

Burlesque performers  
Keri Burneston and  
Adam Krandle as  
Trixie Little and the  
Evil Hate Monkey.

# Tricks of the trade

At a neo-burlesque workshop, women learn  
how to take it off ... with style. By Lisa Simeone

PHOTOGRAPHED BY DON SPIRO

Five, six, seven, eight! March! Arms up! Jiggle! Paddy Wagon! Sleepy Time! Twinkle Fingers-Hair Flick-Hair Flick-Smoothie Time!

Wearing a quasi-military uniform that includes pedal-pushers, fishnet stockings and black pumps, the preternaturally beautiful Keri Burneston, aka Trixie Little, is leading the 12 members of her burlesque workshop through a routine in an unheated third-floor studio on North Avenue. Dressed in an array of clothing styles, from tights to sweat pants to short shorts to tank tops, and ranging in age from 17 to 50, the women step, prance, twirl and shimmy to "Night Train" by Alvin Roy.

With a spill of hair so thick and gleaming you'd swear it's a wig, and huge glitter-lined eyes, Burneston is one-half of the Baltimore-based neo-burlesque duo Trixie Little and the Evil Hate Monkey (aka Adam Krandle). Performing at the Creative Alliance in Baltimore and the Palace of Wonders in D.C., Burneston and Krandle are part of a nationwide resurgence of interest in good old-fashioned burlesque. Characterized by sequins, feathers, an abundance of camp, vaudeville and just plain fun, the burlesque of today is closer to your grandmother's version of risqué entertainment than to the in-your-face, leave-nothing-to-the-imagination routines found in modern strip clubs. As Donna, one of the participants in the workshop, puts it, "This is so much better than pole dancing."

Burneston's interest in burlesque grew out of her role as co-founder of Fluid Movement, the Baltimore-based performance group that takes ordinary people from all over the city and puts them together in choreographed musical extravaganzas. After several years of success with Fluid Movement, Burneston, 32, was looking to do something just as creative but more personal. And racier. She took lessons in trapeze and acrobatics, blended these skills with a passion for costumes, staging, lighting and retro glamour, and the character Trixie Little was born.

"My thing is 'cute,'" says Burneston, who, along with Krandle, won the trophy for Best Burlesque Duo of 2006 at the annual Exotic World convention in Las Vegas. "What's wrong with cute? Did cute ever hurt anybody? There should be more cute in the world. But everything today is sort of vulgar."

As the rehearsal progresses, Burneston introduces one teasing move after another—a flirtatious glance, a butt-cheek cradle, a wiggle—all tinged with eroticism but nonetheless PG-rated. When she introduces the Booty Shake and instructs the group on how to get the most out of it—"tighten your upper arms, so only your butt jiggles"—Katie Gray, a corporate trainer by day, exclaims, "I've been trying to figure out how to do that at home. Now I understand."

After an hour, the participants have worked up a sweat and take a break. One sports black tights, stilettos and a gold lamé bikini top—this is Erika, a man in drag. She produces a flask of whiskey and offers it to the group. Donna takes a swig.

The workshop regroups to do a few more run-throughs, culminating in the stripping-off of gloves à la Rita Hayworth in the movie "Gilda." Burneston demonstrates proper technique: "Do the business of the fingers first. The more you spread your fingers the more control you have. And you have time. Listen to the music. Time the final takeoff to the music." When it's time for each member to take off her top, some opt to wear pasties; others do not.

The final 30 minutes of the workshop is devoted to a discussion of pasties—how to make them, how to wear them, which fringe flows most freely. Burneston is clearly the Martha Stewart of pasties. "I'm good with a glue gun," she says, pulling out a dazzling dozen of her creations: red-sequined discs for Valentine's Day, pink petals with red glitter and white fringe, magenta cones with white pearls in concentric circles, black marabou feathers with silver stars.

"Size is an aesthetic choice," says Burneston. "At times I like to accentuate that I have small breasts, so I'll use small pasties. Other times I want to make a point." So to speak.

At the end of the workshop, Burneston sends off the group with a burlesque mantra: "The four Cs: choreography, character, costuming and charisma," she says. "That's what it's all about." □

**For information on workshops and shows, visit [www.trixielittle.com](http://www.trixielittle.com).**

*Lisa Simeone is the host of "NPR World of Opera" and the documentary series "Soundprint."*

