

The Burlesque Handbook PDF

Jo Weldon



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About the book

Praise for Jo Weldon:

"Jo Weldon represents the epitome of New Burlesque. I consider her not only a friend but a true inspiration." — Lily Burana, author of **Strip City: A Stripper's Farewell Journey Across America**

Introducing *The Burlesque Handbook*:

Dive into the vibrant world of New Burlesque with Jo Weldon's comprehensive and user-friendly guide, featuring a foreword by the fabulous comedian and burlesque lover, Margaret Cho. This essential book is perfect for fans of Dita Von Teese and performers of all levels, offering invaluable insights and a spirited approach to the art of burlesque.

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The Burlesque Handbook Summary

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Who should read this book **The Burlesque Handbook**

"The Burlesque Handbook" by Jo Weldon is a must-read for anyone interested in the art of burlesque, whether you're a performer, aspiring dancer, or simply a fan of the genre. This comprehensive guide caters to a diverse audience, appealing to beginners looking to learn the fundamentals of burlesque, as well as seasoned professionals seeking to refine their skills and expand their knowledge. Additionally, those studying performance art, gender studies, or cultural expressions will find rich insights into the history and evolution of burlesque as a form of entertainment. Ultimately, Weldon's handbook serves as an engaging resource for anyone eager to embrace self-expression, body positivity, and the vibrant world of burlesque.

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Key insights of The Burlesque Handbook in table format

Chapter	Summary
Introduction	Jo Weldon introduces the art of burlesque, its history, and its cultural significance.
Chapter 1: What is Burlesque?	Defines burlesque as a form of theatrical entertainment that plays with humor, sexuality, and exaggeration.
Chapter 2: The History of Burlesque	Explores the origins of burlesque, from 19th-century vaudeville to modern-day performances.
Chapter 3: The Burlesque Performer	Describes the qualities, skills, and attributes needed to be a burlesque performer.
Chapter 4: Costuming	Focuses on the importance of costumes in burlesque, including tips on design and creation.
Chapter 5: Makeup and Hair	Gives guidance on creating iconic burlesque looks with makeup and hairstyling techniques.
Chapter 6: The Dance	Covers various dance styles utilized in burlesque, including tips for choreography and movement.
Chapter 7: Building a Routine	Provides a step-by-step guide on creating a captivating burlesque performance routine.



Chapter	Summary
Chapter 8: Stage Presence	Discusses the significance of confidence and stage persona in captivating an audience.
Chapter 9: Audience Interaction	Teaches how to engage and interact with the audience during performances.
Chapter 10: The Business of Burlesque	Offers insights into promoting oneself as a performer, including marketing and networking strategies.
Conclusion	Weldon emphasizes the empowerment and creativity found in burlesque, encouraging readers to embrace their individuality.

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The Burlesque Handbook Summary Chapter List

1. Introduction to Burlesque: History, Evolution, and Modern Interpretation
2. Essential Performance Skills: From Stage Presence to Audience Engagement
3. Costume and Makeup: Crafting the Perfect Burlesque Persona
4. Choreography and Movement: Developing Unique Dance Styles for Burlesque
5. Creating a Burlesque Act: Structure, Theme, and Character Development
6. Navigating the Burlesque Community: Networking, Collaboration, and Performance Opportunities
7. Final Thoughts on Embracing Your Inner Burlesque Star: Confidence and Creativity

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1. Introduction to Burlesque: History, Evolution, and Modern Interpretation

Burlesque is a vibrant art form that has captivated audiences for centuries, rooted in a rich history that reflects societal changes, cultural shifts, and artistic evolution. Its origins can be traced back to the 19th century, where it emerged as a theatrical genre that combined parody, comedy, and various forms of entertainment. Initially, burlesque was a satirical performance that mocked the serious theater of the time, using wit and often slapstick humor to entertain audiences. By the mid-1800s, it started to incorporate elements of striptease, which, while controversial, contributed to its growing popularity and appeal.

As the decades progressed, burlesque evolved significantly, particularly in the United States during the early to mid-20th century. This period saw its transformation into a more glamorous and sophisticated form of entertainment, with elaborate costumes, music, and choreography. Iconic figures such as Gypsy Rose Lee and Sally Rand became synonymous with the genre, embodying the allure and spectacle of burlesque performances. This era is often romanticized as a golden age, yet it also faced considerable challenges, including censorship and changing social mores that sought to suppress its more risqué elements.

The decline of traditional burlesque in the mid-20th century coincided with

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the rise of mass media and new forms of entertainment, leading to a significant shift in how audiences consumed entertainment. However, burlesque never entirely vanished; instead, it adapted, finding new expressions in clubs and theaters. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a revival began to take shape, spurred by a resurgence of interest in vintage aesthetics and nostalgia for past eras.

Modern burlesque is characterized by its fusion of traditional elements with contemporary sensibilities, often embracing diverse artistic influences that reflect the multicultural nature of today's society. Performers now explore themes involving feminism, body positivity, and empowerment, using the stage as a platform to challenge societal norms and celebrate individuality. The modern burlesque scene promotes creative self-expression and often incorporates a variety of artistic mediums, including music, comedy, dance, and visual art.

Today, burlesque acts can be found in various venues worldwide, including dedicated burlesque theaters, cabarets, and festivals. The art form has gained recognition as a legitimate performance genre, with many performers receiving accolades and acclaim for their work. In this evolving landscape, burlesque is more than just entertainment; it is a celebration of diversity, creativity, and the confidence to embrace one's identity.

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The modern interpretation of burlesque invites performers to not only hone their technical skills but to also engage with their audiences in meaningful ways. It encourages them to explore and express their unique perspectives while fostering a sense of community among performers. As we delve deeper into the intricacies of burlesque, we will explore essential skills and techniques that define successful performers, dissect the art of costume creation, and examine the choreography that elevates burlesque to an empowering form of artistic expression.

In summary, the journey of burlesque from its historical beginnings through its evolution to modern interpretations highlights its adaptability and enduring appeal. The art form stands as a testament to the spirit of performance, inviting both performers and audiences to celebrate the art of seduction and the beauty of self-expression.

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2. Essential Performance Skills: From Stage Presence to Audience Engagement

In the world of burlesque, the art of performance transcends mere technical skill, encompassing a captivating blend of stage presence and audience engagement. These essential performance skills are not just about executing dance moves; they embody the artistry of drawing the audience into a world of entertainment, fantasy, and emotion.

Stage presence is the foundation of any successful burlesque act. It is that magnetic quality that commands attention the moment the performer steps onto the stage. Building stage presence involves developing a sense of confidence and comfort in one's own skin. For aspiring burlesque artists, this means cultivating a persona that resonates with the audience while remaining true to oneself. It's about owning the spotlight and expressing one's character through confident body language, facial expressions, and eye contact. The ability to connect with the audience through a shared gaze or a playful interaction can transform a good performance into a memorable experience.

Moreover, audience engagement is a vital aspect of burlesque performance. Burlesque thrives on the interaction between the performer and the audience, creating a collaborative atmosphere that heightens the entertainment value. Engaging the audience can take many forms, from inviting their

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participation to reading their reactions and adjusting the performance accordingly. This might involve using humor, charm, or teasing to elicit responses from the audience, making them feel like active participants in the act rather than passive observers.

Incorporating storytelling into performances is another effective way to deepen audience engagement. Each burlesque act can tell a story, convey a message, or evoke an emotion. When performers weave narratives into their acts, they create a connection that resonates with viewers, allowing them to invest emotionally in the performance. Whether the tale is humorous, dramatic, or seductive, a well-told story adds layers to the performance and makes it more impactful.

Physicality is also critical in both stage presence and audience engagement. The movement a performer uses to express their character can range from subtle and intimate to bold and extravagant. How a performer moves through space, the energy they project, and their ability to play with dynamics can captivate an audience and maintain their interest throughout the act. Variations in speed, posture, and gesture allow performers to create distinct moments that punctuate their routine and keep the audience engaged.

Finally, practice is essential. Developing these skills requires time and effort. Performers should rehearse not only their choreography but also their

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interactions, expressions, and audience engagement techniques. By consistently refining their skills, burlesque performers can build the confidence needed to shine on stage and leave a lasting impression.

In conclusion, essential performance skills in burlesque—stage presence and audience engagement—are interwoven aspects of creating a powerful act. They require practice, creativity, and a deep understanding of both oneself and the audience. With these skills, performers can create enchanting experiences that elevate their acts beyond mere performance into a vibrant celebration of personality and expression.

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3. Costume and Makeup: Crafting the Perfect Burlesque Persona

Costumes and makeup play a crucial role in defining a performer's persona in the world of burlesque. With roots that celebrate femininity, humor, and sensuality, burlesque performers use costume and makeup not merely as accessories but as foundational elements that add depth and narrative to their performance.

When selecting the right costume, it's vital to consider the character you wish to embody. Each outfit should reflect the theme of the act and enhance the storytelling aspect of the performance. For instance, glamorous sequined dresses can evoke vintage Hollywood vibes, while more playful or outrageous attire might draw on pop culture or personal quirks. Fabric choice also matters; materials like feathers, satin, and lace can create visual intrigue and enhance movement on stage. Understanding the balance between revealing and tastefully concealing is key, as burlesque traditionally embraces elements of tease and surprise.

Yet, the costume alone doesn't complete a burlesque persona. Makeup serves as the finishing touch that adds character and flair. A distinctive makeup style can transform a performer, allowing them to become someone entirely different on stage. Think bold, dramatic looks, often characterized by vibrant colors, exaggerated eyeliner, and striking lip shades. The aim is to



enhance facial features, ensuring they stand out under stage lighting while portraying the essence of the character.

In blurring the lines between fantasy and reality, makeup artists in burlesque often employ techniques from theatrical applications and drag culture, emphasizing a dramatic and larger-than-life aesthetic. Contouring can alter the face's shape, while rhinestones or glitter can add sparkle and allure. Understanding how to apply makeup that withstands the heat of stage lights and lasts through energetic performances is imperative for any burlesque performer.

Moreover, costume changes during performances can create added layers to the act, allowing for a visual narrative that keeps the audience engaged. Quick changes can be choreographed to coincide with musical transitions or pivotal moments in the performance, enhancing the overall impact. Accessories like boas, hats, masks, or gloves can also help craft a more nuanced portrayal without requiring a complete costume overhaul.

Ultimately, the interplay between costume and makeup in a burlesque act is an art form in itself. Thoughtfully crafted outfits paired with striking makeup contribute to the spellbinding atmosphere burlesque is known for. As performers delve into their creative process, they must embrace their individuality while celebrating the rich history and cultural significance of



burlesque. This journey toward crafting the perfect burlesque persona not only prepares them for the stage but also allows them to reclaim their narrative, embracing confidence and creativity.

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4. Choreography and Movement: Developing Unique Dance Styles for Burlesque

Choreography and movement play a pivotal role in defining the essence of burlesque. Unlike traditional dance forms that often prioritize technical execution and uniformity, burlesque allows for a greater emphasis on individuality and personal expression. This unique genre of performance art challenges dancers to develop their distinctive movement styles that resonate with their character, theme, and audience.

To begin creating unique dance styles for burlesque, performers must first immerse themselves in the history and variety of dance forms that have influenced the genre. Burlesque draws from a rich tapestry of dance styles, including jazz, classical ballet, cabaret, and even pop culture movements. By exploring these diverse influences, dancers can identify elements that inspire them, from the sultry sway of the hips in jazz to the theatrical flair of cabaret.

Understanding the foundations of rhythm and musicality is essential for any burlesque performer. Movement should feel responsive to the music, allowing the dancer to playfully interact with the beats and melodies. Jo Weldon emphasizes the importance of listening to the music not merely as an accompaniment but as a partner in the dance. This means interpreting the emotional undertones of the song, which can lead to a more profound



connection with the audience.

Developing a burlesque routine involves much more than just choreography; it requires crafting a narrative that enhances the performance. Dancers are encouraged to think about their unique stories or themes and how movement can convey these ideas. Whether it's a playful take on a classic fairy tale or a commentary on contemporary life, choreography should weave in and out of the narrative, underscoring key moments and highlighting character development through physicality.

Another vital aspect of choreography in burlesque is the incorporation of props and costumes, which can significantly affect movement. Props can range from feather boas to giant fans, and how a dancer interacts with these elements can define their style. Effective use of props not only adds visual interest but also creates opportunities for comedic timing and dramatic reveals that are signature to burlesque performances. Dancers should explore how various props influence their choreography to create striking and memorable moments on stage.

Moreover, individual style is paramount in burlesque, where performers are encouraged to embrace their bodies and find movements that highlight their strengths. This journey often involves experimentation with various styles and techniques to discover what resonates. From bold and dynamic

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movements that exude confidence to more subtle and teasing gestures, dancers should cultivate a signature style that reflects their personality and artistic voice.

Finally, the rehearsal process is a crucial stage in developing choreography. Rehearsals not only refine the movement but also foster creativity and innovation. It's an opportunity for performers to explore their interpretations of the music and the character, adjusting movements to find the most authentic expression. Creating a supportive environment during rehearsals allows dancers to share feedback, exchange ideas, and ultimately grow as performers.

In summary, developing unique dance styles for burlesque involves a combination of historical awareness, a deep connection to music, thematic exploration, prop integration, and personal expression. By embracing their individuality and committing to the rehearsal process, performers can cultivate dynamic and captivating acts that resonate with audiences, ensuring that each performance is a celebration of artistry, empowerment, and joyous self-expression.

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5. Creating a Burlesque Act: Structure, Theme, and Character Development

Creating a burlesque act is an intricate process that merges creativity with structured performance design. This chapter delves into the essential elements involved in crafting a captivating act that resonates with audiences and showcases the performer's unique charisma.

Structure of a Burlesque Act

A successful burlesque act typically follows a clear beginning, middle, and end. The **beginning** sets the tone and introduces the character. It's crucial to grab the audience's attention immediately, whether through a provocative entrance, striking visuals, or engaging dialogue. The **middle** of the act is where the performer builds the narrative, often incorporating comedic elements, storytelling, and a gradual escalation of tension and excitement. This is typically where most of the choreography unfolds, allowing the audience to immerse themselves in the act's theme and character. Finally, the **end** sequence should provide a climactic resolution, often culminating in a final reveal or a memorable punchline, ensuring the audience leaves with a lasting impression.

Theme Development

Theme plays a vital role in establishing the overall mood and objective of the act. The theme can be drawn from various sources, such as classic films,



pop culture, historical events, or fantastical concepts. It's essential for performers to choose a theme that resonates personally, as authenticity shines through in performance. Effective themes should not only entertain but also invoke emotions, provoke thought, or spark laughter. Once the theme is established, performers can strategize on how to incorporate elements relevant to that theme into their act, including music selection, costume choices, and choreography.

Character Development

Character development is at the heart of burlesque and is critical for resonating with the audience. Each performer should create a character that embodies their personality and artistic vision. This involves defining the character's background, traits, motivations, and quirks. A well-developed character often has a story that unfolds throughout the act, allowing the audience to connect on a deeper level. Performers can enhance character development through vocal inflections, body language, and facial expressions, making sure these aspects align seamlessly with the act's narrative and theme. Engaging with the audience during the performance—whether through flirtation, humor, or audience interaction—can also deepen the connection between the character and the viewers.

Conclusion

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In summary, creating a burlesque act entails thoughtful consideration of structure, theme, and character development. Each element is interlinked, contributing to a cohesive performance that captivates and entertains. By investing time in honing these aspects, performers can craft acts that not only showcase their talents and uniqueness but also create memorable experiences for their audience, solidifying their place within the rich tapestry of burlesque.

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6. Navigating the Burlesque Community: Networking, Collaboration, and Performance Opportunities

The burlesque community is a vibrant and eclectic tapestry of performers, artists, and enthusiasts who share a passion for celebration, expression, and creativity. Navigating this community involves understanding its dynamics and making meaningful connections that can enhance one's career and artistry in burlesque.

To begin, networking within the burlesque scene is essential. This can involve participating in local performances, attending workshops, or simply being present at shows to meet fellow performers. Establishing a rapport with other artists often leads to collaboration opportunities—whether that means joining forces on a joint act or supporting one another in various productions. Networking is not just about personal gain; it's about building a community where individuals uplift each other, share resources, and inspire creativity.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of the burlesque community. It encourages performers to step out of their comfort zones, explore new ideas, and mesh different styles to create something entirely unique. This can range from creating shared performances, where multiple acts flow seamlessly from one to another, to working on projects that incorporate different artistic



disciplines—such as incorporating live music, visual arts, or even theater techniques into a burlesque setting.

Moreover, through collaboration, performers can tap into each other's strengths and skills, enriching their own performances and allowing for innovative storytelling through movement and character. Engaging with fellow artists fosters an environment where mentorship can thrive and newer performers can gain invaluable insights from those with more experience.

In addition to networking and collaboration, performance opportunities abound within the burlesque community. From local performances at bars and theaters to larger festivals and competitions, there are countless venues where one can showcase their talents. Finding these opportunities often involves being proactive—reaching out to show producers, staying informed about auditions, and being visible within the community. Participation in these events not only builds one's performance resume but also provides exposure to diverse audiences and networking with various industry professionals.

Social media plays a crucial role in cultivating connections within the burlesque community. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok allow performers to showcase snippets of their acts, share behind-the-scenes glimpses of their creations, and connect with fans and fellow artists alike.

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Engaging actively on these platforms helps to expand one's reach and fosters a more significant sense of community through the sharing of stories and experiences.

Ultimately, to navigate the burlesque community successfully, one must embody an open-minded and generous spirit. The beauty of burlesque lies in its celebratory nature and its capacity to foster inclusivity and diversity. Through networking, collaboration, and actively seeking performance opportunities, performers can weave themselves into the fabric of this artistic realm, finding their niche while contributing to a shared love for the art form. As each artist embraces their individuality and expresses their unique voice, the community grows richer and more vibrant, paving the way for fresh ideas and innovative performances that captivate and inspire.

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7. Final Thoughts on Embracing Your Inner Burlesque Star: Confidence and Creativity

As we conclude our exploration of the world of burlesque, it's imperative to reflect on the central themes of confidence and creativity that are vital to embodying your inner burlesque star. Burlesque is more than just a performance art; it is a celebration of individuality, self-expression, and empowerment, allowing performers to connect with their inner selves and share that with the audience.

At the heart of burlesque lies confidence. This confidence isn't innate; it's cultivated through practice and embracing one's unique identity. Every time you step onto the stage, you have an opportunity to transform not just how you present yourself but how you perceive yourself. When you confidently own your space and showcase your talents, you invite your audience to celebrate your artistry alongside you.

Creative expression is equally essential in developing your burlesque persona. It's important to remember that your act is a reflection of who you are—your experiences, your passions, and even your quirks. Embracing creativity means allowing your imagination to flourish and finding inspiration in diverse sources, be it in historical influences, pop culture, or personal stories. This creativity will set you apart as a performer and allow you to share something truly unique with each performance.

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Fear and vulnerability often accompany the performance arts, but they can be harnessed as tools for growth. Every aspect of burlesque, from costume design to choreography, offers an avenue to confront insecurities and celebrate triumphs. Engage with your fears constructively; let them motivate you to refine your skills and deepen your commitment to your craft. Remember, even the most seasoned performers experienced their own hurdles before they found their groove.

Additionally, community plays a vital role in nurturing both confidence and creativity. The supportive environment of the burlesque community encourages performers to share ideas, collaborate, and challenge one another creatively. Engaging with fellow performers provides reassurance that you are not alone in your journey. This camaraderie reinforces the understanding that each performer brings something valuable to the art form, which ultimately leads to a richer and more diverse experience for everyone involved.

In essence, embracing your inner burlesque star is an invitation to celebrate all aspects of yourself, to express who you are without inhibitions, and to connect with others on a profound level. Whether you're a seasoned performer or just stepping into the spotlight, remember that the magic of burlesque lies in the confidence to be bold, the creativity to innovate, and the

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joy of sharing that with others. As you venture forth on your burlesque journey, carry with you the understanding that you are a unique storyteller, capable of captivating and inspiring those around you.

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5 Key Quotes of The Burlesque Handbook

1. "Burlesque is not just about taking off your clothes; it's about revealing your true self underneath."
2. "Embrace your individuality; it's what sets you apart and makes you truly captivating on stage."
3. "Confidence is the most important costume you can wear—own it and the audience will feel it too."
4. "Art is subjective, and so is beauty; never let anyone dictate what you should be."
5. "In burlesque, we celebrate the imperfections; they are what make us human and relatable."

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