

ATLANTIC CITY, PLEASANTVILLE & BRIGANTINE

powered by Hometown

Atlantic City casinos push envelope with sexy — but not too sexy — live shows

Like

Be the first of your friends to like this.

 Post this article for your Facebook friends

By VINCENT JACKSON Staff Writer | Posted:
Sunday, August 1, 2010 |

With a photo gallery

ATLANTIC CITY — Women strut around in camisoles and corsets, thongs and G-strings in the “X Burlesque” show at Club Worship inside the Showboat Casino-Hotel.

Dressed in black leather and high-heeled stiletto shoes, they gyrate to the music of Metallica, Aerosmith, Lenny Kravitz, Bon Jovi and Motley Crue in their 75 minutes on stage. The women show off their flexibility on a stripper pole, and one scene ends up with two women in a bathtub.

The show is sexy — but not too sexy.

Nudity is banned in the city’s casino hotels. But as Atlantic City casinos face increasing competition from casinos in nearby states, casino executives here are falling back on one classic marketing axiom: Sex sells.

Click here for a photo gallery of some of the risqué entertainment.

Dancers promoted as “tempting, tantalizing & talented,” are part of the advertisement for Back Stage, a new House of Blues-themed gaming area, also in the Showboat. The Vixens perform for

free every Saturday and Sunday in The Mountain Bar at the Wild Wild West Casino at Bally's Atlantic City, while the Rhumba Girls entertain for free on Fridays and Saturdays at the Tropicana Casino and Resort.

The (Almost) Angels at the Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort wear some of the traditional burlesque costumes: corsets, feather boas and thigh-high boots.

Whenever the (Almost) Angels singing and dancing troupe are on stage, they pull people into their performance space, the Ego Bar & Lounge, said Steve Gietka, vice president of entertainment, Trump Entertainment Resorts.

“The blackjack tables in the room are very popular and are definitely revenue producers. It pulls in our customers looking for a high-energy environment where they can gamble, party and enjoy all the eye candy,” Gietka said.

Atlantic City has taken a page out of Las Vegas' playbook, said analyst Cory H. Morowitz, chairman of Morowitz Gaming Advisors LLC of Galloway Township.

“They (Las Vegas) brought in the famous ‘What happens in Vegas’ campaign, and they thrived by understanding what it was, and I think Atlantic City is trying to accomplish something similar to that,” Morowitz said. “I don't know if Atlantic City can compete with Ocean City to be a family resort, so I think it's probably a smart move by Atlantic City to carve out something different on the Eastern Seaboard that you can't get anywhere else.”

Nudity or not?

As the operators in town continue to focus on the cash customer and the 21- to 50-year-old demographic, entertainment options may change, but it doesn't mean nudity is coming, Gietka said.

“Topless and nudity are strictly prohibited in the (state) regulations. I don't think any operator currently feels that the demand for it warrants the effort to attempt to change the regulations,” Gietka said.

While casino execs don't want to be seen as pushing to bring nudity to Atlantic City shows, some in the business say now is the time to think about changing the rules that keep Atlantic City productions from totally emulating their sexy counterparts in Las Vegas.

“I just think it's something that should be looked at. We're not Vegas, but we are a helluva lot closer to Vegas than any place else, and we should be the Vegas of the East Coast. I think that should be embraced in the state level,” said Dan Mulhern, the producer and manager of (Almost) Angels.

Mulhern has been putting shows into the casinos here since the early 1990s. He says that while adding nudity to casino shows won't cure all of Atlantic City's economic ills, it will give it an edge in an increasingly competitive gaming market.

"I think that it's something no one else can offer. Is it going to be the end all, be all, to Atlantic City? No," he said.

At least seven shows now playing in Vegas feature nudity. These include "Zumanity" by Cirque du Soleil at the New York New York Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, "Crazy Girls" at the Riviera Hotel & Casino Las Vegas, "Crazy Horse Paris" at the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino, "Fantasy" at the Luxor Hotel and Casino and "Bite," touted as a topless vampire and classic rock show at the Stratosphere Las Vegas Hotel & Casino.

"I think it's always just kind of been accepted. Vegas is unique, unlike any other place via the gaming demographic, the desert, the lifestyle, the 24-hours-a-day, anything-you-want mentality. I don't think it was that hard of a challenge to make the toplessness fall into line with that," said Chris Townsend, the Stratosphere's entertainment manager.

It was exactly that anything-you-want mentality that New Jersey legislators wanted to avoid when legalizing gambling in this state in 1976, said David G. Schwartz, director of the Center for Gaming Research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

"Originally, they were very much interested in making it the non-Vegas, and I think part of that was the topless entertainment. They wanted more of a Monte Carlo (experience), more refined gambling. They thought it would be a better reputation for the state, and they thought it would be a way to differentiate from Vegas," said Schwartz, 37, who from birth until 2001 lived in Ventnor. His late father, Sonny, was a longtime Press of Atlantic City columnist.

Unseemly in N.J.

"It was a moral thing. ... Certain legislators felt it would be unseemly to have topless girls performing. They were opposed to that," said H. Steven Norton, who was the executive vice president of Resorts International when it opened 32 years ago. Norton now lives in Illinois and works as a gaming consultant.

An early version of a campaign brochure from 1976 assured the skeptical that "comparisons with Las Vegas are misleading. In Atlantic City, the atmosphere will be very different, with Continental-style casinos patterned after those in Monte Carlo and the Caribbean."

Historically, Atlantic City casino operators have been ambivalent about pushing the envelope with shows.

Mulhern's company had talked about bringing the Las Vegas topless show "Splash" into the city, where the women would have worn pasties, but it never happened.

"I put numerous proposals together where the hotel says, 'I want to do a show that's a little bit edgier, something that might be a little bit late-night-oriented,' but I can tell you that the shows that we put together when requested for some kind of proposal on that level ultimately didn't get approved," Mulhern said.

Changing tastes

In 1989 and 1990, Neil Cirucci, of Neil Cirucci Public Relations, based in Ventnor, staged the Platinum G-String Awards Go-Go Pageant in Atlantic City. While the shows featured no nudity, casinos balked at hosting the event because it was to be staged the night before the Miss America Pageant, said Cirucci, 62.

The opening of the Borgata Hotel Casino and Spa, which attracted a younger demographic, also changed attitudes toward selling sexiness in Atlantic City, Cirucci said.

"If the Borgata was in existence in 1989 ... I would have had the Platinum G-String Awards in a casino," said Cirucci, who is the manager and publicist for model and actress Cindy Margolis and deals with casinos here and in Las Vegas. "At the Taj Mahal, (Almost) Angels, I think, is like a Vegas-type move. That's a huge move that Steve Gietka pulled off there, trying to be more like Vegas. Even though it's not nudity, it's a sexy, happening, now show."

So what would it take to bring topless, or nude, showgirls to Atlantic City?

In order to alter a Casino Control Commission regulation, a petition must be submitted seeking to amend the administrative procedures act. The desired change would have to be spelled out, and the commission would consider it, said Daniel Heneghan, the commission's public information officer. The commission also can initiate the process internally, and a majority of the five commissioners can pass a rule change, Heneghan said.

The current regulations prohibit topless shows and nudity in casino productions. The regulations would have to be changed to allow it.

Changing regulations with regard to nudity and toplessness has not come up during the last eight years, said Linda Kassekert, the commission chair who has served since 2002.

"It's something we would have to look at very, very carefully. Las Vegas and Atlantic City, we sort of all go back and forth. Are we a family resort? Are we not a family resort? Are those kinds of things appropriate? I think we would really have to look at the nature of the show. I'm not sure where I would stand on it as a woman anyway," Kassekert said.

Will nudity bring customers?

If Atlantic City casinos were allowed to add a little nudity to shows, it's not clear that it would bring in more customers.

David Johnson, 34, of Staten Island, took in the "X Burlesque" show with his girlfriend while spending a weekend here. The lack of nudity didn't detract from the show, Johnson said.

"It was interesting. They put on a good show. The dancing was well-choreographed," said Johnson, who added that taped "Xs" on the performer's breasts were no different than if the women had been wearing pasties. "I prefer a topless show. For 'X Burlesque,' it didn't make a difference. It's still definitely a good show."

Along with "X Burlesque," the (Almost) Angels performances rank among the sexiest now in Atlantic City.

(Almost) Angels perform Thursdays through Sundays in the Ego Bar & Lounge. The (Almost) Angels sing and dance while wearing short shorts or Daisy Duke shorts, lingerie, garter belts, thigh-high stockings and form-fitting bras or bikini tops.

While the costumes are sexy, they cover more than you would see on a beach in the city.

That suits lead vocalist Gina Cannuscio, who grew up in Egg Harbor Township, just fine.

"I'm kind of old-fashioned, to leave a little bit of mystery is a good thing. As a performer, I never wanted to do a topless show. When you are dancing, things move, and they bounce. I don't think that's really flattering. It's more distracting. You can't watch the show and appreciate the dancing. When you go to a (topless) show in Vegas, you are just there for the boobs. ... If you want to see boobs, you go to the strip club," said Cannuscio, who is not a supporter of allowing more skin in casino shows.

"I'm glad they don't have that in A.C. ... I love our show because we can still be sexy, but a little is left to the imagination," she said.

Contact Vincent Jackson:

609-272-7202

VJackson@pressofac.com

© 1970-2010 Press of Atlantic City Media Group