

Seattle Boylesque Festival returns in full to the Triple Door

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1 of 2 | Seattle performer Ernie Von Schmaltz will be one of the hosts and performers at this year's Seattle Boylesque Festival. (Jiji Lee)

By [Gemma Alexander](#)
Special to The Seattle Times

The exaggerated femininity of Gypsy Rose Lee made burlesque famous, and later Dita Von

Teese brought it into the mainstream. But femininity is just the tip of the iceberg at the Seattle Boylesque Festival, where the focus is on male bodies and male presentation. From the high-concept experimentalists of New York to Seattle's polished professionals, modern burlesque has turned gender expression into an art form.

After two years of pandemic disruptions, the annual Seattle Boylesque Festival is back in full for its seventh year. Hosted at the Triple Door April 8 and 9, the adults-only burlesque festival will present four performances with a dozen artists from around the country performing in each show. Many of the same performers will appear each night with different acts.

“Boylesque’ was coined by Tigger! from New York in the late ‘90s when burlesque was making a comeback and he wanted to have a way of describing male-identified or male-bodied characters,” said Seattle-based burlesque performer and producer Luminous Pariah. Tigger! is a New York-based performance artist often called the godfather of contemporary burlesque. Luminous Pariah was part of the original boylesque festival established by producer Jen Gapay in New York and has performed in every Seattle Boylesque Festival since Gapay’s Thirsty Girl Productions founded it in 2015.

While “boylesque” cheekily refers to the performers, boylesque performances fit into the broader burlesque genre.

“Burlesque encompasses multiple things,” said Luminous Pariah. “A burlesque show in general has quite a bit of variety, but there’s always striptease involved.” Many performers come from a training background in Broadway-style theater or classical dance, as well as more specialized performance styles like circus arts and acrobatics. Drag, comedy and magic tricks can make an appearance as well.

Each act is unique, but Seattle performer Ernie Von Schmaltz, who has emceed the

Seattle Boylesque Festival every year, sees a unifying theme.

“The vibe is fun appreciation for diversity and beauty and talent on stage. It’s really a celebration of physicality. And all the recent conversations and evolutions about gender that our society is working through, we’re seeing that on stage with a much wider evolution of gender presentation and expectations,” said Von Schmaltz, who will emcee on Friday night. On Saturday, when New York-based singer Shelly Watson will host, Von Schmaltz will perform his own act.

Luminous Pariah’s troupe, Mod Carousel, which comprises a blend of genders and sexes, is rooted in dance and theater. This year, Mod Carousel will perform as a trio without him on Friday night; on Saturday, Luminous Pariah and Mod Carousel member Moscato Sky (formerly Moscato Extatique) will each perform solo acts.

“My own personal narrative questions authority and gender and masculinity, especially in the Western world, and having fun with it,” said Luminous Pariah. For this solo performance he is taking a theatrical approach that incorporates spoken elements.

Seattle’s burlesque community is active and tight-knit, with an enthusiastic and dedicated fan base. The pandemic caused the festival’s 2020 cancellation and required last year’s festival to be smaller, with a mostly local bill in front of a socially distanced audience. This year, Seattle Boylesque Festival offers a balance of familiar and fresh, bringing back fan favorites like Mod Carousel while also introducing audiences to different styles of performance from artists around the country. The Triple Door venue expands the range of possibility as it’s one of the only places in Seattle that can accommodate aerial and fire acts. This variety also makes the festival a great introduction to boylesque — and burlesque generally — for newer audiences.

“My invitation is just for people to attend and experience the joy, the ludicrousness, the sexiness and the diversity of a live burlesque show,” said Von Schmaltz. “If you’re new to this, we welcome you. If you want to see lots of different gender expressions on stage, please come. This is your party, full stop.”

7th Annual Seattle Boylesque Festival

April 8-9; The Triple Door, 216 Union St., Seattle; \$30-\$50; 18+ for 7 p.m. shows, 21+ for 10 p.m.

shows; check thetripledoor.net for current venue COVID-19 protocols; 866-973-9612, boylesquefestival.com/seattle

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