



ZE GABRIEL/PRESS IMAGE





Burlesque

The art of seduction

Decidedly on the rise in São Paulo, theatre's sexiest genre has been bestowing feathers, thrills and tassels to gripped audiences all over the world ever since its origins in Italian Commedia dell'arte.

Chiara Rimoldi dives into the scene to unearth the movers and shakers bringing the sensual art form to life in São Paulo

As the lights go down and the audience settles into silence, a gorilla appears, darting recklessly into the crowd to the strains of a rockabilly tune. Peeling off its fur to reveal a mysterious woman inside, the gorilla is unmasked as none other than Mademoiselle Blanche, the hostess of TrixMix cabaret. TrixMix's winning formula of a constant roster of new acts has helped make it one of the city's main forums for burlesque artistes like Paula Miessa, a professional dancer who swaps her ballerina's tutu for more daring outfits to take to the stage for her fast and furious striptease; and like Ziza Bisola, who adds acrobatic skills to her sensual, pinup looks.

Sexy and audacious, TrixMix is one of a number of burlesque and cabaret shows inspired by famous clubs like La Clique in London (lacliquelondon.com) and Starshine Burlesque (starshineburlesque.com) in New York. Playing a rapid game of catch-up, troupes of performers are now bringing burlesque to life in São Paulo, further disseminating the well-travelled art form.

Burlesque has a distinct European flavour, from its French name to its conceptual background. It's nothing less than the bastard child of *Commedia dell'arte*, a genre of revolutionary theatre that arose in Italy in 1560 and spread across Europe, sailing the trade winds of the general discontent characterising the period. Not only a carnivalesque public arena in which the ruling class could be symbolically pilloried, burlesque was also a stage on which female roles were played by real women, and not men in drag.

The concept isn't totally new to Brazil: the country's Belle Époque (1889-1922) is a relative recent memory. Café Uranus, opened in 2001, is inspired by São Paulo's 1920s and 1930s cabaret scene and hosts a regular musical, *Tango Mulheres* – a steamy tale of passion in which the actors interact with the audience.

Raquel Rosmaninho, one of the leading lights in São Paulo's cabaret and burlesque scene, launched TrixMix, perhaps the city's best-known show, in 2007. The inspiration came after a pe-

riod spent living and working in London in the midst of the circus scene.

An acrobat like her husband and TrixMix co-founder Emiliano Pedro, Rosmaninho successfully applied the tried-and-tested formula of French cabarets such as Moulin Rouge and Folies-Bergère to modern time and appetites. The result is a mixture of elements of circus, live music, dance, humour, stand-up and, of course, burlesque. 'Our show has a strong artistic and playful component. Burlesque is a new concept in Brazil – the scene is nothing like those in London or New York,' says Rosmaninho. Sensual and sexy, the burlesque element is a major part of TrixMix's winning formula – and it's an element Rosmaninho finds herself explaining over and over.

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'The word "cabaret" itself was taboo here in Brazil,' she explains. 'Because everyone instantly thinks of a brothel – something seedy, with prostitutes stripping naked. These girls have a thirst for doing something seductive, but they don't want to do it in a strip club.'

'Burlesque theatre lets me be whoever I want to be – I can play any role,' reveals Cheesecake, one of São Paulo's most talented burlesque artists. 'This is exactly what my artist's soul has

been craving in the last few years, and it's for that reason I have given myself entirely to this art' Currently performing at Nine Bar (*see Bars*), the belly-dancing champion is a mix between Mata Hari and Scheherazade, but her performance goes behind the cliché of borrowing moves and clothes from famous female figures. She doesn't get lost in the character – on the contrary, she finds herself onstage: 'You have to explore your body, the movements and their femininity without falling into vulgarity.' According to Rosmaninho, Cheesecake is one of the city's finest burlesque artistes: 'Cheesecake needed a space in which she could cross the line, and we gave her that space. She's a great tease – the crowd goes wild when she walk on stage.'

Another of the city's standout burlesque artistes, Karina Raquel, aka Fascinatrix, defines herself as a 'new pin-up', resembling a Brazilian tattooed version of Dita Von Teese. A longtime performer at Drops Bar, a bar set inside a 1930s mansion which has sadly just closed, Fascinatrix is currently looking for a new venue in which to perform. Says Rosmaninho of Fascinatrix, 'She did a regular strip show at Drops in a really small space, close to the crowd. That's not easy – you have to be brave and in control of the situation, and she does it with class and humour.'

Unlike Cheesecake, who defines her character within the limits of the stage act, keeping her identity a secret, Fascinatrix's performance is ongoing, and she stays glamorously in character even when offstage. 'I've often been asked to pose for photos as a pin-up,' she says, 'but I don't see myself as a static image. I'm a burlesque performer: I have a theatre act.' She adds, 'The funniest thing is noticing how much women enjoy my show. Even if it's designed for a male audience, my true fans are women, wondering where I buy my lingerie and carefully observing my moves, maybe to try them at home.'

This month sees the launch of the film *Burlesque* featuring Christina Aguilera and Cher (*see Film*), followed by the grittier, indie *On Tour* (*Tournée*), which follows an American burlesque troupe on tour in France, and for which Mathieu Amalric won best director prize at last year's Cannes Festival. It looks like burlesque fever is set to rise and rise.

Cheesecake will be performing in At Nine bar in January, dates as yet unconfirmed – see stripchic.com.br. Trixmix returns in February – see trixmix.org



BURLESQUE ESSENTIALS

POLE DANCING

Escola Internacional de Pole
Dancing Alessandra Telles, Miss Pole Dancing Brazil 2010, teaches classes for beginners and pros. *Avenida Lins de Vasconcelos 1351, Sala 1, Vila Mariana (4102 2060/alessandratelles.com). Metrô 1, Vila Mariana.*

LINGERIE

Pink Delicatessen The two floors of this shop are filled with the most sensual of vintage-style lingerie. *Rua Augusta 2542, Shop 7, Jardins (3060 8696).*

CORSETS

Madame Sher These lavish bespoke corsets are tailor-made to create an instant Dita Von Teese waist (*mme.sher@gmail.com/madamesher.com*).

EXOTIC DANCING

Soul Art Estúdio de Dança Belly-dancing classes for all levels of ability. *Alameda Itú 167, Conjunto 25, Jardins (3253 1837/soulartestudiode-danca.com.br). Metrô 2, Trianon-MASP*

TAKE TWO

Don't miss our review of the film *Burlesque*, out this month, starring none other than Cher. See *Film*, page 72



PHOTOS: ANILCAR PACKER

Tricks of the trade—The TrixMix crew prepare for lift-off, backstage in November

