

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: ChrisKPhotography

Peek-A-Boo! Splits, Kicks, and Tassels

By Kalila Kingsford Smith

The Peek-A-Boo Revue, Philadelphia's premier 14-year-old neo-burlesque troupe, brought on the holiday spirit with their first ever musical, *It's a Wonderful Christmas Carol Story Life*. But doesn't burlesque mean stripping? Yes, but neo-burlesque is all about the power of suggestion rather than simply taking off clothes. All is playfully removed save the g-strings and pasties, and the heels accentuate the lines of the dancers' legs. With pointed toes, beveled feet, pelvic circles and bouncing shimmys, the dancing styles ranged from Fosse to Broadway to Las Vegas Showgirl. Accompanied by a fantastic ten-piece jazz band, The Peek-A-Boo Revue built up to high kicks and splits as the dancers stripped down to thongs and tassels.

Though lengthy, the title accurately reflects the show: a witty parody of the combined storylines of Christmas classics *It's a Wonderful Life*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *A Christmas Story*. The story provided transitions between the raunchy dance numbers, which naturally caused the audience to whoop, holler, and whistle. The dialogue, full of sexual innuendo and crass yet clever commentary on current events, was so quick I nearly missed the punch lines. Though some lines were forgotten, the audience was quick to forgive, and they soon warmed to certain characters and awaited their return. Noteworthy for her performance of "Tiny Tit" among other characters, Christa D'Agostino became an audience favorite for her comedic timing.

Most of the dancers got the chance to perform solo in the spotlight, and I soon noticed a formula for the striptease. Coyly walking onstage in an evening gown and gloves, the dancer would sweep and turn, catching the light on her satin skirt. As the music progressed, she would remove the gloves one by one, then backbend, her hands stroking down her front as her head rolled back. In a flurry of twirls, she would unwrap her skirt, revealing a corset and a frilly thong, showcasing her muscular legs. After some requisite high kicks and crawling on the floor, the corset would go, exposing the bra. The dancer would shoulder roll and bounce her chest, walk directly upstage, remove the bra, then turn around with tassels spinning. She would smile and shine as the audience whistled and

applauded her saucy striptease. Each dancer had her own style in entertaining the audience and would add suggestive hinges or extra pirouettes to showoff her excellent dance technique. However, the disrobing only strayed from this formula when the dancer portrayed a specific character like a cowboy or a cop.

Of the many group numbers, one of my favorites opened with a clear homage to *A Christmas Story*. The lights lowered to smoky red as fishnet-clad legs, wearing torso-sized lampshades, glided sultrily onto the stage. The bass set a walking tempo as voices whisper-sang, "So long. So lean." Though the lampshades covered the dancers' eyes, they changed places and moved in formation without hesitation. Legs kicked and swiveled in unison; rears popped in the air like Betty Boop's bottom; hips swayed as the leg-lamps walked right offstage.

Having never been to a burlesque show, I arrived expecting feathers, stripteases, and jazz. Peek-A-Boo exceeded those expectations and broadened my mind to the possibilities of semi-nudity in performance. With names like Lulu Lollipop and Cherry Bomb, these dancers carried the audience to a different world, where clothes are removed with a glint of irony that says, "You can look but you can't touch." Performed at a theater that offered alcohol, accompanied by live jazz, with costuming reminiscent of the 20s and 30s—this show was enchanting and engaging. I came away nostalgic, yearning to be a part of this world that felt like a time gone by.

It's A Wonderful Christmas Carol Story Life, The Peek-A-Boo Revue, The Trocadero December 15, World Café Live December 16.

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December 23, 2012