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DISTORTION

NEW SENSATION:: BURLESQUE NOT BOMBS

A "LAVISH SPECTACLE OF SIGHT, SOUND, MOTION, AND COLOR": IS THIS A BURLESQUE SHOW, OR THE AMERICAN MEDIA'S COVERAGE OF THE WAR WITH IRAQ?

By Catherine Wergo

During this particularly dark time for our country, it's arguably inappropriate to be discussing lighthearted — even scandalous — entertainment. But burlesque has been around for over a century, and has actually flourished during times of hardship. During the Depression, the hours that out-of-work men spent at burlesque shows became a time for them to feel special. In the past few months, it seems, burlesque has grown increasingly popular here in Chicago. University of Chicago doctoral candidate Tara Vaughan Tremmel and filmmaker Gwen Lis are helping to revive this 135-year-old entertainment tradition as the Sissy Butch Brothers; they're bringing burlesque to the stage for their third and latest event, "Burlesque Not Bombs," a fundraiser for their upcoming documentary on the history of striptease, *Gurlesque*.

A burlesque show is a unique combination of striptease, drag, song, comedy and dance, performed by a host of diverse performers, each with their own voice and form of expression and, most importantly, power and control over their acts. The resulting show is an exploration of each performer's sexuality, performed for a respectful, supportive audience. "Tease is very important to burlesque," says Tremmel. "What the performer will or will not reveal to you is powerful and enjoyable."

The long, rich history of burlesque is captured at the Exotic World Burlesque Museum by founder Jennie Lee; her successor, Dixie Evans (considered the Marilyn Monroe of burlesque) maintains the art form's legacy today. Located in the middle of the Mojave Desert, this custodian of burlesque's past is the focus of Lis and Tremmel's documentary.

"Burlesque Not Bombs," held at Martyr's, will feature a cabaret-style stage show that includes various and sundry talents laced with sexual, smart, humor. In light of recent world events, performers are expected to address issues of a political slant in addition to those of gender and sexuality. The proceeds from the show will help fund *Gurlesque* and the museum's day-to-day operations.

"It's about sex and gender," Tremmel says, "but there's so much room in that for personal expression." Everyone is welcome to audition for the show, too, so whether you're a former burlesque performer or someone who's never even seen a pasty before, this is one opportunity to shine — "as long as they are respecting the story that the performers want to tell," says Tremmel.

"A lot is being thrown out there, between the performer and the audience, about what sexuality and gender means — recreating it, poking fun at it," says Tremmel. "I see it as a constant dialogue between the performer and the audience about dealing with the complicated pleasures of living in a world that promotes a particular ideal form versus every person's conception of their own body and sexuality."

Catch "Burlesque Not Bombs" at Martyr's (3855 N. Lincoln) on April 12 at 9 p.m. Tickets are \$15 at the door, but are available online at www.martyrslive.com.