

ding a contest designed to pair 50 executives with 50 professional to boost their careers. Fifty win- arded face-to-face meetings with inated as Women For Hire held its

ncided with the airing of "The ys Tory Johnson, CEO of Women e routinely heard women at our h I could get in front of a big busi- onald Trump of my industry, be- could wow them with my creden-

plus executives who have agreed ur to meet with a selected woman chief executives and other high- from companies such as Ameri- o's Pizza, Playboy Enterprises, Liz y, Essence Communications, Sy- and the WNBA.

to apply the big wigs' lessons of ers' own careers.

think that the ultimate is really wov- uch that they want to bring you e you part of the team," she says. walk away with a job, that doesn't success."

submissions is July 16. Winners i July 26. An online entry form, mplete list of executives, can be omenforhire.com.

—*Maria Moosbil*

Names of poetry

why women don't wear silk

nch, a 35-year-old Chicagoan, an- stion in a poem that recently won a ze in the Olay Total Effects Fine Contest (www.total-effects.com/)

she was surprised but pleased that even winners selected from a pool ,000 entries.

ing," she said. "I still like the senti- m and I think it's very accessible." l she based "Why Women Don't ans" on memories of her mother and n rural Louisiana.

ette women master how to swing a chicken's head off in one graceful wrote.

stant professor of English at Lewis omeoiville and edits the poetry ga- Chicago Magazine.

—*Raoul Mowatt*

ve your moves

reason to skip the gym? Home im- be the best one yet. According to mprovement stores, doing typical e house are a good way to tone mus- eight.

ing up with Liz Neporent, author of ummies," has hammered out im- rovement tasks that shape up the home and body. Ac- cording to Neporent, remodeling, repair- ing and maintaining a home is a great way to fit a workout into a busy schedule.

Julie V. Yenichek, spokeswoman for Lowe's, says that half of the chain's customers are wom- en and that more than 25 percent like to tackle renovation projects themselves.

"Home improve- ment is a great way to exercise, although people don't usually see it that way." Yen- any women feel empowered by do- selves."

of empowerment is Lowe's Hab- ity Women Build project, where ct homes from the ground up for ill. In the process learning valuable skills.

s put together several home im- s that exercise the muscles as well ble at www.lowes.com/habitat/.

—*Nicole Grasse*

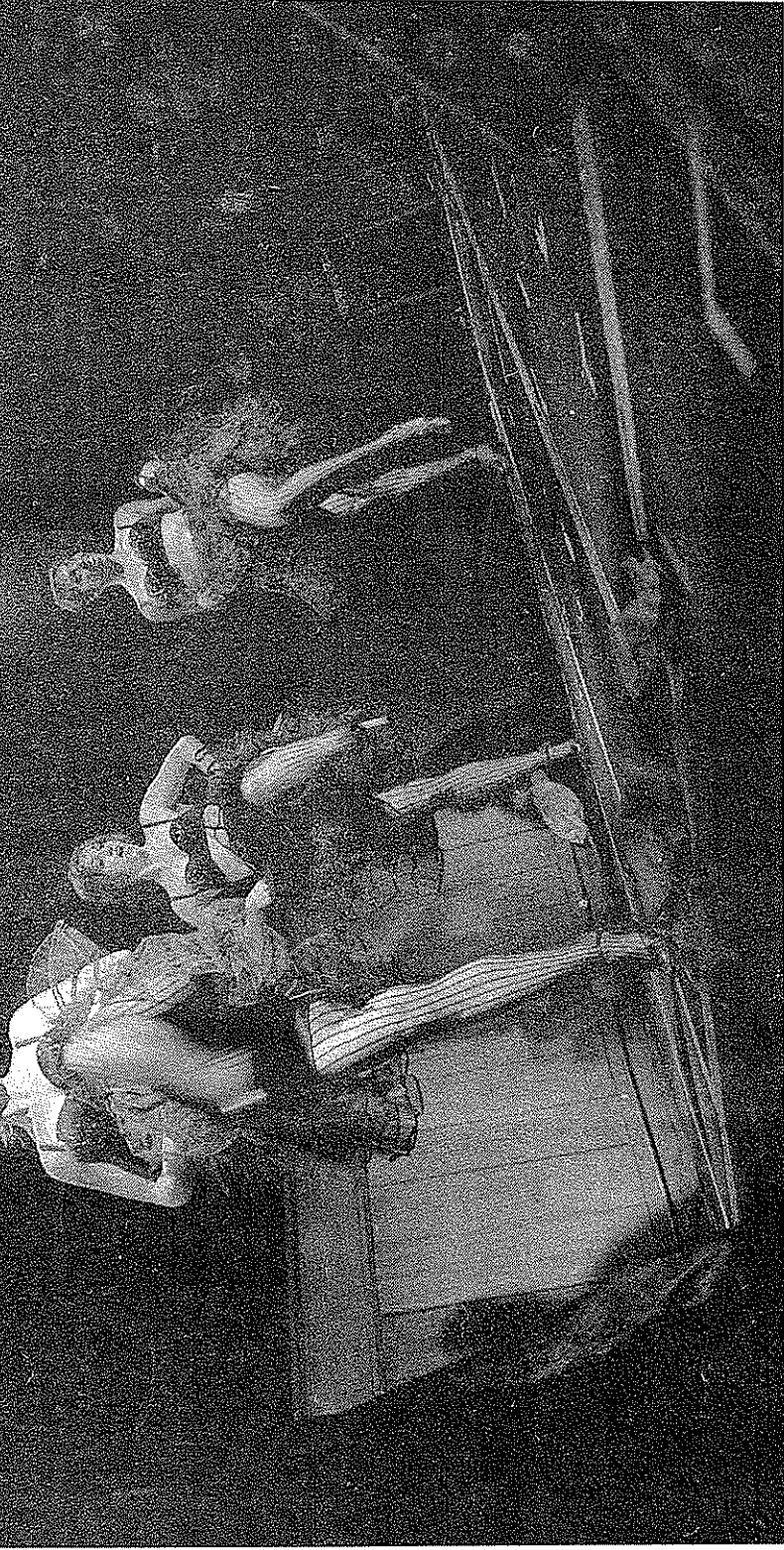
ICALLY SPEAKING

untries by the Harvard School of and that working conditions in the at support working families lag other countries.

—Countries that offer guaranteed paid leave to women in connection with childbirth. The U.S. does not.



kills
Habitat Women



Members of the Lavender Cabaret troupe, Candy Moneysworth (from left), Michelle "Toots" L'Amour and Lola Getz, kick up their heels.

Tribune photo by Kuni Takahashi

A real kick for dancers

Burlesque performers revel in stripping that is often comic, satirical

By Claire Zulkey
Special to the Tribune

Annie Terrell found herself living out many people's worst nightmare, and she was loving every second of it. She didn't originally intend to take off her clothes in front of 100 people, but it just looked like so much fun.

Terrell, a 25-year-old public health adminis- trator from Humboldt Park, was in the audi- ence of the burlesque show Gurllesque Bur- lesque last year when she found her calling the bawdy, humorous dancing typified by leg- ends such as Gypsy Rose Lee and Sally Rand "Some guy with a cheesy pickup line asked me why I wasn't on stage," she said, "But then I thought, 'I can do that.'"

She spoke with the founders of the show, got a group of other performers together and before she knew it, was doing a striptease to Queen's song "Fat-Bottomed Girls" at the next "Gurllesque" installment.

Women taking their clothes off for money is, as they say, one of the world's oldest profes- sions. But now, as burlesque enjoys a resur- gence, more are doing it as a hobby and art form, and people are paying to see them do it. At a time when flaunted sexuality is at once vilified and the norm, the burlesque revival seems to strike a balance between modesty and flagrancy, flirtiness and intelligence, that is as much fun—and perhaps more meaningful—for the performers as it is for the audience.

"The essence of burlesque is questioning norms while using humor," says Tara Vaugh- an Tremmel, a founder of Gurllesque Bur- lesque, a show featuring about 50 dancers. The female form, in all shapes and sizes, is celebrated, but so is the performer's person- ality, Tremmel says.

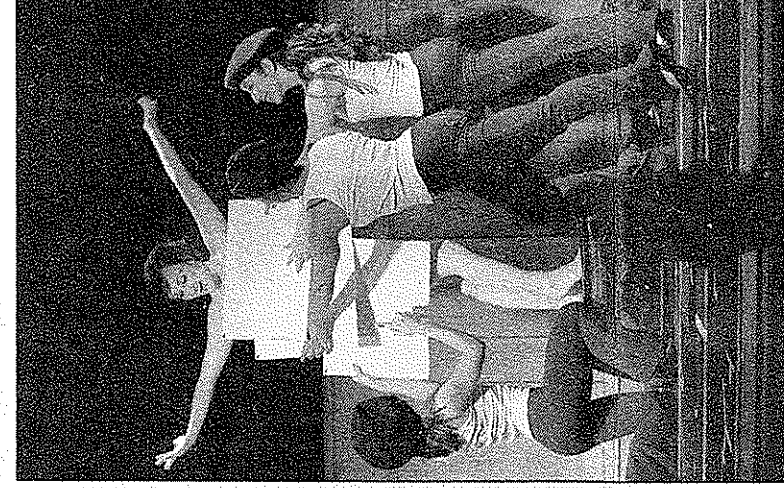
Dante Ingraham is a graphic designer from Wicker Park, who, like other performers in- terviewed, is reluctant to give her age be- cause, she says, it could interfere with her act's illusion. By night, with Chicago Bur- lesque and Vaudeville—which, like other troupes, plays at various venues around town—Ingraham takes turns as a chanteuse, knife and whip target, and dancer, perform- ing fan dances or coyly destroying her dress made of inflated balloons.

High production costs

Actress and Logan Square resident Monica Zaffarano, meanwhile, created and produces Flirt, a burlesque cabaret at the Black Orchid Theatre that features live music, singers per- forming from swings and props such as clear bathtubs with white plastic bunnies.

Flirt, which Zaffarano produces herself, has had just two performances, both in front of capacity crowds at the 300-seat theater.

While most burlesque shows cost patrons \$10 to \$30, the troupes themselves shoulder the production costs, including costumes, props and musical accompaniment, which explains the sporadic runs of many groups. "When we put on our first performance, I spent about \$400 to be a part of three acts," Terrell says. Gurllesque Burlesque will even



Dance troupe members assist Lavender Cabaret's Michelle "Toots" L'Amour at a recent performance at Schubas.

Where to see, reach troupes

- **Hellcat Hussies:** hellcathussies@aol.com
- **Flirt Chicago:** Information available at the Black Orchid, 312-944-2200
- **Gurllesque Burlesque:** www.sissybutch-brothers.com/ (Next show: July 16-17, The Abbey Pub, 773-478-4408)
- **Lavender Cabaret:** www.lavendercabaret.com (Next show: Sunday, Darkroom, 773-276-1411)
- **Chicago Burlesque & Vaudeville:** www.chicagoburlesque.com/ (Next shows: July 7, 21 at Berlin, 773-348-4975)

fly in national burlesque headliners for each show, Tremmel says.

"Nobody is paying their rent from doing burlesque," Ingraham says.

Despite the producers' and performers' fi- nancial struggles, there is promise of grow- ing audiences.

"There is definitely a burlesque revival go- ing on," says Rachel Shteir, head of the dram- aturgy department at DePaul University and author of "Striptease: The Untold History of the Girlie Show," coming out this fall from Oxford University Press. Shteir says bur- lesque is stripping with a point, incorporat- ing comedy and satire that often make politi- cal statements. "Traditionally, stripping is only part of a burlesque show," she says.

Alison Fensterstock, 27, of New Orleans, is an organizer of Tease o Rama, a yearly bur- lesque convention for performers and fans.

"We put on our first show in 2001, after we noticed how many people were getting back into burlesque," she says, noting that the con- vention's attendance has reflected bur- lesque's growing popularity.

"We've increased by a couple hundred peo- ple each year," she says.

Fensterstock says Tease o Rama offers per- formances, classes and networking opportu- nities for dancers. "It's burlesque historical preservation, punk rock and a feminist state- ment," she says.

Infused with modern twists

"Neoburlesque is alive and well," says Shteir, referring to contemporary burlesque performers who borrow routines from bur- lesque's 1930s heyday, infusing them with modern inflections, irony and often, gay and lesbian twists.

"It's already been catching on in New York and L.A. over the last five years or so and it's lasting," Shteir says. "Every day someone calls me to tell me they're starting a show, from Rio to Vermont."

"With the first show, I was so afraid no one would come, or even know what burlesque is," Tremmel says of Gurllesque Burlesque's 2002 Abbey Pub debut. "Then the only com- plaint we had afterwards was that people had a hard time seeing because it was so packed."

Mia Park, 34, a part-time talent broker from Humboldt Park, has helped several Chicago clubs book burlesque performances over the last two years.

"As I saw that the movement was growing, I thought it would be a great idea to bring them to clubs, as these indie-rock audiences enjoy kitsch, and this is sort of kitsch sex," she says.

Each show that Park has seen has drawn large audiences that she describes as the "cool crowd: men and women from their early 20s to mid-30s."

Burlesque performers participate in inti- mate acts that often involve stripping off clothes under a spotlight, but many, includ- ing Terrell, who has no background in per- formance art, find it empowering.

"It's a very potent art form," says Terrell, who is quick to point out the difference be- tween burlesque and stripping. "Women get to take on roles that are both powerful and sexual. They're not just doing it for the view- ers, like strippers do; they're doing it for themselves. Plus," she adds, "There's a lot of body confidence and diversity."

Burlesque dancers do differ from the stan- dard long-legged, tanned, big-breasted Barbie doll look. At a typical show, a female viewer is likely to see what she may view in the mirror every day: an average female figure.

"Burlesque accepts all body types and cele- brates the female form" says Michelle "Toots" L'Amour, from the Chicago troupe Lavender Cabaret. "If you know what you got and know how to work it, you'll be fine."

The sexiness of burlesque, however, isn't all in the bump and grind.

In one Gurllesque Burlesque show, two per- formers stripped and rubbed each other in oil to "God Bless America" while wearing George W. Bush and Dick Cheney masks.

Despite the fact that burlesque, like any line of show business, can be cutthroat, the performers bond over an art form that is still not mainstream, Shteir says.

"The burlesque resurgence has everything to do with the more supportive groups that did low- and high-budget shows for the art of it," Ingraham says.

"That's a tradition that's carried through to today: Burlesque dancers look out for each other," Terrell says.

E-mail cic-woman@tribune.com