

Burlesque recaptures little more than nostalgia

By ETHEL SIMMONS

If this was burlesque, we haven't missed much. Onetime stripper Ann Corio has brought her show "This Was Burlesque" to the Birmingham Theatre for a six-day stay through Saturday. The show opened Monday night to an unimpressed house.

The show is touted as the all-new 1978 version of "This Was Burlesque," which Ms. Corio has been starring in since 1962.

Besides Ms. Corio's modest striptease, there are a couple of other strippers in the show. And one (Luna) takes it all off, except for a G-string, while swallowing fire. The other stripper, a sultry blonde (Phoenix Flame), twirled her tassels and all.

Vying with the blonde for best of show was comic Jerry Lester, who achieved fame in the early days of TV as host of the late-night live "Broadway Open House." In a shoulder-length brown curly wig, Lester managed to be raunchy and funny as he stripped to a few false bare essentials.

MS. CORIO is still a stunning woman, with a pretty face, red tresses and a knock-out figure. Her plunging necklines were revealed in a constant change of costume, as Ms. Corio narrated the nostalgic history of burlesque.

Her strip came at the end of the show, when she recreated her famous routine from the 1930s. Dressed in pink crinolines, she teasingly talked to the

Review

strains of "A Pretty Girl." Then she removed a few garments to appear fleetingly in a sheer top and bottom. "I'll catch cold," she said, donning a flowing pink ruffled capelet.

Five top bananas, or burlesque comics, appeared in the show. They were better than their material permitted. The skits were incredibly bad, it seemed to me, and one with kids in a schoolroom and Ms. Corio as teacher had humor that would appeal only to an adult with a 12-year-old mentality.

Most of the comics were of the baggy-pants variety, and Maxie Furman knew how to deliver a line, if not how to choose one. A routine where he kept taking his pants off had him going down into the audience and clowning with a woman in the front row.

"You weren't embarrassed by 'Deep Throat' were you?" he queried after she put her purse over her face to avoid him. Everyone in the front row was generally good-natured about the frequent audience participation, however, including this same woman.

HER ESCORT was a constant target for joking by the Burley Cuties, six lively showgirls in the cast. (Two couples escaped the share-the-fun routine when, before the show, they protested being seated in the front row, and got other seats.)

Those of us who have not been to burlesque shows before discovered that most of the jokes were, as expected, about sex. But it was dis-

appointing to find this "musical satire" more corny than raucy. The constant references to the same old thing was boring.

Besides the free Birmingham Theatre program, which tells a little about burlesque, an interesting souvenir program offering "A Pictorial His-

tory of Burlesque" by Ann Corio was on sale for \$2. The candy butcher (Josip Eli) promoted this before the intermission break.

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