

Stagebuzz  
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By Rebecca N. Robertson

### **Review: Shine: A Burlesque Musical**

I am relieved to report that Shine is not a homogenized musical 'about' burlesque and, unlike what appears to be a modern trend, it is certainly not a strip show excusing its lack of skill by calling itself 'burlesque'. Internationally touring music duo The Wet Spots have spawned a genuinely bawdy musical that triumphantly succeeds in hailing free expression of sexuality and embracing of individuality, while dazzling the audience with the talent of its artists.

The premise of the show is *The Aristocrat*, a fictional burlesque house circa 1930's that is struggling to make the rent in NYC's rapidly gentrifying Bowery district between the Whole Foods Market and a Starbucks. Enter Richard Suit (Douglas Crawford) to save the historic hall and its burlesque show, but at the expense of its soul, imposing sterile mainstream sexual ideals on the untraditional cast of characters.

Adopting the structure of a great backstage musical, Shine's song and dance numbers are willfully entertaining, furthering the action with clever lyrics and illustrating the finer points of the dialogue with upbeat mischief. The original music explores various genres from rock to cabaret vaudeville, while remaining cohesive in style, offering singable melodies and toe-tapping grooves. Highlighting the youthful limberness of the chorus, the choreography keeps energy high and supports the folly of the club atmosphere, especially effective in the plot background number "Perversions of Yesteryear". In a such song heavy production, a few of the numbers that seem to exist for the sake illustrating argument, such as "Girls Gone Wild" and "Breezy Broadway Love Song" may be unnecessarily long, thanks to straightforward presentation that quickly drives the ideas home.

The ladies of Shine dominate the stage. As theatre owner Shine Mionne, Cass King's self-empowered stage presence leads this fast paced exhibition of campy humor, catchy songs and passionate ideals. New to burlesque Adra Boo Green portrays *The Aristocrat's* unconventional leading lady Lulu Von Doozy with growing confidence in numbers like "Large and in Charge", winning hearts and much deserved audience exultation. Gemma Isaac exudes sexy innocence as the starry eyed ingenue, seducing us into following her as she discovers the landscape of this underground performance culture and her own developing desires. The ensemble is energetic eye-candy, though undermatured characterizations unfortunately weaken the dramatic effectiveness of the chorus numbers. Amid infrequent rough spots such as these, the show shines with higher production potential and begs to be seen, more, more!

There are few moments that fail to win empathy, such as a number devoted to a performer's complaints that he might have to "get a day job" to make ends meet while he pursues his dreams, but this is NYC, after all. However, the great majority of the idealistic message is intellectually convincing and presents the modern existence of burlesque as rebellious movement toward self-acceptance and a revival of consensual sexual exploration beyond exploitation of stereotype. Like great sex, comedy though titillation of intellect may be at the core of Shine, but it quite simply feels like fun!

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