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# Burlesque showgirls hit the stage

'As sexy as we want to be'

Sean Ridgeley

Lickety Split. Heike Lifen-skirten and her Rabbit. Katt Nypp. Velveeta Gabor. These are a few of the women that'll be performing at the Valentine Burlesque show Saturday. Bizarre, to be sure, but if that's what you're after, you're sure to be in for quite a night.

Meghan Beresford was involved heavily in the bi-yearly event before she took her skills to New York last year.

"When I started, I didn't want to shock anyone," she says. "I wasn't ready to just start whipping off my clothes in public either, so I started with something very classic burlesque - a glove striptease."

This, she explains, is when you cover your arms and then slowly, oh so slowly (she drags the "slowly" out) reveal them.

"This is something Jo Boobs (a fantastic burlesque teacher in New York) likes to point out: if you do it properly, the entire audience will be sitting there with bare hands, yet panting to see yours. They're arms, people! But that's at the heart of the tease, choosing what to give away and what to keep for yourself."

Originally, I spoke to Meghan about the

business of burlesque this time last year. At first feeling a little strange about my girlfriend at the time getting involved, I learned it's really about overcoming inhibitions, shyness and getting to find oneself sexy. Which, really, are all great things.

"Not the first time I've heard the 'Oh my God' from boyfriends," she had said. "But they love me, once they get over their fear of me."

This year's show is going to be put off by Neighbourhood Dance Works (NDW), the folks in charge of the Festival of New Dance. All of the profits made will be going towards future endeavours.

Out of the ordinary as it is already, according to the website, this is going to be one strange burlesque show.

"They are tons of fun and a great chance for budding performers to whet their sexy toes on stage," it says. "Anything goes! Singing, dancing, poetry, juggling, magic, striptease, hula hooping, jazz."

One half of "LLickety Split," Lisa Porter is delighted to be hosting things this year with counterpart Lori Clarke. She affirms the uniqueness one can expect.

Lori Clarke and Lisa Porter are L

Lickety Split. - Photo by Baptiste Neis/Special to The Telegram

"You never know exactly what you're going to get. We've had stripping jugglers, can-can dancers, cross-dressers and contortionists. It's not always about women in bustiers, although that's certainly part of it."

The nature of it dates back to its very origins, she says.

"Burlesque has a long and colourful history dating back to the mid-19th century when it emerged as a way of spoofing opera or classical theatre. Usually musical and full of bawdy humour, it was light fare for the masses."

Porter is quiet about what exactly we'll see, but does reveal there will be "a little Irving Berlin for the traditionalists, and something more, let's say, post-modern for the younger crowd."

Beresford says what she loves about burlesque is the self-esteem it encourages.

"It takes a lot for a woman to stand up for her belief that she is attractive and

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intelligent and interesting and worth watching, and I got to see a lot of incredible students and friends do that for the first time on the NDW stage; I still get all puffed up with pride when I think about it."

Porter feels it's all about the individualism.

"We live in a time and place where our esthetic is circumscribed by what we see in magazines and on TV. Bodies must be airbrushed, nipped and tucked, all exactly the same, without variation. It's pretty boring really. Burlesque encourages us to celebrate the human form in all shapes and sizes. We're all as sexy as we want to be."

See the show Saturday at The Majestic Theatre. Doors open 8 p.m., show starts 8:30. Tickets are available at Fred's Records, Johnny Ruth and at the door for \$15.