

Burlesque Boom

EUGENE'S BURLESQUE AND VARIETY TROUPES GIVE THE TRADITION A MODERN AND SILLY SPIN by William Kennedy

Burlesque is just stripping for hipsters, right? Or the kind of show to which Don Draper from *Mad Men* would take clients (performed at places with names like “The Boom Boom Room”)?

Wrong. The truth of the matter is burlesque has a long and storied history, and while dance is vital to burlesque, the popular variety shows also feature comedy, live music and social commentary.

These centuries-old theatrical dance productions are no longer tucked away in dark nightclubs or confined to the wee hours of the night; burlesque troupes are performing at your favorite neighborhood bar, at festivals and taking their show on the road like any band. Some troupes are even tailoring their shows for the whole family. New York City's Pretty Things Peep Show has performed at Diablo's, the Portland-based Rose City Shimmy lit up the Lane County Fair in years past and last month The Ultraviolets Black Light Burlesque from Hawaii titillated audiences at Sam Bond's.

But Eugene also has its own homegrown burlesque scene with a modern spin: The Broadway Revue Burlesque Show has settled in nicely at Luckey's after losing its long-time home at the venue formerly known as John Henry's, The Red Raven Follies vaudeville troupe performs regularly around the Pacific Northwest and The Trudy Bauchery Variety Show is a monthly favorite at Sam Bond's.

“My productions have a similar structure to those of the mid-19th-century burlesque shows,” says Jennifer Brom, aka Trudy Bauchery, producer of The Trudy Bauchery Variety Show. “They have comedians, musicians, theatrical spoofs and performers in drag. It is an arena where taboo subjects can be explored with laughter and creativity.”

“Our shows are a mix of vaudeville, vintage dance, circus arts, comedy, music and burlesque,” says Jennifer “Ember” Woodruff of The Red Raven Follies. “We also enjoy providing family-friendly performances for all-ages shows.” In October, The Red Raven Follies will launch a series of “performance slams” at Luckey's. “This will be a fun series of monthly, supportive, performance competitions that will culminate with the finalists performing in a variety show,” Woodruff says.

“I like to think of our show as an ever-evolving beast,” says Matt Depew, stage manager for The Broadway Revue. “Our show brings a lot of variety, with comedic skits, fully-themed shows and copious amounts of sex appeal.”

“Burlesque audiences in Eugene are amazing, rowdy and fun,” Woodruff adds. “They make what we do absolutely worth every moment.”

Burlesque gained popularity in England and America in the mid-19th century. From the very beginning, burlesque featured bawdy dancing and humor. In the early 20th century — paralleling vaudeville — the risqué portions of the show became emphasized. As burlesque fell out of fashion with the rise of movies and TV, the spirit of the medium lived on.

“As a performer, I often reveal how highly influenced I've been by Jim Henson and *The Muppet Show*,” Brom says. The Trudy Bauchery show includes outrageous costumes like a seven-foot egg-laying bird and a lactating alien. “For me, burlesque is the means, laughter is the mode and thinking outside the box is the objective,” Brom says.

Burlesque's sexualized nature is often controversial since feminism started a long discussion about the male gaze. “It isn't just about being sexy for me,” Brom says. “It's about the laughter; it's about exploring and bashing the general public's feminine ideals. What better way to expound myths than through laughter? We are all sexual beings, be our style silly or serious, strange or seductive.” ■

Catch the next Trudy Bauchery Variety Show, featuring Portland's renowned “pop-n-lock” queen Angelique DeVil, 9:30 pm Saturday, Aug. 17, at Sam Bond's; \$8. Find The Broadway Revue Sunday nights at Luckey's and The Red Raven Follies perform the Eugene Celebration Saturday, Aug. 24.



JENNIFER BROM OF THE TRUDY BAUCHERY VARIETY SHOW
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