

Operation transformation



So how did Johanna Gohmann's transformation into a burlesque babe take place? First, she enrolled in the Flirting With Burlesque class at the Irish Burlesque School, under the expert tutelage of Lisa Byrne (pictured on the right of Johanna, above left and centre). Lisa danced under the name of Kitty Darling at London's Café de Paris. Then (top right), Johanna turned to Melissa Nelson of

Honey Trap, who gave her a glamorous makeover while Eimaer Geelon worked on her hair. A red-velvet corset, above, completed Johanna's burlesque makeover.

Right: after her makeover, Johanna ditched her denim shorts for a sequined dress and stockings when attending dance classes.

me warmly. She is a striking woman: tall, with ruby lips, and blonde hair that is swept up in a fist-sized curl. She sports a jaunty eye patch, which I at first think is an accessory, but later learn is worn due to a car accident from many years ago. In what appears to be a tongue-in-cheek gesture, she also sells eye patches as costume pieces. "That's why I have my shop, so I can wear my patch without getting any grief!" she laughs.

Melissa ushers me into the make-up room and explains that she wants to give me a very old world-style burlesque look, circa 1930s. She introduces me to Eimaer Geelon, a hair stylist who crafts many of the elaborate coifs seen on *The Tudors*. She immediately attacks my hair with a curling iron and begins coating it in what feels like a tanker of hair spray. While she works away, Melissa closes in on me with an eye pencil and lipstick.

When my make-up and hair are complete, Melissa helps strap me into my ensemble, which feels akin to wearing a bear-trap blouse. With my internal organs now firmly crushed and my head feeling about 20 pounds heavier, I am shown my new look.

Whoa. My hair is very... big. Eimear has turned it into an elaborate twisting sculpture, and it looks almost otherworldly. So much so, I feel a bit like I could do a cameo on *Alien vs. Predator*. But then, I remind myself, this was the style in the 30s. The blowout had yet to be invented.

As for the costume, well, it is impossible not to adore my corset. I can't breathe and I don't fill it out in the slightest, but the red velvet and cinched waist make me feel as if I'm ready to kick the saloon door down and start a ruckus. I feel a bit more madam of the bordello than Gypsy Rose Lee, but no matter, I can now totally see the appeal of glamping it up old style. It feels like an exotic alternative to stomping around in stilettos and a Topshop mini-dress.

Next step: time for a proper burlesque audition. Lisa announces at the end of dance class that there are spots available in an upcoming Karl X Byrne Burlesque & Cabaret and Social Club. The audition will be held in a studio in Temple Bar and we need only show up and perform the same dance we've been learning in class.

On the evening of the audition I'm suffering from a wretched head cold, and it kills any potential butterflies I might have had. I arrive at the studio feeling about as sensual as a bag of wet turf. Lisa is there to lead things, and for the first round it's just myself and two other ladies. Watching at the front of the room is a man in a fedora and topcoat and a woman in a leather pencil skirt and red pompadour. I stumble through the routine in my Lemsip haze, and afterwards we are introduced to the man in the fedora



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appointment for the Full Foxy Makeover, and Melissa kindly offers to fit me out in a costume as well.

When I arrive, I discover the walls of Honey Trap are tastefully lined with an array of satin, velvet and lace corsetry. Melissa greets

>>> Foxy. Moonbottom. The list goes on and on.

I come up with a handful of contenders, and run them by my fiancé: Foxy McGlitterwhip; Ima Imbroglia; Aurora di Silkysmack.

Several weary fiancé sighs later and I have a name: Tayto Galore is born!

The next step in my burlesque-a-thon will be getting the right look, so I head to the Honey Trap Boutique in Dun Laoghaire. Stylist Melissa Nelson opened her shop two years ago, selling corsets, lingerie, elbow gloves, stockings and other saucy accoutrements. She also offers makeovers in her Pout Parlour, which are a big hit with weddings and hen parties, as well as couples who are just looking to kick things up a notch. I make an