

British Theatre Guide

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Burlesque The Musical

Book by Steven Antin based on his screenplay, songs by Christina Aguilera and Sia, new music by Jess Folley and Todrick Hall

Produced by Adam Paulden & Jason Haigh-Ellery, Sue Gilad & Larry Rogowsky, Steven Antin, Clint Culpepper, executive produced by Christina Aguilera

Savoy Theatre

10 July–6 September 2025

Burlesque the Musical is the latest film-to-stage adaptation to arrive in London. Those who don't like the film won't be going to see this show, and those who do need to brace themselves.

I don't have particularly strong views about the 2010 film. It stars Christina Aguilera as resourceful ingénue Ali Rose, who escapes to the big city from small-town Iowa to find a new life as a performer, getting her big break at a New York burlesque club owned by Tess, played by Cher.

After try-outs in [Manchester](#) and Glasgow, *Burlesque the Musical's* latest opening takes place [under something of a cloud](#). It may be that there's no such thing as bad publicity, but there is also no smoke without fire, and a show that replaces key members of its creative team on its way to a West End opening has, at best, some skeletons in the cupboard.

Idiom-overload aside, given the show's short run—it is currently playing a limited season to 6 September but probably hoping for longer—and based on the public's response on the last preview performance, this show could still do as well at London's Savoy Theatre as it did north of the capital, but such popularity will be based on something other than any overarching artistic merit.

The new book by Steven Antin (who wrote the original screenplay) retains some of the film's scenes and dialogue, but disproportionately bigs-up the character of Sean (Stanley Tucci in the film and Todrick Hall on stage), the loyal confidante of the financially troubled Tess.

Hall ad-libbed a joke on Monday night that he carried the show. As principal writer of the additional songs, replacement director, replacement choreographer and in the lead male role, it isn't an unfair précis of the contribution he bears on his Atlas-like shoulders. As purveyor of the biggest charisma on stage, it could even be said that Hall steals the show; he certainly effortlessly steals scenes. Perhaps he feels entitled to do so given his abundant creative investment in the production, and he certainly delivers an extremely entertaining turn.

This does however come at a cost, mostly paid by the downgraded Ali (Aguilera) character played by *X Factor*—*The Band* winner Jess Folley. Folley has a nice singing voice and a powerful set of pipes to wow audiences with her vocal stamina, but she is out of her depth here.

It isn't just the apparent lack of theatre training that works against her; for the stage, Ali has been rewritten as saccharinely cute and with no gumption, so Folley has little to play, plus she is burdened with a terrible second act wig that requires hair-ography and a couple of poorly judged costumes.

The character of Tess has also been whittled down, leaving the strongly sung Orfeh, making her West End début, underused.

On other levels, the show delivers in spades. Amongst the glimpses at burlesque entertainment, there is copious corsetry, feathers and thongs and a good helping of tease. Standing out even from this ably skilled crowd is burlesque performer Jake Dupree as Trey, later Chardonnay, whose eye-poppingly acrobatic strip brings a true thrill.

Dupree's act in this show is welcome testament to burlesque as an ever-evolving art form, itself a stem of Antin's story which has also had other updates, some by necessity but none as successful.

The present version of *Burlesque* won't be to everyone's taste, and personally I lament Antin choosing to water down two strong female characters. It feels oddly regressive and reduces the show to a confection high on spectacle and low on heart.

This review was amended on request on 25 July to update the show's producers and to remove the credit for additional material to the book by Kate Wetherhead.

Reviewer: [Sandra Giorgetti](#)