

"One of the most creative strippers"
NewYorkTimes

The "definition of burlesque", Miss Dirty Martini, is one of the most celebrated personalities in the world of the new burlesque. She has been photographed by Karl Lagerfeld, Starred in the film *On Tour* -winner Best Director at Cannes 2010 – co-stars in Dita VonTeese's touring show *Strip Strip Hooray* and voted number one burlesque performer in the world by her fans for 4 years running! Miss Martini has spearheaded the new burlesque revolution in New York City and all over the world with her over the top physique and classical dance training bringing vintage glamour into the 21st century. A favorite of original burlesque performers of the 1940's and 50's, Miss Martini has become an underground celebrity and popular headlining act nationally and all over the world.

Featured in the January 2010 issue of *V Magazine* with a five page editorial photographed by fashion legend Karl Lagerfeld at the Chanel Atelier in Paris, she has also posed for acclaimed photographers Andres Serrano, Terry Richardson, Roxanne Lowitt and Mario Sorrenti. Miss Martini is a sought after "Burl-expert" in the written press and television and is featured in almost every book written about the New Burlesque. Dita Von Teese asked her to tour with her show *"Strip Strip Hooray"* in the wake of the release of the movie *'Burlesque'* "to show America what real burlesque is all about". She has made a splash in the UK performing on the Paul O'Grady TV Show and at London's *KoKo* nightclub backed by an orchestra led by burlesque music pioneer, Barry Adamson. She was a guest star on Italy's *'Lady Burlesque'* TV show and performed in Rome's Teatro Olimpico in the musical *'La Dolce Diva'*. Miss Martini currently tours internationally with *The Cabaret New Burlesque* featured in the film *"Tournee"* (Winner of the *Palme D'Or* for Best Director and the *International Film Critics Award 2010*) bringing her to red carpets at Cannes Film Festival and the Cesar Awards in Paris.

Miss Martini is often featured at private events for trend setting companies such as Marc Jacobs, Coco de Mer, Morgans Hotel Group, Visionaire Magazine and charity organizations The LifeBall Vienna, The Imperial Court of NY, Keep A Breast Foundation and Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS.

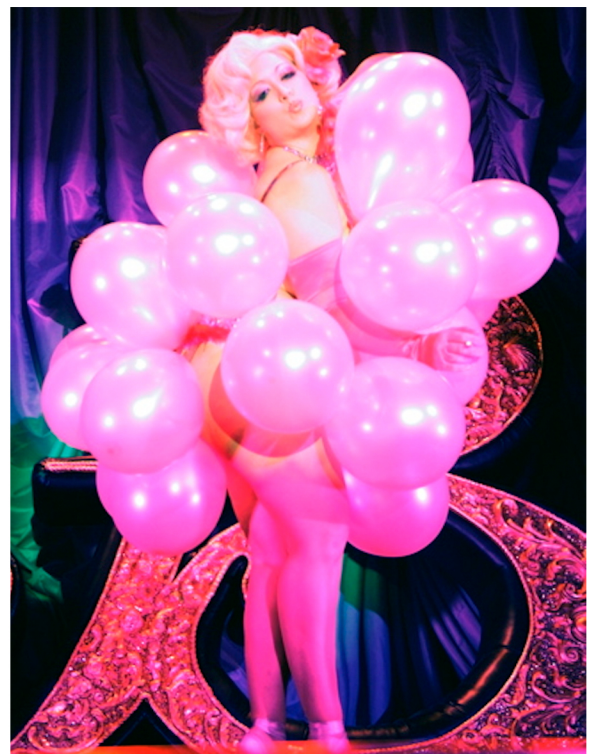
"One of the best in burlesque" - Village Voice



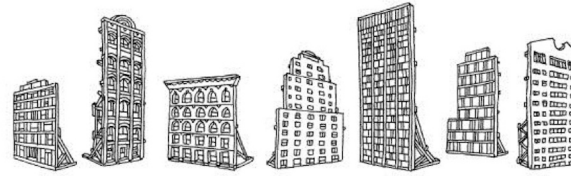
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THE CRITICS



AT THE CLUBS

TAKE IT OFF

The new-burlesque scene.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

As the curtain went up in the Slipper Room, on Orchard Street, one night last month, Dirty Martini, whom many people regard as the queen of the so-called “new burlesque,” stood on the stage in a gown printed, in sequins, with the American flag. “God Bless the U.S.A.” played in the background. Like Justice, she wore a blindfold and held a scale. But this was not a good position in which to negotiate the degueur first action of a burlesque routine, the glove peel, and so she unceremoniously dumped the scale on the floor. To her joy, she found a pile of money in one pan. Now rushing, she took off her dress, hoping to find more money. Pay dirt! Bills spilled out of her bra and her panties. So she shed those garments, too, stripping down to pasties (red-white-and-blue stars) and a small merkin. Then she began *eating* the bills. (She told me later that she cleans them with antibacterial wipes before the act.) Quickly, in the drama, the money passed through her digestive system. The lights dimmed, she turned her back to us, and, with a great flourish, she began extracting a rope of rolled-up bills from her rear end. (“It’s a magic trick,” she explained.) She pulled it out and pulled it out—it was twenty-five feet long—and when she got to the end she gathered it up, saluted us, and exited. Martini calls this her “Patriot Act.”

Martini, whose real name is Linda

Marraccini, came to the profession from an academic dance program, at the State University of New York at Purchase, but today’s burlesque queens arrive from everywhere: dance troupes, the theatre, the circus, strip joints. The movement started in the early nineteen-nineties, at a few clubs in New York. Now there are scores of them, offering burlesque shows for various audiences: highbrow, lowbrow, gay, lesbian, and a large group made up of tourists and couples on dates. The shows usually start around 10 P.M. and run well past midnight.

In America, burlesque’s heyday lasted from the nineteen-twenties through the forties. Films from the period indicate that, by our standards, the shows weren’t especially naughty. Still, various defenders of public morals were always trying to shut burlesque down. Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia said that it promoted the “incorporation of filth” into our society. The Kings County district attorney claimed that burlesque was “largely responsible for sex crimes in the city.” (This conflict is the setting of the play “The Nance,” now at the Lyceum.) Eventually, the campaign succeeded. By the nineteen-fifties, burlesque was all but dead in New York.

Its rebirth is due, partly, to politics. Again and again, artists and commentators of the new burlesque say that it is a feminist enterprise, enabling women to enjoy their sexuality and take pride

in their bodies. The artists are often buxom. Muffin tops, back fat, discernible bellies: here they are. Most important, from what I can tell, are big bottoms. In the sex shows of yesteryear, breasts were given the starring role. Today, they tend to be used for comic purposes, sort of as that-old-thing. The real kilowatts come from the rear end. Dirty Martini, size 16, probably has the most famous hindquarters in the business, but smaller women, too, make the most of what they have. Bunny Buxom, serving, in one show I saw, as the pickup girl—the person who comes out onstage to pick up the clothes that the other performers have shed—bent over, each time, from the pelvis, with her back to the audience, thereby giving us, despite the G-string, a clear view of what was between her legs. Every time she stepped onstage—even before she did anything—the audience began cheering.

The burlesque queens of the mid-twentieth century often had trim, Art Deco bodies, and they tried to be seductive. Lili St. Cyr, sticking her pretty legs out of a bubble bath, Sally Rand frolicking behind her seven-foot ostrich-feather fans: they were giving the audience suggestions, not facts. Many of the old burlesque queens also made a stab at dancing and, to pace the witchcraft, drew the act out for fifteen or twenty minutes. They had lyrical names: Blaze Starr, Tempest Storm, Mammelle Fifi.

The new burlesque performers are wholly different. They do not try to lure. (In the audiences, I saw no men in trenchcoats.) Nor, for the most part, do the women dance much. Some can’t even move to the beat. What they do, mainly, is comedy. They pour Martinis out of shakers lodged in their cleavages; they sprout extra hands, which then feel them up. They don’t have naughty names; they have dirty names—Lucy Fur, Creamy Stevens, Fanny Fromage. And their acts typically last for only three to five minutes, the length of a song or two. Apart from, or together with, the claim that the new burlesque empowers women, the point that the performers most vehemently insist upon is that their occupation differs from

The performer Dirty Martini, at the Slipper Room. She is regarded by many as the queen of the new burlesque.

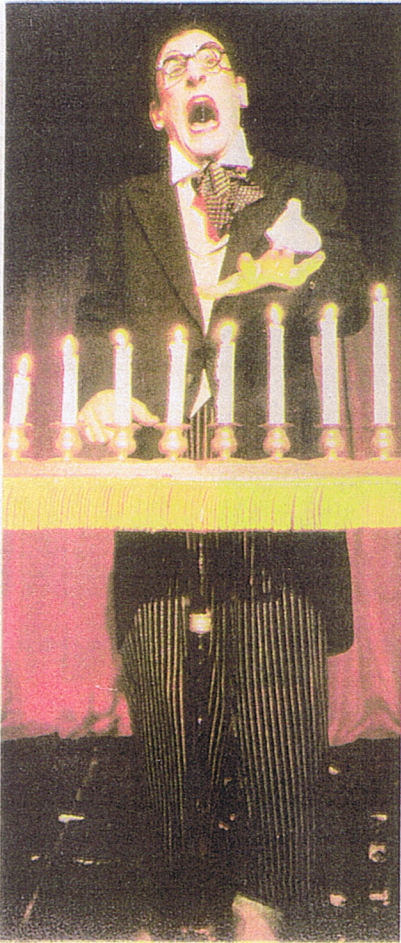
Esquire



Most modern burlesque routines honor the classics of the forties and fifties and include dancing, sketches, props, and, of course, stripping down to pasties and panties. The fan dance is a burlesque tradition, as is the balloon dance that "Dirty Martini," opposite, performs in the Va Va Voom Room at Fez in New York. Her voluptuous look harks back to the days before silicone-enhanced waifs were the standard objects for idolatry, when a performer's success counted less on selling lap dances and more on using personality and props to stand out from the competition.

T H E A T E R

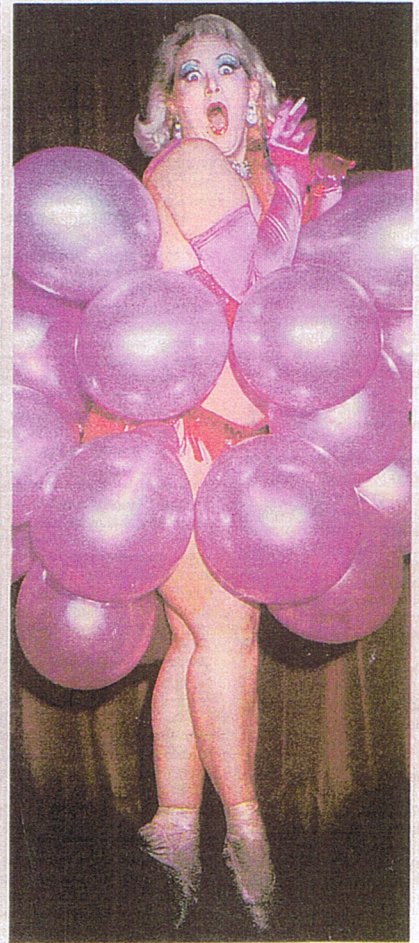
Old-Time Vaudeville Looks Young Again



Tom Tavee



Richard Termine for The New York Times



Richard Termine for The New York Times

Joel Jeske, left, screaming in tune at the Palace of Variety; Mr. Pennygaff of the Bindlestiff Family Cirkus, center, with "sword"; and Dirty Martini popping her balloons at Fez.

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

YOU won't believe your eyes and you'll be scratching your heads in amazement!" the barker beckons.

The appeal is irresistible — a genuine circus on 42nd Street. Has time spiraled in reverse? Maybe. We venture into the Palace of Variety and take the cluttered lobby. Prominently displayed is the sturdy stool that once supported Helen Melon, the fat lady of Coney Island.

"She's so big and so fat that it takes four men to hug and a boxcar to lug her," a sign proclaims.

We plunk down \$4, and within minutes are listening Professor Adam Gertsacov, every bit the fantastical presario, in his purple top hat and cash-register voice, producing us to the wondrous insects itching (sorry) to form. Yes, they can pull objects more than 100,000 times their weight, and, yes, Shakespeare wrote his

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Vaudeville had its origins in beer halls, and its first audiences were immigrants seeking refuge from tenements and factories. Andrew Davis, who wrote his doctoral dissertation at New York University on burlesque comedy in 2000, likens the present time to the period when the vaudeville arts were young and sparkling, a few years before they became the staple of theater chains.

"There's a lot of exploration and nobody's quite sure where it's going," he said. He thinks the ultimate synthesis will involve an unpredictable cocktail of vaudeville, burlesque, circus, sideshow and, as is happening, particularly in Los Angeles, elements of the dance club scene. Increasingly, new immigrants, as yet not much involved, will provide impetus in spirit, he thinks. His hope

to move them about with tweezers. The finale comes when he puts the fleas in a cannon and blasts them through a ring of fire.

Were there really fleas? Maybe, maybe not. What surely existed was a high-spirited glance back at an entertainment form that had been dead as a doornail on 42nd Street since Professor Hecker's Show at Hubert's Dime Museum closed in 1957. It is part of a revival of old-time show business in New York City — with plenty of echoes nationally — that includes vaudeville, burlesque, sideshow, baggy-pants comedy and the circus arts, all with more than a dash of the urban self-consciousness associated with performance artists.

The old has become new. For the first time in 70 years, there is a continuous vaudeville show in Times Square, the Bindlestiff Family Cirkus. It appears in the same space as the flea circus, showcasing in one recent performance an old-fashioned ukulele duo, a yo-yo master, a trapeze artist, a whip act, a sword swallower. But the new edginess is evident in the yo-yo guy doing hilariously risqué tricks, and the trapeze lady ending the

is that cable television does not jump on the new variety and wring out its vitality, as it has with stand-up comedy.

It isn't going backward, but the occasional glance through the rear-view mirror seems inescapable. For example, a new show at the Palace of Variety does take on the routines of Chaplin and Keaton.

Called "The Golden Age," it is the brainchild of Joel Jeske. He dedicated himself to revivifying old-time variety when he was shocked (yes, shocked) at the news that Universal Studios was removing the characters of Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy from its theme parks. Few recognized them.

Mr. Jeske's conversion to premeditated zaniness happened in his native Chicago

when Professor Inferno taught him his legendary act: holding his hand over various candle flames. The performer then screams at different pitches to create incendiary tunes like "My Old Flame."

But what is the New Vaudeville without the New Burlesque? Better clothed, for sure. From San Francisco to New Orleans to SoHo, women have taken the classic striptease numbers and remade them in imaginative, often feminist modes. Men, too, actually: the productions are equal-opportunity exposers.

Still, the shows are more than nudity, and the nudity itself challenges contemporary body stereotypes. At the East Village club Fez, Va Va Voom Room, a new burlesque

revue, was appearing the other night. Two of the most creative strippers were delightfully zaftig: one called herself Bob and wiggled out of a cowgirl outfit. The other, Dirty Martini, stripped on pointe in a costume of balloons, popping them with a cigarette.

Interspersed with the strippers — among them a man who hilariously and acrobatically stripped in female drag — were acts ranging from magicians to a beatnik-style French lounge singer who became so depressed by his act that he finally simulated suicide. There was also ample audience participation, a hallmark of the new variety: birthday celebrants were called to the stage to experience the "spanking machine."

Step right up, folks, and see fleas walk a high wire! A trapeze striptease! A swordfish swallower! All with attitude!

It all harked back to "Lydia Thompson's British Blondes," the show that introduced burlesque to the United States in 1865. It consisted of three parts: songs and coarse sketches; baggy-pants comics along with acrobats and magicians, and a finale featuring an exotic dancer or a boxing match. Not until Little Egypt introduced belly-dancing at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 did the striptease become standard burlesque fare.

Things progressed. Come 1933, Sally Rand at another event in Chicago, a Century of Progress International Exposition, introduced the fan dance. As near as anyone can tell, Dirty Martini does a perfect imitation. The old has become new. Life is grand.

"So step right up, folks!" the barker barks. "Witness the historic and triumphant return of the flea circus to Times Square. It's only \$4, but we'll take \$8. And, yes, ladies and gentlemen, the creatures perform naked."



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PIERRICK SORIN RHABILLE LE NEW BURLESQUE



Nouveau show et rencontre au sommet entre l'artiste vidéaste et les beautés du cabaret américain révélées par Mathieu Amalric.

PAR PHILIPPE NOISETTE



LE BURLESQUE A CONNU SON ÂGE D'OR DANS LES ANNÉES 1950 AUX ETATS-UNIS. CE GENRE EST UNIQUE ET, SURTOUT, LES CORPS NE SONT PAS FORMATÉS.

Dirty Martini ou Mimi Le Meaux, plantureuses artistes, ont remis le burlesque, mélange d'effeuillage et de comédie, au goût du jour. Après le succès du film de Mathieu Amalric « Tournée », leur cabaret enchanteur et coquin a fait le plein... trois ans sur les routes. Il aurait pu continuer avec les mêmes numéros. « Mais le succès risquait de tuer la créativité. Et puis, impossible de revenir à Paris avec le même spectacle », lâche Kitty Hartl, directrice artistique de la troupe.

Kitty monte alors au front, même si certaines interprètes n'en voyaient pas trop la nécessité. « Pourquoi changer une formule qui marche ? » se disaient-elles. « Je dis que le New Burlesque est mort. Il était temps de se réinventer », résume Kitty. Elle a trouvé son joker en la personne de Pierrick Sorin, vidéaste plasticien, Méliès de son temps, aussi à l'aise dans une galerie d'art que sur une scène d'opéra. « Je ne voulais pas d'un chorégraphe ou d'un metteur en scène qui s'approprie le show. Il fallait garder cette fraîcheur propre aux artistes. Elles signent elles-mêmes leur création. » Tout comme Rocky Roulette, le strip-teaser du spectacle. Sorin est donc venu avec ses bricolages visuels et poétiques. Des

décors miniatures filmés dans lesquels il incruste Kitten, Julie ou Dirty. « Plutôt que l'électrochoc du show, je suis celui qui modifie la coloration du concept. Je n'arrive pas avec des idées que j'impose, comme à l'opéra où les chanteurs dépendent de nous. Dans le cabaret New Burlesque, il y a déjà les chorégraphes, les idées. »

Au Grand T de Nantes, où l'équipe répétait, on a vu un « Cygne » qui ferait rougir Tchaïkovski ou une policière délurée qui met le feu aux planches sur le rap de KRS-One. On rit souvent. De Lou Reed à Duke Ellington sans oublier The Nuns (!), un groupe punk-rock de San Francisco des années 1970, le Burlesque Circus connaît la musique. « Pierrick aime l'esprit du cabaret. Avec sa patte, on regarde vers l'art contemporain... mais avec humour ! » Qu'on se rassure, Mimi and Co n'ont pas changé. Elles font encore la fête – presque – tous les soirs. « Mais elles sont là le matin pour les répétitions et à l'heure », reprend Pierrick Sorin. Burlesque for ever... ■

« Cabaret New Burlesque », au théâtre du Rond-Point à Paris, du 10 au 18 octobre puis en tournée dans toute la France.