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Steamy, ribald
ROUGE rises to
the occasion for
adult audiences

By **Matt Kelemen**

Expectations will be high for a show that bills itself as "the sexiest show in Vegas" as **ROUGE** does. The nightly neo-burlesque show does not disappoint, with a wink and a 20-member cast of really, really, good-looking performers whose costume changes sometimes leave them exposed during their steamy, sensual acts.

Sexualized skits alternate with acrobatic feats and choreography as Dr. Libido, a self-proclaimed "surgeon of sex" dressed in steampunk finery and a white top hat, plays the master of ceremonies for the proceedings.

BEYOND

Burlesque

ROUGE

An Enticing Exploration of Sexuality



The good doctor, assisted by buxom Nurse Naughty, seems to have an accent with a New Orleans twang. That and an early sketch set in 18th-century France are aspects of the show most directly tied to its title. That is, the French word for "red" lends itself well to presenting Parisian-style entertainment or Crescent City ribaldry, but **ROUGE** expands beyond being a modern version of *Folies Bergère*.

That long-running show at the Tropicana tried to revise its formulas of showgirls mixed with musical numbers unsuccessfully before closing in 2009. It really needed a complete overhaul to reach the level that **ROUGE** occupies now. One key element that makes **ROUGE** click with audiences is the breaking of the barrier between the stage and showroom. Performers with a flair for bondage fashion engage in a different kind of immersion before the show, with some pairing up on platforms for erotic entanglements and others mingling with guests.

Sometimes they get very close, but like most of their professional peers, **ROUGE** cast members are good at reading the crowd for those who might be amenable to a close encounter. The same applies to Dr. Libido, who chooses a few audience members to flirt with and lightly embarrass throughout the show. There are participation segments once the crowd is warmed up from all the heat coming from the stage.

The action is augmented by large video screens at the side of the stage that provide close-ups of the gorgeous cast members. Strap acts have been done before, but never in a tantalizing tandem that ends with both performers forming a star with their bodies. "Light My Fire" kicks off a soundtrack that includes Nina Simone's version of "I Put a Spell on You," which captures the sophisticated spirit **ROUGE** exudes throughout the various acts of acrobatic strength and gravity-defying choreography.

There are beautiful bodies everywhere. There are transfixing acts such as a siren splashing in an oversized martini glass, hand balancers and full-cast dance routines. And there are costumes, some of which leave little to the imagination, others that evoke laughter.

ROUGE creator Hanooh Rosènn combined his experience developing previous productions *Extravaganza* and *WOW—The Vegas Spectacular* with "sexpertise" to evolve a concept of risqué variety show as adult playground, the foundation for what could indeed be the sexiest show in Vegas. How successful that realized vision turned out is a matter for the eyes of the beholders.



Photos courtesy of **ROUGE**

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