

MUSIC TO STRIP TO (v3)

R4 PRES INTRO

Traditionally, burlesque performers removed their clothes to sassy, jazzy show tunes. But today, almost anything goes. How did the music of striptease become so diverse? Burlesque stars on both sides of the Atlantic reveal all, now on BBC Radio 4, in MUSIC TO STRIP TO.

0'00 TEASE (actual tease)

DARLINDA: I start – um, do you want me to tell you everything? (Laughs) OK!

MUSIC: Buddy Morrow – Night Train

DARLINDA: So, I come out with a black cape, then I open the cape, there's like neon yellow and then neon pink, take off the cape, and I've got this shimmy neon dress.

AURORA: I'm wearing a silk Grecian dress, with slits at the side, so it swishes a lot more. And it's just like, ridiculous!

LUNA: ...and by this point, I need to be taking my other glove off – otherwise I can not grab my panel skirt! (laughs)

AURORA: This is the bit where my, kind of, bigger knickers come off...

LUNA: And you just drop it down...

(AURORA: *counting* 1-2-3, 1-2-3...)

LUNA: ...with the musicality of the song, and just tease...

DARLINDA: Would you like to see it? Gotta wait for the cue... (Slap! Slap! Slap!)

JULIE: I want the music to slap the audience, and be like – HEY! Watch!

AURORA: And then this is where the bra comes off...

DARLINDA: ...and then I pull off little strips – snap! Snap! Snap!

LUNA: My body has its own natural rhythm, so I just embrace that...

AURORA: The punches in the music are just what makes it amazing!

NASTY: It makes you wanna do bumps and grinds, and all that stuff with it.

DARLINDA: And then finally... here we go, one arm goes up... here we go, last time... one arm, one arm... and the tassel twirl... (rapid breathing)... (laughs) If you aren't huffing and puffing by the end of your burlesque routine, then you haven't done any work! (laughs)

1'39" INTRODUCTIONS

MUSIC: Buddy Guy – What Kind Of Woman Is This

DARLINDA: I am Darlinda Just Darlinda. I'm a Burlesque performer, performance artist...

AURORA: I'm Aurora Galore. I say I'm a dancer, even though I do neo-burlesque performances...

LUNA: I am Luna Tiktok...

ZOE: My name is Zoe Ziegfeld...

JULIE: My name is Julie Atlas Muz, I am a showgirl... yeah, I'm a showgirl. That's the best way to describe me.

NASTY: My name is Nasty Canasta...

TIGGER: I am Tigger! I'm an actor, acting like a stripper.

ZOE: I'm 31.

TIGGER: I'll be 52, soon.

LUNA: ...27 turning 28 this year...

NASTY: I am the girl with the 44DD brain!

JULIE: I'm a 43 year old athletic yet curvy blonde, with a nice big juicy booty that jiggles when I walk!

DARLINDA: What else? Um... I'm about 5'5"...

AURORA: I have a lot of tattoos, more on my legs than on my arms...

DARLINDA: ...big hips, small boobs...

TIGGER: Short, bouncy, lively...

ZOE: ...and I am a queer Jew from New York!

TIGGER: I am so much more complicated than even I can possibly begin to know!

LUNA: I'm a super vivacious, curvy, va va voom lady! (laughs)

3'00" MUSIC UP – now heard in club with audience fx

LUNA ACT – WHAT KIND OF WOMAN IS THIS

LUNA: Here you get three full proper dance turns, that fully embrace the flow of this skirt, and then we come up to a part now where that's coming off. That needs to come off now, and we're gonna turn around and give some booty love right here. And keep looking back, cos obviously no-one pays to just look at your back... and then we just let... go of the skirt there. Then I toss off a bra, and I got a tiny little bra underneath, cos yeah! Layers! And um... here comes the booty claps – just with the subtle drum claps underneath, I time up with all those little riffs.

3'53" MUSIC becomes more intimate

LUNA: I have always wanted to perform since I was a little girl. No-one was able to afford dance classes for me, but that didn't matter, I put on my radio and just danced in front of my mirror, and just performed always for myself, made shows for myself, I spent a lot of time alone as a kid. (laughs) And then I found burlesque. It all made sense from there. I can DO this? YES! I will do this!

(cheers... "ladies and gents, Luna Tiktok!")

4'32" WHAT THEY TEACH AT BURLESQUE SCHOOL

MUSIC: Big Spender (instrumental) at burlesque class

LUNA: I went from walking into the class, thinking "will I have to use Fever?", and I wound up using some pretty hardcore music, so...

LUX: You had a much better experience learning burlesque than I did, in that case, oh I'm jealous! (laughter)

MUSIC UP – "shimmy, shimmy... and hips!"

LUX: A lot of burlesque schools tend to be like – this is burlesque! This isn't burlesque! This is what you can do, this is what you can't do! It always has to be... Imelda May! (laughs) And that's literally it! Or Big Band! I dunno, I don't think it gives you isn't enough scope.

AURORA: I went to a burlesque course, it was very much geared towards 40s and 50s style. I'm not one of these people that was like – I liked vintage things... I was 19 when I started,

and I was like, I wanna dance to Lady Gaga with coke cans in my hair. So that's what I did – I'm gonna do whatever I want! (laughs)

5'30" AURORA ACT – NERO'S DAY AT DISNEYLAND

MUSIC: *Nero's Day At Disneyland – No Money Down Low Monthly Payments*

AURORA: I picked a track by a band called Nero's Day at Disneyland. It's super duper electronic, and kinda weird... there's that metronome beat – but then there's the DUGGA DUGGA DUGGA... rrraaaagh! Isn't it the most amazing but ridiculous bonkers song ever? It's so good! That kind of, stop and start. That's where I would match my body or my leg... there are so many points in the music where it stops – or makes like a, OO-OO – BRRRP! See, all of that stuff is, hip, face, eyebrow... and it goes DOO DOO DOO!... it becomes so much more than it is, because everyone knows you're connected to the music. ... I think because I believe it so much, hopefully I make people believe it – they're like "what is this track? I would never normally listen to this at home on a Sunday, making roast potatoes, but, SHE'S having a good time, so I guess it works?!" So I think, because my heart is in it so much, people just get into it. For the most part! I mean, if they don't, they don't tell me, which is nice of them!" (laughs)

6'58" FINDING MUSIC

LUX: The majority of the time, when I'm trying to think of an act, it will be when I'm on a bus, or at Sainsburys or Tesco or whatever, pushing a trolley round, and I'll be like – hey! I could do a thing to this song! You do find yourself sitting in your car, or in a supermarket going – mm! mm! mm! – and moving along with it.

JULIE: When you pick a good piece of music, seventy percent of the work for the audience is already done. If the audience can groove, and be like – yeah man, dude, I love this song! – you're done. And then there's a naked lady, so alrighty, that's a check plus! And then all you have to do is put a little bit of crafting, and thought, and sly humour and timing into it, and BOOM! It's easy, it's formulaic, especially if you listen to the music.

7'48" MUSIC: *Reverend Horton Heat – D for Dangerous*

LUNA: This song I'd never heard. Just came on. And I was like – WHAT IS THIS? THIS IS AMAZING! There's like a bunch of pauses, and I was just like WHAT DO I DO WITH THIS?! ... I already had like the dress and heels, I was just waiting for something – and I'm like – yep! Having that. OK! (laughs)

DARLINDA: It's the music! It's the music that clamps it all together, there's all this – you've got all these elements, these great costumes, a community, a stage... but having the right music makes the number.

LUNA: And I just listened to it over and over and over and over and over again...

DARLINDA: ...you have to listen to the music, over and over and over and over again so you'd better like the music! Cos if you don't like the music, you're just gonna be in hell.

JULIE: It may become a signature number – for the rest of your life. Do not pick a song that you hate.

Music stops

MUSIC: Aqua – Barbie Girl (briefly – then it cuts out)

TIGGER: I'm not gonna be a Barbie Girl, in a Barbie world, ever. I frickin' HATE that song – Aqua? I will never do an act to that song. Cos I don't wanna hear it!

Music resumes

9'01" LUNA ACT – REV HORTON HEAT

LUNA: This song has a lot of points for events. Like, rightarounds... SINGS... those are what I use to guide me through this song, kind of. Anything can happen in between, but as long as I get that dress open by that "DAH!", then we're good! Cos it seems, it's musicality – musicality is my jam, completely. I think that's where I excel in choreography. I can't do the splits, I can't kick higher than my head... but I can absolutely hit every beat in a song. This is me taking my glove off, just spanking my butt over and over... wait – spank spank spank spank spank! (laughs) Toss away. And then I just, effortlessly, just go around and be like – yeah, you like this? Good! And this is where I open my dress, just a nice little open and closure, just play with the audience in that classic way, but then turn around and give it more sass... and I've been doing this thing lately where I lick my shoulder. And I don't know where it's been coming from, but it's been working! (laughs)

Music stops

10'24" LUNA STATEMENT

LUNA: I am Brooklyn raised, now over here in lovely UK, I settled over in Glasgow with my husband... and I've lived a lot of life for a 27 turning 28 year old. I suffer from a couple of mental disabilities. My mental health is not the best. And though I do my best on stage, a lot of it is making a statement that mental – (sighs) this is me over-thinking – maybe my statement is that I am here. I am a performer of colour, a Latina, an immigrant... I do identify as gender queer... I'm happily married to a man but I'm still queer as hell! And I perform a lot more for women if anything. Um... and I'm here, and I'm not sorry about that. Yeah, especially since becoming an immigrant. It's... post-Brexit – sorry if I'm getting political – it's been hard. I've been getting a lot of back-handed statements. And, it takes a lot of light out of my life. It's painful. And when I get to step on a stage and be celebrated, it's me remembering, this is ME. And this is fantastic. These things aren't wrong with me. I

entertain a bunch of people. People will come to see me, they will travel. It's me being brave enough to still be like – you can tell me that I'm dirty, or that I need to go home, you can tell me I'm wrong for being queer, or that I'm less for being mixed race, or Latina – well – you know, I'm still here. And people are happy to come and see me. I'm not sorry for being plus size, I'm not sorry for being anything. And I'm embracing the fact that I am out of my mind sometimes – Luna TikTok (laughs) – and yeah, no. Think that's about it. Think we're good there!

12'32" DARLINDA ACT – BLOOD SWEAT AND TEARS

MUSIC: Blood Sweat and Tears – You've Made Me So Very Happy

DARLINDA: We're in my room, we've just walked past my bed and we're going into my closet. I've built a walk-in closet ... Oops!... there goes a rogue coat-hanger. So, you're probably wondering why I have American flags here? I do a number that's a pro-choice number, so, anti- whoever's threatening our rights to choose, so currently it's an anti-Trump number. And... it's to the song "You've Made Me So Very Happy" by Blood Sweat and Tears. So I start out looking like a gorgeous American beauty queen, I have a blonde wig on, red gown, white gloves... and then I strip and underneath, I have... I'll show you... So I take everything off, and I start to feel sick, and I realise that...

Music stops

DARLINDA: Can you say (BEEP) on BBC radio? (laughs) ... (pause) Right. Um... okay. So...

Music resumes

DARLINDA: I realise that *inside of me* – it's a picture of ... Donald Trump. So I pull the picture out from inside of me, in horror, and usually I scream, and show the audience, and I rip it up... and then I transform from being freaked out to the happiness of having exorcised him from my body and from the body of all women who are affected by not having the right to choose!

DARLINDA: I thought of it because it's so ironic – "You've made me so very happy, I'm so glad you came into my life"... but it's not at all happy at all, at all. (laughs)

14'37" TIGGER ON POLITICS AND SEXUALITY

TIGGER: All burlesque is political, this is an incredibly puritanical world, and shame is a major tool of oppression, so everything you're doing – even if you think it's not political – yes it is. You're getting naked onstage, you're sharing sexuality, you're willing to laugh at sexuality – THAT's political. I grew up as an exceedingly queer faggot, sex and politics and art have all been twisted up together all my life. Um... as soon as I ran away to New York in the 80s, I joined a theatre company, quickly became known as "the naked actor", I just kept finding dramatically compelling reasons to get naked! Um... somewhere in the midst of that,

I'd begun stripping, I was an erotic dancer acting like a stripper, and I was calling it "Stripperformance Art". And it wasn't until I'd been doing for a while, and someone asked me to do a burlesque show – and I was like "ah! Burlesque! Yeah! Yeah! That fits!" And obviously it's what I was doing, but I hadn't connected that. Because my images were fabulous glamour girls from way gone by... and it's like, uh, I'm not doing anything glamorous, I'm not a girl... but being, having my personality, I couldn't resist.

World Famous Bob: "Please give a huge welcome to Tigger!" (CHEERS)

16'10" MUSIC: Norman Greenbaum – Spirit In The Sky

TIGGER: I foolishly thought I would create this clever new word to set myself apart – cos we didn't see any other male people doing quite what I was doing. I thought, oh, BOYLESQUE! Obviously that HUGELY predates me, but at the time I thought I'd made it up!

TIGGER: Y'know, some twenty women all twirling their tassels – I come out and I'm a man. BANG! Right away, everything's different. Right away people are like – woah! Oh! What? What?! That's no longer the case, but I think it's every performer's job to find a way to get some piece of that. How can I come out and change things? Y'know, selfishly you wanna stand out, but also, it's part of giving the audience a good show!

17'04" JULIE ACT – OFFICER DONUT

MUSIC: KRS One – Sound of Da Police (in club with audience)

JULIE: I do KRS One, Sound Of Tha Police. And I tell you, they hear the WOOP WOOP! And the whole crowd is already groovin'!

(JULIE ON STAGE: "Are you on drugs sir?" "No!"...)

JULIE: I start off like a big fat police officer, I have a box of doughnuts that I eat, I throw the doughnuts out into the audience, and then I rip off my fat cop suit, then I turn into sexy stripper lady... and then I get REALLY crazy. Dance around LIKE A LUNATIC! Take off one stocking, gag myself with it, take off another stocking, cover my head with it like a robber... pull out a gun, run back out into the audience, and then hold them up. So that's Officer Donut, to KRS One's Sound of Da Police.

MUSIC becomes more intimate

JULIE: And that's a song that's about 15 to 20 years old, but more relevant than ever. With Ferguson happening, and just so much – and I'm born and raised in Detroit, there's a lot of racial tension there, and I'm just sick to death of it. I think people do want a bit of politics in their evening! I think they wanna have something to talk about.

MUSIC back to normal

18'27" TARO & SCOTT (DJs)

TARO: Music for burlesque is about NOT being within restrictions. Performing today, neo-burlesque, there is a context – post-2000... there's no reason you can't use modern music because that's what the strippers were doing back in the 50s and 60s anyway. Y'know, burlesque never stopped or ended or died, it just changed. It just found itself existing in a different form.

MUSIC ends

TARO: My name is Taro Baugham. I go by the moniker DJ Momotaro, I'm primarily a DJ in the burlesque world in NYC.

MUSIC: Sam Taylor – Harlem Nocturne (recorded in club with audience)

SCOTT: I'm Scott Ewalt, I've been involved and interested in burlesque for about 30 years, helping performers find the perfect piece of music for their acts. I like the classic stuff the most...

MUSIC up – saxophone

SCOTT: For some reason there is no other sound that eludes sex more than a saxophone. Um, you know, but, the classic burlesque act is on the fade out, people are more interested in the comedic, ironic, which calls back to the original definition of burlesque, pre-1930s, being a parody of something. I think it wasn't until the 20s and 30s that burlesque became synonymous with striptease and kind of had a sexual connotation to it.

MUSIC: Louis Armstrong – St Louis Blues

TARO: Burlesque before there was striptease existed. Shows were all about blue humour, and something wild and unexpected, inverting social norms, and playing games with cultural ideas of morality. That's what burlesque is about, and that continues pretty much to this day.

MUSIC reverb out

AURORA: Because the burlesque market is so saturated, it's hard to find a unique piece of old music, cos there's only so much you can dance to, so maybe people are exploring other avenues to try and connect. And, I find it ironic that people question me listening to, performing to contemporary music, when back in the day people would perform to the music of THEIR contemporaries, and it wasn't like they were being "vintage", they were just dancing to current music! So when people say "oh burlesque is vintage", I'm like, it is NOW, but it wasn't THEN!

TARO: Don't feel that it has to sound like a burlesque song. If you just want to do a bump'n'grind striptease, great – but sometimes that can be effectively done... to hip hop, to stuff that's not even music at all.

21'19" NASTY ACT – CAR ALARM FAN DANCE

FX car alarms

NASTY: I think the Car Alarm Fan Dance – it's interesting, because, it's rhythmic and arrhythmic, it's not really musical... it just goes on and on! (laughs)

FX stops

NASTY: So, one of the most established tropes in classic burlesque is the fan dance. It is the beautiful woman, with giant feather fans ... the idea is the hide and reveal, and the music reinforces that. I had never done one, because it was a classic idea I hadn't been interested in working with...

FX car alarms – as heard from inside apartment

NASTY: I've lived in Brooklyn for 20 years, and someone parked in my neighbourhood, and I swear the car alarm went off for... we realised by the end of 3 days, you were brushing your teeth to it, and walking through the house to this sound. We started dancing to it in the kitchen, and I was like – hmm! Interesting! And that just turned into a very, very beautiful, classic, lovely, Fan Dance to the most horrible noise.

(FX cheers... "Nasty Canasta!" ...)

FX car alarms – as heard on stage

NASTY: It's moves that you do with fans. Swoops and sweeps – the changes in tempo mean you can do those big sweeping movements, and the short staccato ones that fluff the feathers a little bit, and then just... revealing the butt! And then closing. And then the butt! And then closing. ... The movement, because it's dictated by the type of sounds that are happening is also a bit of a play on the movements of the fan dance too.

Car alarm FX ends

NASTY: I personally work off of the traditions of the classic burlesque performers, and the art form as it started years ago, but I try to turn a lot of that stuff around.

23'20" ZOE ON NON-TRADITIONAL IMAGE, AND QUEERNESS

ZOE: One of the reasons I'm not doing the big band, old-style music stuff, is cos that sexual archetype doesn't interest or serve me. So while I appreciate the art of it, and love to watch it, it doesn't fit on me.

MUSIC: Garbage – Number One Crush

ZOE: When I first started doing burlesque, the question was, can I be a beautiful sexy woman? And at this current moment in my life, being a beautiful sexy woman in a very typical, hetero-normative, glamorous (in quotation marks) kind of way... doesn't speak to me particularly. ... I'm really queer, I want my queerness on stage, I've stopped shaving my armpits and my legs and my bikini line, and I'm looking for ways to put my body hair on stage... I don't really wear wigs, I mostly don't wear high heels any more... I've done it. I've been a sexy woman. So – now what? And I think that is happening in my music as well. I've done big band, I... what else can I do?

24'38" THOUGHTFUL SUMMARY STUFF

DARLINDA: I do like doing classic, I love the old time jazz music, the music that was made for striptease, it's amazing, and I do do it, but... people expect me to do the weird stuff. There's absolutely nothing like it.

24'48" MUSIC: Infected Mushroom – Saeed

TIGGER: What I love about burlesque is that EVERYTHING can apply. And that's part of why I wanna keep expanding the parameters and opening doors. I want my own mind to be blown. I want things that I think are burlesque, I want that to be radically changed year after year. I'm so much more interested in a performer who wants to CONNECT, rather than impress. I don't wanna see someone come out and just try to impress me. If I want that, that's the Olympics... and we are not sports, we are arts. And ARTS ARE BETTER. Sorry – true! It's just true. It's more human, richer, it's everything. It's absolutely everything.

AURORA: If you're not connected to the music, I think people really can read that. But if you're listening to the stupidest music then people will get on board, because they see that that's like... a part of me. I believe that you can be weird, you don't always have to wear red lipstick on stage if you don't want to, and if you wanna do quirky things to stupid music then you can, you can embrace your weirdness. It doesn't have to be about anything else other than you coming to the stage being raw and honest. It could just be about, "this is who I am, and this is what I wanna share, I just wanna be, and exist!"

26'12" MUSIC stops

TARO: I've nothing but respect for people who take on burlesque performance. The act of being on stage and putting yourself out there – you're baring all! It takes a lot of courage, and a lot of tenacity... I think that really says something about the people that do it.

MUSIC: Perez Prado – Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White

SCOTT: I've never had the confidence to get up and strip in front of an audience. That's why I do worship these people, because it does take an incredible amount of nerve.

MUSIC UP – cheers

MUSIC fades out... (false ending...)

26'56" BIG REVEAL

TARO: Y'know, so much music fades out, recorded music, anyway. And sometimes, fade outs work great – but obviously a song with an ending is better than a fade out!

MUSIC rewinds and resumes

SCOTT: A real burlesque number needs to have like a big ending. The only way to end an act is with a big, big sound...

DARLINDA: ...and I bump to the right...

SCOTT: ... perfect for pulling off the last piece of clothing...

DARLINDA: ...bump to the left...

SCOTT: ...and stepping into the spotlight.

DARLINDA: ...bump to the centre...

SCOTT: It's the ultimate TA DAH.

DARLINDA: (laughs) TA DAH!

27'35" curtain down

R4 PRES OUTRO

MUSIC TO STRIP TO was produced by Steve Urquhart. It was a White Stiletto production for BBC Radio 4.