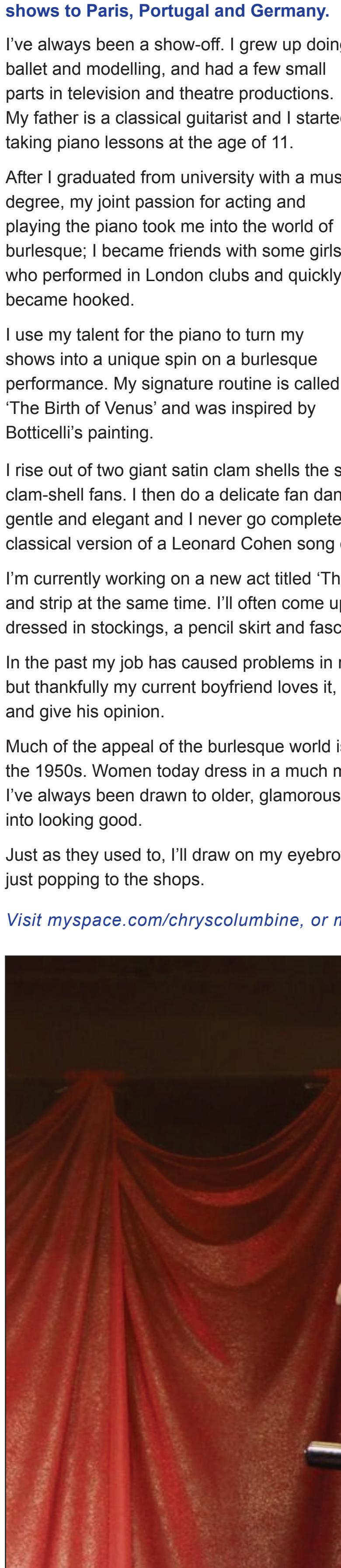


Get ready for high tease with the new queens of burlesque

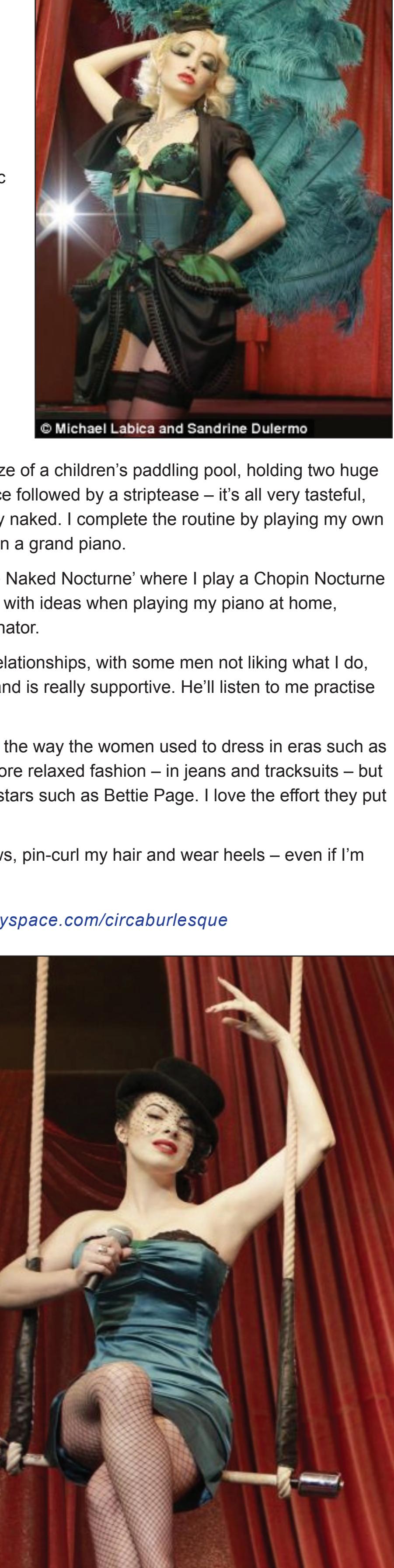
A new generation of glamorous burlesque artistes is packing out theatres with an uplifting – and sometimes shocking – mix of circus, striptease, song and sparkle. YOU twirls some tassels with the showgirls

By JO UPCRAFT



© Michael Labica and Sandrine Dulerme

Camille O'Sullivan



© Michael Labica and Sandrine Dulerme

Chrys Columbine

Chrys, 27, from Camden, North London, performs her sultry combination of burlesque and classical piano on a regular basis in London and has travelled with shows to Paris, Portugal and Germany.

I've always been a show-off. I grew up doing ballet and modelling, and had a few small parts in television and theatre productions. My father is a classical guitarist and I started taking piano lessons at the age of 11.

After I graduated from university with a music degree, my joint passion for acting and playing the piano took me into the world of burlesque; I became friends with some girls who performed in London clubs and quickly became hooked.

I use my talent for the piano to turn my shows into a unique spin on a burlesque performance. My signature routine is called 'The Birth of Venus' and was inspired by Botticelli's painting.

I rise out of two giant satin clam shells the size of a children's paddling pool, holding two huge clam-shell fans. I then do a delicate fan dance followed by a striptease – it's all very tasteful, gentle and elegant and I never go completely naked. I complete the routine by playing my own classical version of a Leonard Cohen song on a grand piano.

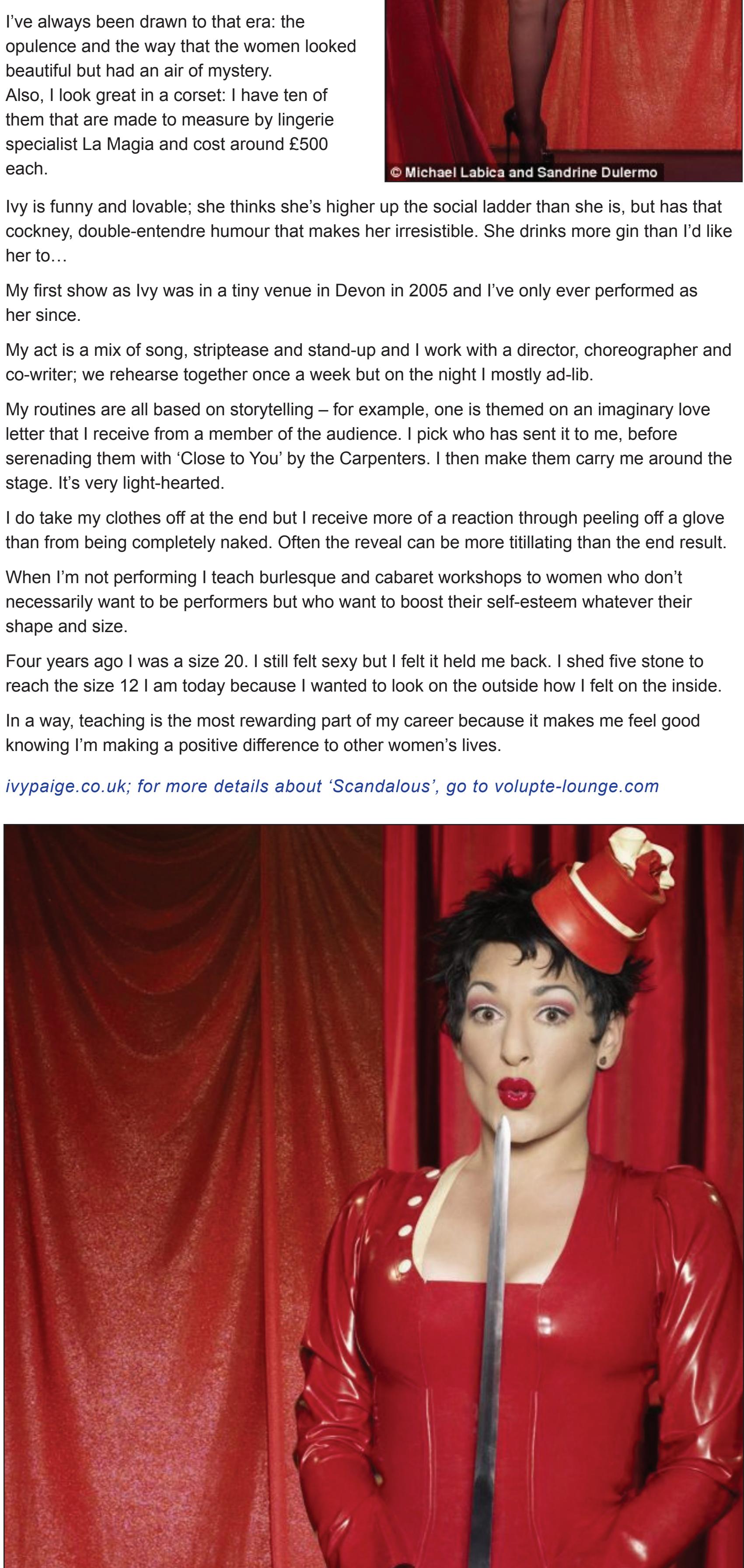
I'm currently working on a new act titled 'The Naked Nocturne' where I play a Chopin Nocturne and strip at the same time. I'll often come up with ideas when playing my piano at home, dressed in stockings, a pencil skirt and fascinator.

In the past my job has caused problems in relationships, with some men not liking what I do, but thankfully my current boyfriend loves it, and is really supportive. He'll listen to me practise and give his opinion.

Much of the appeal of the burlesque world is the way the women used to dress in eras such as the 1950s. Women today dress in a much more relaxed fashion – in jeans and tracksuits – but I've always been drawn to older, glamorous stars such as Bettie Page. I love the effort they put into looking good.

Just as they used to, I'll draw on my eyebrows, pin-curl my hair and wear heels – even if I'm just popping to the shops.

Visit myspace.com/chryscolumbine, or myspace.com/circaburlesque



© Michael Labica and Sandrine Dulerme

Ivy Paige

Singer Camille, 34, grew up in Dublin with an Irish father and French mother. She has been performing around the world in her shows 'La Fille Du Cirque' and 'Dark Angel' since 2004. When not on the road she lives in Dublin.

In 2000 I was working as an architect when a car accident left me with a broken pelvis, hip and hand. It made me question where I was going with my life.

I already sang occasionally in small bars in Dublin, and dreamed of making a full-time career of it. The crash made me think, 'Yes, you are scared but you only have one life. Go for it.'

My shows are an emotional roller coaster. I take songs from the likes of Jacques Brel, Nick Cave and David Bowie and adapt them into my own English and French versions.

Seeing me perform is a very intense experience – the songs evoke all the emotions from euphoria to despair. I often feel sorry for the audience because I put them through so much, so I'll go and climb over them to make them laugh and make sure they're OK.

My first year was hard – no one understood why I didn't sing happy, uplifting Doris Day songs. Britain and Ireland have only recently started to enjoy this type of 1920s German and French traditional cabaret. I think we were scared of what it was about, but now we're more open.

My show is also about style. My mother is French and growing up I was in awe of her glamour – I remember an old Edwardian dress she used to wear, and a Christian Dior mini. I enjoy the idea of expressing your personality through a look and embracing your femininity on stage.

I start a show looking sophisticated in a 1930s dress and pill-box hat but, by the end, I look like I've been dropped off the back of a bus. I purposely make myself look ugly, pulling down my hair, smearing my face with make-up; it's interesting how you can do that but still look sexual.

For the past four years I have toured with the Famous Spiegeltent – a 1920s travelling theatre tent – and I've performed with it in New York, Sydney, London and Edinburgh.

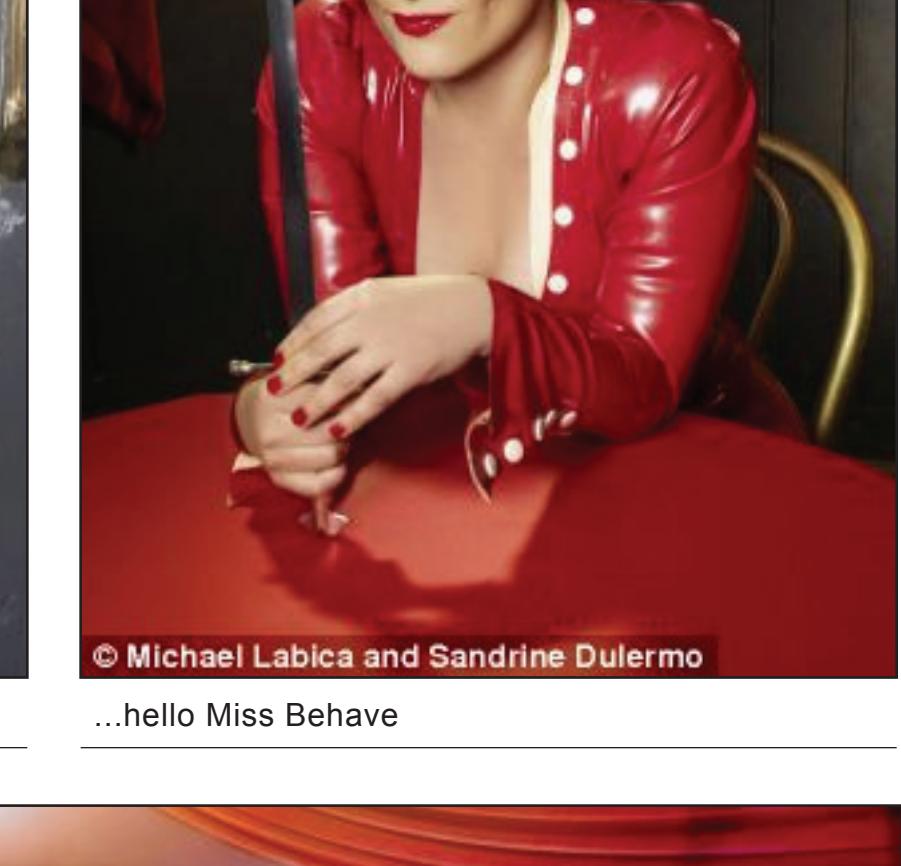
My life is nomadic and I love it, but you get lonely because you're never in one place long enough to form friendships. I joke that I have a man in every port, which I do, but sadly they're all in my band.

For further information, visit camilleosullivan.com



© Michael Labica and Sandrine Dulerme

Camille O'Sullivan



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Chrys Columbine

Roxy, 28, from Hackney, East London, has been performing her trapeze act in a giant birdcage for two years. She has her own monthly show 'Love on the Rox' at Volupté in East London. Her performances have also taken her to Milan, Rome and Norway.

After seven years at Cheltenham Ladies' College I was expected to go to Oxford to read geography. But I had other plans.

A degree in fine art and a year of drama lessons led me towards performing. I blend many styles together: 1920s French and American burlesque and 40s German carnival mixed with traditional circus.

The tiniest things provide me with ideas. My 'China Girl' routine – a striptease on pointes – was inspired by a little porcelain cat in my bedroom.

I also take a lot of ideas from old-fashioned films and base my stage persona on Marilyn Monroe.

I make my own costumes. For a Japanese-themed show I made a kimono and sewed hundreds of fabric butterflies on to it, which took a month.

I'm most famous for my birdcage, which is a freestanding aerial rig, ten feet high by eight feet wide, with a hoop inside for my trapeze work. I perform many shows in it, including 'The Magic Birdcage' in which I swing and strip until I end up in a 30s-style feathered budgie outfit, and 'Snow Queen', in which I swing and strip until I finish hanging upside down.

I studied the trapeze at Circus Space in Northeast London and train every other day at the Hangar in East London – a warehouse full of circus equipment. I have fabulous arm muscles!

I perform my own show night monthly as well as other acts five times a week at clubs in London, and also starred in the video for comedian Al Murray's birthday 'Cops and Robbers'.

There is nothing I'd rather do, except be a weather girl.

A weather girl on a trapeze perhaps...

For further information, visit roxyvelvet.com

© Michael Labica and Sandrine Dulerme

Ivy Paige

Lucinda Ryan, 28, from Kent, has been performing her song, stand-up and strip-tease act as Ivy Paige, stand-up and strip-tease artist at Volupté in the City. She regularly performs around the country and in Europe.

I created the character of Ivy Paige three years ago. I didn't want her to be a sultry 1920s showgirl because that has already been done, so I opted for making her from the 1800s from the likes of Nancy from Oliver!.

I've always been drawn to that era: the opulence and the way that the women looked beautiful but had an air of mystery.

Also, I look great in a corset: I have ten of them! I'm a specialist La Magia and cost around £500 each.

My act is a mix of song, striptease and stand-up and I work with a director, choreographer and co-writer; we rehearse together once a week and on the night I mostly ad-lib.

My routines are all based on storytelling – for example, one is themed on an imaginary love letter that I receive from a member of the audience. I pick who has sent it to me, before serenading them with 'Close to You' by the Carpenters. I then make them carry me around the stage. It's very light-hearted.

I take off my clothes at the end but I receive more of a reaction through peeling off a glove than from being completely naked. Often the reveal can be more titillating than the end result.

My first show as Ivy was in a tiny venue in Devon in 2005 and I've only ever performed as Ivy since.

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