

We as artists who have performed on the cabaret stage located on the second floor of Café Cleopatra's, have been following the OCPM meetings with a keen interest in the hope that the new revitalization plan for the lower main would bring a new life/vitality/vigour to a much neglected historical entertainment district.

Because of our involvement with Café Cleopatra's, we have become aware of the eclectic historical life of this particular building and had greatly anticipated the beneficial effects that the Quartier des Spectacles project development would have in courting a wider interest in the upstairs cabaret show bar.

Through the public consultation meetings we were further informed of the nature of the proposed plans put forth by the SDA. We were discouraged by the absence of consideration for the needs of those currently occupying the space slated for development. If the Quadilatere is to go forth with-out amendments necessary to ensure the right of Café Cleopatra's to exist, the longstanding tradition of alternative entertainment that this venue has nurtured will be silenced.

The forms of alternative entertainment performed at Café Cleopatra's vary from drag impersonations, traditional travesties, and underground performance art. All of these have branched from the roots of Vaudeville theatre.

1. Vaudeville is defined as:
  - a. Stage entertainment offering a variety of short acts such as slapstick turns, song-and-dance routines, and juggling performances.
  - b. A theatrical performance of this kind; a variety show.
2. A light comic play that often includes songs, pantomime, and dances.
3. A popular, often satirical song.

One of the more recognized subgenres of Vaudeville is Burlesque which has seen an international resurgence in the past decade.

“Women enjoy watching burlesque because they can relate to dancers with normal-shaped bodies.”The performers don't have bodies out of fashion magazines,"... "Women enjoy it because they see it as empowerment. It's about them regaining their own sexuality and enjoying it”.”

-Andy Dangerfield from the article *Empower burlesque?* BBC news.

Upstairs and downstairs Café Cleopatra's supports the body politics of Burlesque.

“One of the things that is unique about Neo-Burlesque and Classic Burlesque (burlesque performed until 1960 and 70's) is the acceptance of performers with different bodies. If their body is different from the societal/popular norm performers can be acting as a feminist by the mere act of having their bodies on stage. The late Heather McAllister the creator of Fat Bottom Review in San Francisco, a fat positive, queer burlesque troupe, said, “Any time there is a fat person onstage as anything besides the butt of a joke, it's

political. Add physical movement, then dance, then sexuality and you have a revolutionary act.””

-Darlinda Just Darlinda, from *Feminist Neo-Burlesque Speech from 10/26/07*

The proposals set forth by the SDA do not include a small venue, or stage bar for local, alternative, low budget artists that need the opportunity of low rent accessibility to actualize their projects. Currently we do have such a place.

Since 2004 we (Travesty Theatre) had been performing on the stage of Café Cleopatra's, before settling into producing larger shows featuring local and out of province acts. Travesty Theatre through the creation of its long running Dead Dollz Cabaret has specialized in Neo-vaudeville and neo-burlesque style performances. Our shows display a wide range of diverse contemporary cabaret, neo-vaudeville entertainment, and support a multifaceted talent pool from the neophyte to the professional.

We chose to use Café Cleopatra's for the following reasons:

1. It boasts a traditional show bar cabaret set up, unique to the city yet perfectly adapted for the needs of our genre of show entertainment. Found on the second level of Café Cleopatra's, a Thrust Stage, otherwise known as a Three Quarter Round is a rarity here in the city of Montreal. The lighting system as well follows a more traditional cabaret approach as opposed to the typical “rock and roll” style found in most Montreal venues.
2. The support, mentorship and continued encouragement on the part of J. Zoumbalacos to continue producing these shows.

The corner of St Laurent and St Catherine's has degraded into an area populated by an itinerant community known for poverty and drug problems. Yet situated in the heart of this zone is an establishment that may be seen as a tarnished gem; that with finesse and proper consideration by the city of Montreal could once again re-claim it's prominence as a memento of an era of decadence that put Montreal on the world map. Elsewhere in Canada, the city of Vancouver has realised the importance of it's theatrical heritage by moving to approve the restoration of *The Pantages Theatre*, a former Vaudeville house, located at 144 East Hastings, mere moments away from the infamous corner of Main and Hastings an area not unlike our lower Main.

If the City of Vancouver approves the plan set forth by the developer then construction -- which will take 12 to 18 months -- can start by the end of 2009. While one Canadian historical venue is seeing it's re-birth another is facing its death.

Meanwhile in Denver Colorado, Reyna Von Vett and Michelle Baldwin, two prominent burlesque performers have bought over an old vaudeville house and are in the process of

restoring it to its former glory. They want to be able to provide a regular venue for neo-vaudeville performers.

“For the first time since the 1930s, a theatre is being built specifically to house burlesque, headed up by Reyna Von Vett and Michelle Baldwin. Von Vett partook in last fall’s acclaimed *Leadville or Bust* — a playful romp through 1880s burlesque (she also played Tanya for two years in the Las Vegas company of *Mamma Mia!*). Baldwin, a.k.a. **Vivienne VaVoom**, is the mother of neo-burlesque in Denver and creator of one of the first neo-burlesque troupes in the US, Burlesque As It Was.

Converting the space recently known as the Black Box Cabaret in the Denver Civic Theatre (721 Santa Fe Dr.), Von Vett and Baldwin aim to bring burlesque back while paying homage to the great tradition of burlesque that began in the late 1800s and all but disappeared in the 1960s.”

Quoted from: Jo Weldon [burlesquedaily.blogspot.com](http://burlesquedaily.blogspot.com)

Every theatre best suits the type of art form that it was built for. Opera houses are built for opera, symphony halls are built for symphony. Café Cleopatra’s, was built for the cabaret.

A district of national significance is defined, according to guidelines adopted by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, "as a group of buildings, structures and open spaces which share uncommonly strong associations with individuals, events or themes of national significance".

By virtue of the over whelming support against the demolition of existing establishments located in the area colloquially known as the “Red Light District”, an unprecedented number of people have now become aware of the significance of the history of the area. This in and of itself demonstrates this area to be of national significance. The potential destruction of such a celebrated corner resonates with many who see Montreal as ignoring its colourful yet vibrant epochs in favour of expanding its business sector.

In the early to mid 20th-century, the Montreal municipal governments undertook many projects of urban renewal which disturbed the vibrant street life of the lower Main. Buildings were demolished in order to widen east-west thoroughfares and advance the Ville-Marie Expressway. Are we to see yet another urban renewal project that falls short of it’s promise to renew, and instead nullifies the character of the lower main.

In closing, we encourage the SDA and the city of Montreal to acknowledge the historical and contemporary value of Café Cleopatra’s and to respect the right of the venue to endure, or at the very least reconsider an integration into the proposed building project.

Thank you for your consideration.

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