



## Looking Back

**Tanya Cheex**

Back in the day, burlesque was a form of entertainment that couples could go to. It was predominately for the male gaze, but in certain theatres it was so grand—like in Montréal if you were going to see Lili St. Cyr—you would put on your furs and your jewels to go out with your husband. It was like the dinner theatre of the time. There'd be comedians and there'd be the girls. It was really glamorous back then.

My grandmother had an interest in this and she knew all the names of the stars of her day, so she used to talk about them, how they looked and how they moved. Burlesque and vaudeville is essentially what television became, so you'd also see burlesque pieces in old Hollywood movies, like *Gilda*, where Rita Hayworth does a striptease with a glove to a song. In Marilyn Monroe's time there was a burlesque star who imitated her—Dixie Evans, who is still alive today. Marilyn's image and behaviour was definitively based on burlesque and the larger than life feminine archetypes.

So when I was really little—eight—my Grandmother

and I used to have these TV nights where she'd babysit me and we watch these old movies. I got it in my head that I should put together a strip show in my friend's backyard. I choreographed this number with umbrellas and charged a \$5 admission and it got busted by the neighbourhood parents. My first sold out show was busted! This was the '70s and the phone was ringing off the hook with parents saying, "Do you know what your daughter did?!" and my parents were trying not to kill themselves laughing. They finally asked me, "Where did you get the idea to do this?" And I answered: "Granny!" My Grandma encouraged that kind of thing. She was a model, so she had a huge wardrobe of these crazy elegant gowns and gloves and stoles and we were always playing dress up.

So I dropped it for a while, because I was eight, but got it in my head that if I was a stripper then it'd be the same thing as what I'd seen in these stag reels. I soon quickly found out that no one cared about boas and gloves in a strip bar. When I was there I spun off into more of the fetish side of things and then I was told I'd make more money as a dominatrix. So I did that for 17 years. All these things interlock in a way because I was also really getting involved with the drag shows on Church Street. I actually got my start performing in those bars—I've had drag mamas and I was female/female impersonator doing Marilyn, old Hollywood and Madonna.

It was around that time I started distributing a line of clothing out of the UK that was called Skin Two, which was high end latex rubber clothing. I would do fashion shows at these sex and trade shows and I thought it would be more interesting to do the runway in burlesque vignettes. It was fetish, burlesque and drag culture. The name Skin Tight Outta Sight was born out of that and it stuck. My original troupe was established with those models who were involved. Combine all that with the punk rock and rockabilly retro—all those things mashed together—is what became Skin Tight Outta Sight, Canada's longest running burlesque act. We're the originals and we're one of the originators of the movement in North America.

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Bend over Ladies and Gentlemen, she'll TAN-YA CHEEX!

Founder and Artistic Director of Skin Tight Outta Sight ([www.skintightouttasight.com](http://www.skintightouttasight.com)) since 1998 and Artistic Director of The Toronto Burlesque Festival, Tanya loves to mix the sublime with the surreal. She was voted as one of the Top 50 Burlesque Performers for 2009, and has taken off her clothes all across Canada and the USA. Read her adventures at [www.rhinestoneswhiskey.blogspot.com](http://www.rhinestoneswhiskey.blogspot.com).