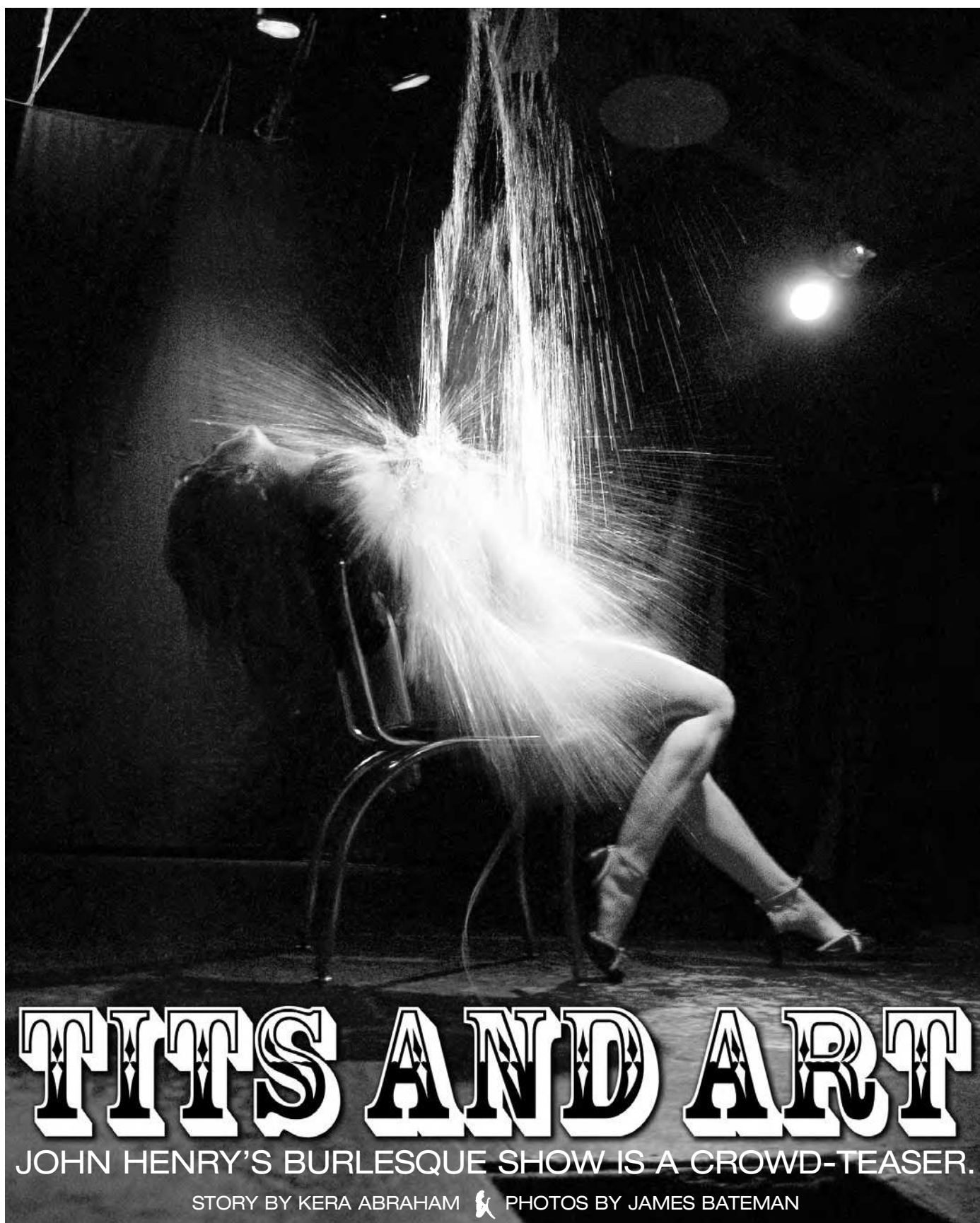




It's Sunday night in Eugene, and the downtown bars are near-dead. A group of tired-eyed women shoots pool at Luckey's, a few undiscovered stars sing karaoke at Downtown Lounge, and a half-dozen lonely guys line the bar at Horsehead.

But wait. *Something* is happening. A gaggle of smokers loiter outside of John Henry's, looking mighty buzzed and kinda turned on. Inside, Lexy (her stage name) is twirling tassles for a standing-room-only crowd that eggs her on. Her breasts whirl with the tassles: clockwise, counterclockwise. Her grin is simultaneously sweet and wicked.

This is John Henry's Broadway Revue, a weekly burlesque and variety show that embodies the bar's motto, "Classy as Fuck." The staff (all men) wear their black-tie best: suit jackets, bow ties and top hats. The female performers wear brassy little costumes. In one act, Dusty pushes around a broom, slowly zipping out of a

baggy janitor suit in a sexy rendition of "Take This Job and Shove It." In another, Lexy and Katie sport men's suits and grip canes, swaggering to Nine Inch Nails. Later, Nikki scoots up and down the stripper pole in a short skirt and a g-string.

The show has been happening weekly at John Henry's since fall 2003, when bar own-

ers Keith and Mark Martin caught onto something hot: a resurgence of burlesque. The genre is generally defined as a mix of dancing, theater, comedy and striptease. Early burlesque spanned a century of showgirls — think Bettie Page, Lili St. Cyr, Tempest Storm, Gypsy Rose Lee. Women who teased the crowds but didn't take it all off. Women who seemed to be in charge of their sex appeal. But their empires were still controlled by men, and they performed primarily for men in times when hard smut was harder to come by.

The 1960s brought free love and flowing porn, a deluge that drowned out the old-timey song 'n' dance routine. Straight men shelved their glam pin-ups in favor of *Playboy* centerfolds. They stopped drooling over the burlesque queens and went to strip clubs instead. They got more ass, less art.

Then, in the early millennium, the retro tease came back. It seems that the Internet, the ghost of vaudeville past and young, post-feminist hipsters joined forces to imbue the art of burlesque with a modern flavor — call it *neo-burlesque*. Women in

traveling troupes like Fluff Girls, The Yard Dogs Road Show and the SuicideGirls Burlesque Show (see sidebar) are dancing, doing circus tricks and giving the crowds saucy winks. But this time around, there are piercings and tattoos on women dancing for themselves, and ladies in the audience cheering them on.

The Martin brothers wanted to cash in on the fad. Taking a cue from Dante's *Inferno* in Portland, where the Sunday night erotic variety shows were drawing loyal crowds, they piloted their own version by hosting talent shows at John Henry's and tossing go-go dancers on the speakers.

Bartender River Hawkins became the principle organizer of the show, calling it The Broadway Revue. He's an image of hipster hotness himself, a 29-year-old with a serious face, shaved head and arms covered in brands and tattoos. He worked at local strip clubs for five years, and he recruited their dancers for the first Broadway Revue in November 2003.

If burlesque is a blend of theater, dance and striptease, not everyone agrees on the proportions. In the early months, The Broadway Revue had as much variety as it had stripping. Some women teased off their shirts, but jugglers, fire-dancers and magicians worked the stage clothed. A troupe of six local women, Terpsichore's Daughters, did vaudeville scenes, trapeze tricks and cheeky dance routines in old-timey costumes, but they didn't strip down past their ruffley panties and corsets.

At some point, the scale tipped toward the stripping. During Sunday evening rehearsals, Hawkins plans out the acts, which get progressively racier as the night wears on. By the third set, most skits leave the performers half-naked. When the women of Terpsichore's Daughters learned that the dancers who went topless got paid more than they did, they split.

"We, as a troupe, didn't like that women got up on stage, ripped their clothes off and didn't really choreograph their acts," says Terpsichore member Angelina Donaldson. "Their draw was older college men who just wanted to see tits and ass. Even though there was some sword-swallowing and variety, I felt like the night was a little more lewd than we wanted it to be."

Donaldson calls Terpsichore's Daughters *theater* burlesque, which might make The Broadway Revue *saloon* burlesque. "We choreograph our acts to a tee," she says. "We like dancing more than we like taking our clothes off."

Call it what you want; just don't call The Broadway Revue a strip night. The music is gimmicky, the MCs are corny and the girls are only half-naked. It draws a different clientele than strip joints.

"Our customers are attracted to the tartness of it, but maybe they don't want to see a woman spreadin' her legs," Hawkins says. "It's what you *don't* see that turns you on, and that's where strip clubs lose it. People want more of a tease, and they like the theatrics of burlesque."

The Broadway Revue crowd is roughly 40 percent female, and women demand more than T 'n' A. "You can only orient things toward men for so long until people get sick of it," Hawkins says. "Men are the lowest common denominator in erotica. For women