

CLASSIC BURLESQUE

Kerfuffle performs at Labor Temple Diner & Bar on April 28, May 26

By KATHERINE LACAZE
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Astoria's up-and-coming performing arts troupe Kerfuffle: A Vintage Burlesque Comedy Revue, is the creation of longtime dancer and instructor Trixie Leone, but when she takes the stage as "Trixie Kerfuffle," she is one of six members contributing to a diverse, vibrant whole.

Kerfuffle, which debuted last month at the Labor Temple Diner & Bar, has two upcoming shows at 10 p.m. Saturday, April 28, and 10 p.m. Saturday, May 26, at the venue. The performances are for folks 21 and older (ID required).

The show also features Joshua Conklin as "Ginger Vitus"; Susan Bryan as "Susie Q Slaughter"; Tara Hopman Dyrset as "Kiss Me Karma"; Suzannah Pace Hastings as "Mrs. Vesper Belle"; and Erin Carlsen as "Lady Grace."

In developing Kerfuffle, which Leone called a "dream realized," she carefully recruited the other members for their various talents, backgrounds and presentations.

"I picked wonderful people who are also very talented people, and I picked people that I respect how they carry themselves in public and how they treat people, what they represent and what they stand for," she said. "I tried to choose very different looks, flavors, abilities and styles so it's a true variety show."

A Labor Temple original

Last fall, Leone was approached by Terry Robinett, who owns the Merry Time Bar & Grill with her husband Todd, about developing a bur-

lesque show for the couple's new venue, the acquisition of which wasn't public at the time nor finalized until January of this year.

"(Robinett) really buoyed up my confidence by being so supportive and encouraging and by giving me so much creative power," Leone said. "She is a major silent partner in this venture."

Leone and Conklin, Kerfuffle's resident drag queen who also performs for other events and shows, appreciate having the Labor Temple — with its tinsel curtain, checkered floor and historic vibe — as the troupe's home base.

"It's very dive-bar-meets-vintage-diner," Conklin said. "It's great, and the energy there is amazing ... It's an embracing place."

The show's name was chosen not only because of Leone's stage persona, but because the word "kerfuffle" captures "the perfect meaning and feeling for what I wanted to produce through this show," Leone said.

The other descriptors in the group's title — vintage and comedy — were chosen because the group focuses on period pieces, and "we all believe comedy is a great part of being sexy," Leone said.

The cast members first met as a group in December and began rehearsing in January. Though each had a prior relationship with Leone, they were mostly unfamiliar with the other performers. Over the past several months, however, the group has bonded, due in part to each member's generosity and humility, Leone said.

"I didn't want to deal with ego, or people who thought they were better than anyone

else," she said. "They've exceeded my expectations in spades."

Guest performers may make appearances in upcoming shows, but Leone said she's satisfied with the core group she's assembled and intends to keep them together as-is.

"We're a tight family, and we have a specific chemistry," she said. "I feel like when one of us is missing, it's not quite complete. I really value what we have all together. What we share is very special."

Expanding the repertoire

The group is working on building its repertoire with both solo and ensemble routines that involve dance, choreography and vocals, as well as different costumes and reveals.

"The numbers encompass so much more than a dance routine, making it that much more special and that much more of a burlesque performance," Conklin said.

While Leone choreographs the group numbers, she encourages the cast members to design their own solos, from the music and choreography to the costumes and reveals, so the audience can "get to know them intimately, what kind of performer they are," she said.

The solos are where the performers' personalities come out. For instance, Conklin described his drag as "awkward, relatable and sexy," while Leone uses her athleticism to create a funny, quirky, campy, larger-than-life persona.

For the time being, each show will have a distinct theme: The St. Patrick's Day debut featured a wild, eccen-



CARRIE MARINO ANK PHOTO

Kerfuffle: A Vintage Burlesque Comedy Revue includes (from left) Kiss Me Karma (Tara Hopman Dyrset); Lady Grace (Erin Carlsen); Trixie Kerfuffle (Trixie Leone); Ginger Vitus (Joshua Conklin); Mrs. Vesper Belle (Suzannah Pace Hastings); and Susie Q Slaughter (Susan Bryan).

tric party theme, while April is all about the understated elegance, drama and romance of 1920s-40s cinema with a Silver Screen theme. May's theme has yet to be determined.

"Once our repertoire is built to overflowing, then we can cherry-pick our favorite numbers for upcoming shows," Leone said, adding they could change the performance based on the season, the venue, the audience or for a holiday.

Enter at your own risqué

The group is both blessed and challenged by the likelihood of having a consis-

tent audience base for their shows, Conklin said, adding "it does keep you on your toes," and provides motivation "to constantly reinvent yourself and try new things."

Leone plans to book Kerfuffle for as many events as possible. The group took part in the fundraiser for the Astoria Arts & Movement Center at Fort George Brewery earlier this month. They will also perform for Conklin's May the Fourth Variety Show at the Labor Temple.

Door tickets for Kerfuffle's April and May shows at the Labor Temple are available for purchase an hour before the shows on a first-come, first-served basis;

the price is \$8 in April, \$10 in May. VIP tickets for half of the Labor Temple's seating capacity go on sale two weeks before each show; admission ranges from \$12.50 to \$15.

Audience members are encouraged to come dressed according to theme. At intermission, Kerfuffle will lead a costume contest, selecting a winner by audience applause. The winner receives a free burlesque lesson from Leone as well as a cameo in the next Kerfuffle show.

For more information or to purchase presale tickets, visit the Kerfuffle: A Vintage Burlesque Comedy Revue Facebook page. 