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Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Peek-A-Boo

Full-bodied and Sweet: A Toast to the Taunt

by Whitney Weinstein

Snowflakes on the ceiling, lights ablaze red and green: scandal is aflame. Festive garb, drinks that warm, and a cozy seat inside—so cozy, in fact, that the gals and guys at Peek-A-Boo Revue want to get a little bit intimate. 'Tis the season, after all, for sexy Santas and decorative balls. So strap on your belt and jump in the sleigh for what Peek-A-Boo has to give away. A taste of sparkle, a glimpse of skin, these classy burlesquers shimmied right in.

Since 1998, Peek-A-Boo Revue has been knockin' off stockings in the Philadelphia area and making guest appearances in other major cities (New York, Washington, D.C.). Having lost their home theater in 2007, the core cast continues to rehearse and perform as frequently as possible. In the words of the evening's host, this year's Christmas show, *Slay Belles*, is a "holiday show that entertains ... and perhaps shocks you!" Jolly Old Saint Nick was nowhere to be found, but rather [Krampus](#) and a younger Krampus-to-be, both with a hunger—literally—for children, emceed the show. The up-and-coming Krampus eventually decided that "we're coming for you, [adults]! ...With consent, of course." The theater was ready, with hoots and hollers loud enough to overwhelm the sound system.

The troupe's cohesive energy created an embracing, warm exchange not only among the dancers, but between the stage and the house. In the same moment, I watched four dancers with completely varied approaches to moving: one synchronizing every body part through intensity, another using even phrasing and proportional movements. The third disengaged her head and core from her extremities, flailing her limbs. The final woman in this scene exaggerated her shoulders and hips in twisting motions, like a love-struck teen. Still, these women created a community where they melded well together, all collectively fierce.

Lucille, an enthusiastic flapper with a reputation for offering an intergalactic, world-class striptease, established high expectations in the night's opening act. Her embodiment of the music was natural, honest, pure, and fearless. Not even a runaway pastie put a hiccup in her groove, though she was forced to dance one-armed so that she could maintain her modesty with the other. I wondered about her

choice to conceal this part of her body, when virtually everything else was disclosed. Did a less-than-two-inch area of skin really make a difference to the integrity of the piece?

“What’s the difference between a stripper and a burlesque dancer?” Krampus inquired. “A stripper thinks about you masturbating to them. A burlesque dancer gets you worked up.” A burlesque dancer, to me, invites intrigue and curiosity. I’m reminded of “[Ode on a Grecian Urn](#)” by [John Keats](#), which reflects the stimulating chase after the unknown and the unrevealed, the satisfying sensation of seeking the unfulfillable. The thrill dissipates, sometimes even dies, when the mystery is uncovered. Peek-A-Book Revue flirted with climax never quite achieved; the audience departed with more vibratory energy and vitality than when we arrived.

At another point, when a dancer’s dress wouldn’t come off, she ordered her co-performer, “Do what it takes, baby.” Planned or not, this moment acknowledged the priority without neglecting the importance of maintaining character. Similar to the unwrapping of a package, as layers of clothing peeled off the women’s bodies, organic lines were accentuated differently. A stomach garbed in lace is exposed in a different way than is a belly-button under a corset. A strap sliding off the shoulder or a button undone harnesses hypnotic power over the viewer. Different angles alter the allure of the bare body.

At this revue, a tease invites onlookers while demanding respect, consent, and control. The shake of a bum and caress of a curve express pride and ownership. The traditional dance body is rejected here, on a stage where both confidence and voluptuousness are mandatory, where beauty is ephemeral and ever changing, like a stained glass window illuminated by the rising sun.

While the audience moaned from side-stitching laughter during the segment “Christmas Hits that Rock,” which included “a tear-jerking-off kind of song” and a rap about “My Box,” each performer, from comedienne to sophisticated singer, articulated a range of gestures, postures, rhythms, and subtleties both powerful and revealing of complex feminine consciousness. So effective were the performers’ voices and bodies that dialogue felt unnecessary.

The atmosphere of cleavage, fishnets, and leather felt celebratory and relaxed, vintage and industrial. From big band and swing to screamo metal and Zeppelin, the Peek-A-Boo crew— including the onstage band, solo singers, and lovely ladies—used their collective energies to create a show that not only fulfills the expectation for entertainment, but also builds a respectable reputation for the burlesque community.

Slay Belles, Peek-A-Boo Revue, World Cafe Live at The Queen, Wilmington, DE, December 11, and other venues,
<http://www.peakaboorevue.com>

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December 18, 2015