31st

10:00 pm

Tickets \$53.50 and \$63 (ADULTS ONLY)

The Sanderson Centre

88 Dalhousie Street, Brantford, Ontario

519-758-8090 or 1-800-265-0710

www.lescoquettes.com

Les Coquettes host their first-ever New Year's Eve celebration as special guests of the Sanderson Centre, a former Vaudeville house in Brantford, Ontario. The unique, Toronto-based cabaret theatre company showcases a bevy of beautiful male and female performers in a sizzling evening of Cabaret Burlesque that incorporates traditional striptease with dance, cirque and live music. The majesty of the fully restored theatre offers a perfect venue for this sophisticated and playful adults-only event.

TIP: *Wear something naughty under your glamorous evening attire.*

Ricky Boudreau blossomed as a true social butterfly while traveling the world as a professional figure skater for 15 years. He loves the gift of the gab and discovering great parties in the city. With a love for culture, great food and beauty, Ricky spends his time very creatively as a professional makeup artist for MAC Pro cosmetics. He has helped artists like Deborah Cox and Dame Shirley Bassey look gorgeous. Heard of a new hot spot? Email him at intheCity@pinkpages.com

Photos by Karel Matkovic

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From the Heart

by Shelley A. Harrison

The Masks We Wear



We all act fake sometimes. You know how it feels. When you are the deceiver, if you catch yourself, you feel a bit like cardboard, as though there were a thin wall between you and others. You may feel hyper or drained after the interaction. If you are the receiver and you are not colluding with the masquerader, you feel miffed, bewildered, or put off. You haven't been given real contact or exchange, and you can sense the withholding. Why is it so hard for us to bring forward our authentic selves in our interactions?

We have all developed a veneer that we present to the world in an effort to live up to an image of who we wish to be. We may value appearing to be in control, or want to come across as loving and nice, or prefer to be aloof and above it all, with no needs. These are the three predominant Mask distortions of Power, Love, and Serenity. Which one do you use?

I'd like to share with you a vivid teaching I was given while attending the Barbara Brennan School of Healing. It is a shortcut tour for everything going on in your psyche and soul from A-Z and tracks how we develop the habit of

"giving good face." The teacher came up front with a pile of pillows in different colours. The first pillow she placed on the floor was white. It represented the Higher Self. This is the part of you that is unified with the Divine and the highest within you. It shines through in your life where you are emulating your best and feeling good.

Another pillow went on top. This one was, say a print of rainclouds, or Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*. This was the Wound. It is your pain. When we experience a hurt that we cannot process we try not to feel it. We wall it off by withdrawing from physical pain in our body, or by repressing mental and emotional anguish into our unconscious, where it stays unresolved and un-dissolved. It suffocates the creative energy of the Higher Self. Our Wound separates us from the experience of our inner light. We see it re-enacted in the most painful areas of our life.

She added another pillow to the stack. It was black. The Lower Self. This is the evil within us that thrives on negative pleasure. It wants to be separate from Divine and Unity. It is our self-will, which takes great delight in getting its own way, maintaining separation, and not feeling the

pain of the Wound. Most of us never admit this is within us, but project it onto other people, cultures, or nations. If we can release the energy pent up in the negativity, it transforms into positive vibrant life force. Most of us can't do this work on our own, but need to be shown how to release this in a non-harmful way. When we don't do it intentionally, it leaks out when we lash out.

The next pillow was the Image. There were sunglasses printed on this one. This represents the conclusions we make about life based on our Wounds. For example: "If I love, I will be abandoned." "Men are not trustworthy." "Life is difficult and you have to fight to survive." Our Images are usually unconscious. Only after repeating a painful experience many times do we tune into the fact that we have some part in creating it and start to go looking within rather than blaming others and playing the victim.

Now came a pillow with hockey players on it. (Yes, she really did have one like that!) This one represented our Defense. It's the predominant way we distort our energy when we are afraid. We get afraid because we are creating life according to our images, and so there is a lot of "me against the world" experience of separation, rather than the safety and peace we feel in unity.

Then she finished with the pillow on top, your Mask. This is the idealized self-image you present to the world in order to get along, get love, and feel in control. This is the fake. It's the outer layer of our personality that we superficially identify with. When we interact with others from the Mask, it never brings the full exchange of energy and nourishment present when we interact from our Higher Selves. It is like the shade over the lamp, and it doesn't fully allow the light to shine through. The Mask is the self we think we ought to be, or wish we could be based on idealized mental images. The effort to force ourselves to conform to this perfect picture of who we should be, keeps us separated from self-acceptance. The antidote to the Mask is to try to live each moment welcoming rather than rejecting what arises within us, and also to take responsibility for our faults rather than blaming others.

It takes a heck of a commitment to personal process and awareness, with good guidance from a methodology therapist, healer, or teacher to dissolve and release all of these stifling pillows (these concepts are drawn from the Pathwork, and I highly recommend the book *The Undefended Self* by Susan Thessenga). We must learn to recognize our Mask and Defense; make conscious the Images we hold which shape our life experience; have the courage to safely discharge the negativity in the Lower Self; dare to feel the pain in the Wound...until it dissolves back into Divine Unity, thus freeing more of our Higher Self to shine through to the surface.

However, there can also be a positive psychology to mask wearing, like fantasy role-playing as a way of dressing up. Halloween is the time most of us get to do it. We really enjoy the people who get into their character and don't just don the costume, but ham it up. There are also forms of entertainment that allow us the opportunity to try

on different faces such as theater, and fantasy role-playing games.

My brother Jeff, your fine editor of this here magazine, had a blast last New Year's when he got together and dressed up with our family for a murder mystery evening. This kind of play-acting is almost more akin to clowning. It's all about creating broad caricatures. It shakes up normal parameters, allows us to interact outside of our usual norms, especially our habitual exchanges with friends or relatives.

Another way to masquerade is by playing role-playing games. My brother and I have certainly come a long way since our teenage days of playing Dungeons & Dragons. I still remember the original characters we developed. Both revealed aspects of our true natures, and the idealized characteristics we wished we had.

Why is this grown up version of dress-up so compelling? What are we learning by uncovering these archetypal qualities we possess? Our nephew Hayden loves his Fireman outfit. Psychologists say there is a stage in our early development where we act out roles. Between the ages of seven and puberty we are expressing deep idealistic urges, which reveal the soul's longing and most likely relate to the soul's world task. Within the archetypal forms we put on are found our deep spiritual longings, our goals and aspirations, as expressed by the qualities we play out in the backyard or the school playground. What characters in movies, myths and fantasy animate you the most? Wearing different masks allows us to call aspects of ourselves into the foreground. When we highlight certain traits or tendencies like this, we get a closer look at them, bringing old or seldom worn costumes out of the closet so to speak. So our mask can be disempowering or empowering depending on our awareness of it. Self-awareness is the key.

The holiday season can be a great time to catch yourself in a façade. Parties and family gatherings may trigger us to connect from who we think we ought to be, or wish we could be in order to win approval. You can catch yourself by asking "What impression of myself do I want to create and why?" Then try to relax down into contact with your authentic self in the moment. Take a risk and be real.

"When you master the courage to become your real self, even though it would seem so much less than the idealized self, you will find that it is much more." -Pathwork Guide Lecture 83, "The Idealized Self Image"

Shelley A. Harrison is an Energy Healer in Ottawa. She graduated from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing 4-year professional training and has been working in private practice for 10 years. She visits Toronto regularly to see clients and visit her brother, Jeff, the editor of this magazine. You can write Shelley at fromtheheart@pinkplaymags.com or visit her at www.doveheart.ca.



Winter Horoscopes

by Micki Lee

ARIES (Mar 21 – Apr 19)

January: If you do eventually decide to move on, it can only be because the moment is right.

February: Hold back from making definite judgments.

March: You should try to be less critical of partners' ambitions.

TAURUS (Apr 20 – May 20)

January: You must turn your attention to cash or career issues.

February: Take responsibility for your happiness.

March: Keep up the pace without straining.

GEMINI (May 21 – Jun 20)

January: Sidestep confrontations and avoid competitions.

February: To make it worth your while, you mustn't go over budget.

March: Renovate or simply change your living space.

CANCER (Jun 21 – Jul 22)

January: A fire is kindled deep down that feels stronger than anything ever felt before.

February: It's a time for pushing your own personal projects.

March: It's a strong time to make an investment or to clear some debt.

LEO (Jul 23 – Aug 22)

January: You experience a renewal of energy.

February: Personal projects that you begin now are likely to blossom.

March: During this cycle, you are more communicative than usual.

VIRGO (Aug 23 – Sep 22)

January: Take a break from the hectic pace of your life to reflect.

February: It is better to finish projects and tie up loose ends.

March: It's a great month to do something entirely new.

Libra (Sep 23 – Oct 22)

January: The spotlight is on you and your ability to lead.

February: You are more gracious, well-behaved and likeable now. Take advantage!

March: Social interactions are more frequent.

Scorpio (Oct 23 – Nov 21)

January: You might find some great ideas through others now.

February: It's not the time to push ahead with brand new projects.

March: It's a good time for networking and settling disputes.

Sagittarius (Nov 23 – Dec 21)

January: It's a good time for research and quiet contemplation.

February: You are likely to require solitude in order to get your thoughts together, or to be mentally productive.

March: Be careful that you don't over commit.

Capricorn (Dec 24 – Jan 19)

January: It's a time to shine. Be humble, but don't hide your abilities.

February: You are coming out of your shell, ready to perform.

March: Your popularity is on an upward trend during this cycle.

Aquarius (Jan 20 – Feb 18)

January: Place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others.

February: You could find that your talents or skills are especially appreciated.

March: Take advantage of the increased spontaneity.

Pisces (Feb 19 – Mar 20)

January: Watch for tension or idle chit-chat

February: Some of you may enter a business partnership.

March: Watch for hurried speech and impulsiveness all month.

Micki Lee is a business woman from Oshawa who uses the stars as a guide for her daily life.



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Looking Back

Tanya Cheex

Back in the day, burlesque was a form of entertainment that couples could go to. It was predominately for the male gaze, but in certain theatres it was so grand—like in Montréal if you were going to see Lili St. Cyr—you would put on your furs and your jewels to go out with your husband. It was like the dinner theatre of the time. There'd be comedians and there'd be the girls. It was really glamorous back then.

My grandmother had an interest in this and she knew all the names of the stars of her day, so she used to talk about them, how they looked and how they moved. Burlesque and vaudeville is essentially what television became, so you'd also see burlesque pieces in old Hollywood movies, like *Gilda*, where Rita Hayworth does a striptease with a glove to a song. In Marilyn Monroe's time there was a burlesque star who imitated her—Dixie Evans, who is still alive today. Marilyn's image and behaviour was definitively based on burlesque and the larger than life feminine archetypes.

So when I was really little—eight—my Grandmother

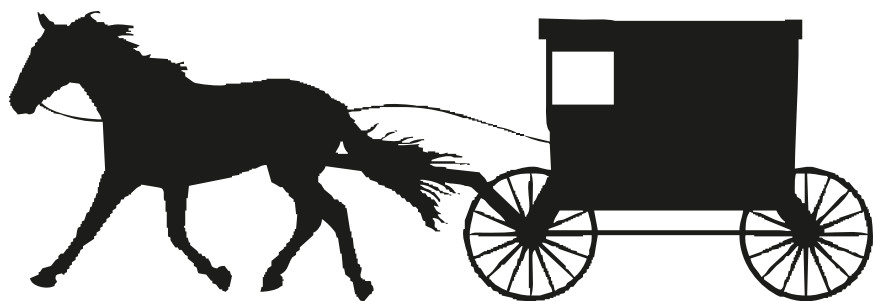
and I used to have these TV nights where she'd babysit me and we watch these old movies. I got it in my head that I should put together a strip show in my friend's backyard. I choreographed this number with umbrellas and charged a \$5 admission and it got busted by the neighbourhood parents. My first sold out show was busted! This was the '70s and the phone was ringing off the hook with parents saying, "Do you know what your daughter did?!" and my parents were trying not to kill themselves laughing. They finally asked me, "Where did you get the idea to do this?" And I answered: "Granny!" My Grandma encouraged that kind of thing. She was a model, so she had a huge wardrobe of these crazy elegant gowns and gloves and stoles and we were always playing dress up.

So I dropped it for a while, because I was eight, but got it in my head that if I was a stripper then it'd be the same thing as what I'd seen in these stag reels. I soon quickly found out that no one cared about boas and gloves in a strip bar. When I was there I spun off into more of the fetish side of things and then I was told I'd make more money as a dominatrix. So I did that for 17 years. All these things interlock in a way because I was also really getting involved with the drag shows on Church Street. I actually got my start performing in those bars—I've had drag mamas and I was female/female impersonator doing Marilyn, old Hollywood and Madonna.

It was around that time I started distributing a line of clothing out of the UK that was called Skin Two, which was high end latex rubber clothing. I would do fashion shows at these sex and trade shows and I thought it would be more interesting to do the runway in burlesque vignettes. It was fetish, burlesque and drag culture. The name Skin Tight Outta Sight was born out of that and it stuck. My original troupe was established with those models who were involved. Combine all that with the punk rock and rockabilly retro—all those things mashed together—is what became Skin Tight Outta Sight, Canada's longest running burlesque act. We're the originals and we're one of the originators of the movement in North America.

Bend over Ladies and Gentlemen, she'll TAN-YA CHEEX!

Founder and Artistic Director of Skin Tight Outta Sight (www.skintightouttasight.com) since 1998 and Artistic Director of The Toronto Burlesque Festival, Tanya loves to mix the sublime with the surreal. She was voted as one of the Top 50 Burlesque Performers for 2009, and has taken off her clothes all across Canada and the USA. Read her adventures at www.rhinestoneswhiskey.blogspot.com.



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