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TALKING TASSELS WITH GARY BEEBER AND THE NEW BURLESQUE

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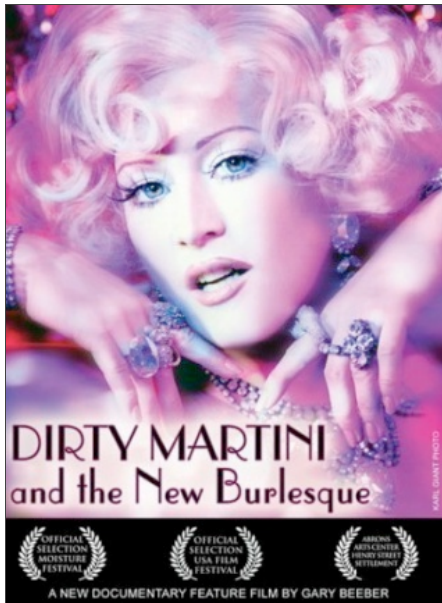
Posted By: **Leslie-Stonebraker**

Tuesday, April 12, 2011

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Dirty Martini hates that every article written about her mentions her size. But as a big burlesque performer (in all senses of the word), it is her very size that makes her an inspiration to all sorts of women. The New Burlesque, a movement Dirty helped to found, is all about celebrating the odd, the out of bounds and the uncomfortable. *Dirty Martini and the New Burlesque* (on sale on Amazon), documents the revival of the bawdy art form through interviews and performances from its star attractions.

On Saturday, the [Highline Ballroom](#) hosts a screening of the documentary, followed by a live performance featuring the burlesque talents of Dirty Martini, Tigger!, Jo Weldon, the World Famous "BOB", Bunny Love, Peekaboo Pointe and Gal Friday. Though he is now busy arranging his own monthly burlesque show, [Gotham Burlesque](#), we briefly caught up with the film's director Gary Beeber to talk tassels before the event.



New York Press: Tell me about the film. How did you get started in burlesque?

Gary Beeber: Dirty Martini is one of the most famous burlesque performers in the world. She could be in Paris or the Netherlands or anywhere any day of the week—she's that big now. But when I interviewed her, I didn't really know burlesque people. I thought that a burlesque performer would be kind of vacant, like a Hollywood showgirl. But Dirty wasn't anything like that. Dirty was very bright, very astute and very interesting. Over two years I really got to know her and I really got to know everybody who's in what's called the New Burlesque movement in New York.

New Burlesque is not like your father's burlesque. This is burlesque where just about everybody in it started out in modern dance, or they were performance artists. Burlesque was totally dead in New York City. And these people, like Dirty, were putting together burlesque not really knowing it was burlesque at the time. Her story and my film is all about that.

The film is only 60 minutes. I could have easily kept watching past that. Why so short?

I wanted a nice, tight film. I didn't want to get too boring. If you notice, there isn't anybody in the film that's doing a complete performance. I wanted to stimulate people to go out and see these performances.

So is the film a preview for the live event?

I wouldn't say it's a preview; it stands on its own as a film. I started showing the film around the country, and it dawned on me that people would find a live show interesting. I obviously can't afford to bring in Dirty Martini, Tigger!, or any of the people who are in the film. So sometimes we've done the film in little towns, which actually have

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burlesque performers, and we've done it with them. I think what happens is once people see the film, they understand what it means to be a burlesque performer, and they understand what burlesque is now.

Why is burlesque enjoying a spotlight in the public eye?

I think the Cher movie didn't hurt. But that's not what burlesque is. That's a terrible fantasy. And I think everybody in the burlesque world... they like Cher, but I think they see the movie as a joke. Like people say in my movie, it's having to schlep your costume and your baggage around to a club in a taxi cab in a cold winter night, and not making a ton of money.

At the beginning of the film, one of your stars attributes Coney Island and the Mermaid Parade with aiding in the revival of burlesque. Will the scene be affected by the redevelopment of the area to be more family friendly?

I've done films about Coney Island, and I know everybody out there at Coney Island, and I know all about Coney Island. When I started going out there around 2003, you had to watch your back, and a lot of the rides were put together with chewing gum and rope, things were kind of falling apart. I don't want people to hate me for saying this, but all the great amusement buildings had burnt down, so it was kind of a shell of itself.

The people from Coney Island USA put together the Mermaid Parade. And that is huge. They created Burlesque at the Beach. Believe it or not, the city gave them money to be able to keep that going. The thing with having families there, on the weekends, families are always there! So, no, I'd say if anything, it helps, because it probably brings more people out there who realize that that's happening out there.

It seems like burlesque is a political and personal act celebrating those outside the norm. How does burlesque fit with feminism?

I've met quite a few of the people that were doing burlesque in the 1950s and '60s. The old burlesque was pretty much about you, as an entertainer, being beautiful, and maybe doing a routine and some dance steps. But now burlesque is about how talented you are. There's a lot of parody, it's very clever and it's very political. It's also political where a woman like Dirty, who's a size 16, can get on stage and shake her thing, and the crowd loves it. I think that every woman that I've ever met feels like something's wrong with them. By somebody like Dirty getting up there on the stage and doing her thing, it makes all women feel good about their bodies.

What's next for you?

After having done this film, I wanted to be able to show the world how talented these people are how much fun they can have at a live show, so I created Gotham Burlesque. Our first show at the Triad, we almost sold out. People loved it. I add a little bit to burlesque too; the first time we had a famous knife thrower, and we've had contortionists. I love putting these shows together in an artistic way.

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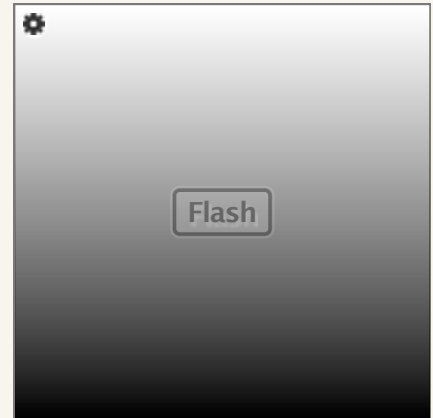
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