THE HISTORY OF BURLESQUE





The word "burlesque" has been in use since the 17th century. It derives from the Italian word "burlesco", which comes from "burla" meaning a joke, or mockery. In theatre it was originally used to describe a pastiche or parody.

Victorian burlesque developed along these lines, parodying well-known culture such as opera or Shakespeare.

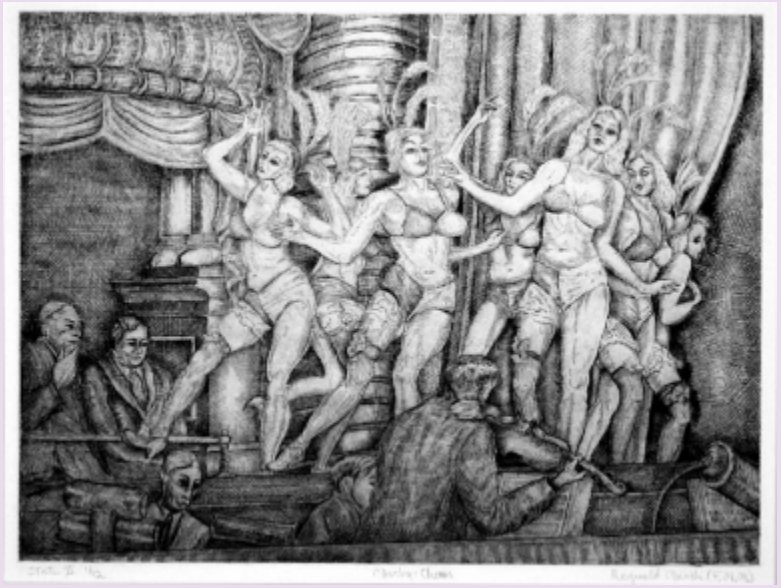




In America, burlesque was popularised in 1840s New York by the British Blondes, Lydia Thompson's visiting dance troupe. The women wore tights, which were considered scandalous at the time! Further troupes sprang up, which incorporated elements of minstrel shows. Mabel Saintley was the first American-born burlesque star. In 1890, The Creole Show began, featuring black performers in the leading roles.



Burlesque gradually developed into striptease in the early 20th century. From 1903, Millie DeLeon was known as "The Girl in Blue" and "The First Real Queen of American Burlesque". She was once arrested for "forgetting" to wear tights.



During the 1920s, striptease was "accidentally" invented by performers at Minsky's.



The 1930s was perhaps the most famous era for burlesque. Josephine Baker, Sally Rand and Gypsy Rose Lee were key performers from this era, and burlesque developed into a true art form.







After the 1950s, burlesque suffered a slow decline until the 1990s, when performers such as Dita Von Teese helped with its resurgence. Today, the art form is popular around the world.

