



© Leandro Azzolini



Left to right: Crazy Cat, Emilie Bon Rêve, Lady Roberta Kent © Sabrina Canola

IT'S BURLESQUE TIME! 1ST VENICE BURLESQUE FESTIVAL

by Olivia Rose

Venice has always been a city of seduction, transformation, and theatricality. From the mystery of its masks to the decadence of its carnival and the libertine legend of Casanova, the city has long embraced the allure of disguise and drama. Was it really possible that a place like this, where elegance and history dance together in the alleys and canals, could go without its own burlesque festival?

On Saturday 18 January 2025, that gap was finally filled with the first edition of the Venice Burlesque Festival, held at the charming Teatro A L'Avogaria – a space that has long been at the heart of the city's cultural scene.

This inaugural event brought burlesque into the Venetian spotlight, reaffirming what those close to the artform have long said: burlesque is complex, demanding, and deeply refined.

At the helm of the festival was Crazy Cat – a true Venetian, burlesque performer, show producer, and teacher for over a decade. With her vision and passion, she led the

organisation of the festival as its artistic director. She was supported by the historic *Compagnia de Calza I Antichi*, the cultural association *Arte-Mide* (dedicated to researching and staging women's history), and her own artistic collective *Le Burlescole* by Crazy Cat.

The show, hosted on stage by Crazy Cat and Janette Jolie, was structured as a true competition, culminating in the crowning of the first "Dogaressa" of the Venice Burlesque Festival. This title, echoing the female counterpart to the Doge – the head of state in the Venetian Republic – was awarded to Emilie Bon Rêve.

Second and third places were honoured with titles drawn from the characters of commedia dell'arte. Lady Poopise was named Colombina, while Countess SinAtra was crowned Corallina.

Each performance was evaluated by a jury, while the audience was treated to a show filled with glamour, wit, and theatrical flair.

The event also included awards given by partner festivals. Poppy Lou received direct access to the Vintage Circus & Burlesque competition. Hurricane Irina earned her spot in the Pisa Burlesque Festival. Countess SinAtra, already third-place winner, was awarded twice more – an engagement with the Hurly Burly Show and a special prize from Roberta Pennisi, also known as Lady Roberta Kent, the festival's prestigious guest of honour and an internationally renowned performer. Crazy Cat herself received the Jenny Je Je Corró special body-painting award, while Sea Star was granted a free application to the Taormina Burlesque Festival.

The evening was a vivid showcase of the many faces of burlesque – from comedic timing to poetic sensuality, from historical nods to modern innovation. The audience, diverse and enthusiastic, mirrored the variety on stage, proving that this artform speaks across generations, identities, and styles. The following day, the artists and their sparkling costumes were the protagonists of a photo shoot in the historic center of Venice, on the traditional gondola. What else?

In its debut edition, the Venice Burlesque Festival reminded everyone that burlesque, in its elegance and its theatrical depth, continues to seduce and surprise – and above all, to bring together performers and audiences in a uniquely inclusive celebration of art.

Emilie Bon Rêve © Nino Esposto

