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Burlesque at the Beach

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Burlesque performer Coco LaPearl (Source: Jason Lee)

On Thursday and Friday evenings this summer Coney Island presents an evening of Burlesque, but not in the conventional sense that places like "The Box" in Manhattan told us it should be like. And definitely not like Xtina and Cher showed us in their Hollywood faint-hearted down played film. The Great Fredini and Bambi The Mermaid brings the **Burlesque at the Beach** program to New York at the end of the line, Coney Island and shows off some hardly enthusiastic oddities indeed.

Coney Island has changed; gone are the gleeful children and stuffed animals you can win. It's now truly the last stop on the subway and in an almost ruinous state. Burlesque at the Beach felt similar. So terrible that it is actually fantastic.

Coney Island's reputation for "girlie revues," where the sets are ornate and the candy is handed out for free, has been lost. It hasn't quite been replaced with anything yet, but then again summer has just begun.

Coney Island USA may die, as the not-for-profit corporation is desperately trying to hold Coney Island legend in place in honor of American popular culture. The money and the crowds have dried up and so new funding for enhancement is in desperate need.

The Friday evening show was thoroughly soaked in irony. The one trick pony fire-eater, who is a third generation New Yorker and the "Grande Dame" of the evening, cackled with laughs making casual mistakes in her comedy skits as she hosted the array of young girls coming out one after the other.

The focus was solely on the girls. The refreshing element came from a completely unprofessional set of acts one after the after and allowed for the performers to not want to impress but rather to just express their creative and artistic feelings.

From a rather sickeningly carnal kitty cat licking lover to a not stick skinny Indian princess teasing the crowd with her undressing of her rosy costume dance the evening was unrehearsed and completely amateurish. That was exactly what made it almost fun.

The lighting was non-existent and the set had no design elements so the focus was solely on the girls. The refreshing element came from a completely unprofessional set of acts one after the after and allowed for the performers to not want to impress but rather to just express their creative and artistic feelings.

In contrast to all the highly designed, perfectly choreographed, elaborate sets usually involved with Burlesque this pared-down, desperate version of the art felt light and hilarious with great amounts of looking away and cramping squeamishness.

There was Vivienne La Flamme and Suzette Snaffoux, but it was the fearless Coco LaPearl that managed to scare the crowd into her world of destroyed beer bottles and titillation as she belly flopped into a carpet of smashed glass.

Unharmd and seemingly undisturbed, Coco LaPearl has the audience squealing. It was Coco's story of not getting enough attention as a child and thus the motivation for her tricks that gave the audience more than just a mouthful.

An evening of ridiculous acts, non-existent costumes and no special effects felt perfectly freak show and perfectly terrible.

Burlesque at the Beach runs throughout the summer at 1208 Surf Avenue, Brooklyn. For more information and for the schedule check the website www.coneyisland.com/burlesque.shtml

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