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MAN ABOUT TOWN

Way more fun than a kick in the head

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First of all, it's very loud. Loud enough to trigger menopause in mice. And the audience has this look, the same facial cha-cha you see in the third period of epic hockey games, when the fans' eyes start to suds up from too much beer.



In this case, it's too much of everything — frilly burlesque, caffeinated comedians, masked wrestlers pinwheeling into the crowd.

"Twisted serendipity" is how one performer describes Lucha VaVoom, an L.A. revue that has to be seen to be disbelieved. "Gloriously unhinged," brags an ad.

Don't want to lose you, so I owe you a sounder explanation of what Lucha VaVoom is, assuming there is one. Well, Lucha VaVoom is traditional Mexican pro wrestling coupled with dance performances in a two-hour show hosted by comedians.

Yet it's more abstract than that — whimsical and subversive. To this day, I don't know if it belongs in a club or a padded cell.

The series of skits and wrestling bouts features slightly plump men

in leotards and the saucy women who stalk them.

The dancers, meanwhile, are like Venn diagrams of what saloon girls used to look like. No, wait, that girl's a dude.

I can see why this show has begun drawing young couples from Pasadena or Mar Vista looking for something more adventurous than the latest Jennifer Aniston dud.

Emcee: Lucha?

Audience: VaVoom!

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Welcome to my new life. My boss has expanded my sphere of nonsense from the home front to just about anything that catches my eye.

So, I'm off in search of new adventures, which brings us downtown. Many of us go downtown only for jury duty — always a joy. But there are other worthy places to noodle around as well.

There's the earthy Grand Central Market or fishy Little Tokyo. In the Arts District, there's one of the best sausage joints of all time, Wurstküche. Down the block, a new Cäjün place.

And tonight — near Staples — I'm here at the Mayan Theater with my buddy T-Bone (probably not his real name). See, deep down I'm really very shallow.

Emcee: Lucha?



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LUCHA VaVOOM has Mexican wrestlers *and* burlesque.

Audience: Va-Vooooooooooooooooooooom!!!

If you haven't heard of it, Lucha VaVoom stages a half-dozen L.A. shows each year. Developed 10 years ago by Liz Fairbairn and Rita D'Albert, its hybrid of *lucha libre* and campy humor is now spreading to Chicago and maybe even Vegas.

"I thought I'd be a millionaire by now," confesses D'Albert, given the way sold-out audiences respond.

But a bid from a comedy channel fell through when the suits from New York didn't get it.

"They just sat there with their

arms folded," moans D'Albert, who sports debutante hair and eyelashes like a garden rake.

No, I'm not sure how this would play in Peoria either, but it's a hoot here, in front of a throbby L.A. crowd of 25-to-55-year-olds.

For such a novel show, it's had a long run.

"It's because the show is really fun, and we pay attention to detail," says D'Albert, who also performs.

What made the creators think wrestling/burlesque might work?

"That moment didn't really happen until the middle of the first show," D'Albert says with a laugh.

"The crowd has changed," says Karis, the girl who's a dude. "Before, it mostly appealed to artists. Then everyone started coming.

"All of a sudden, you get transported into this magical world," says Karis, who goes by just the one name and has been with the show from the start. "It seems complex, but it's really very simple."

Someone told me the crowd would be made up of industry types, but it's more diverse than that. Generally, the young people look like the cast of "How I Met Your Mother." There are older professionals too: lawyers, vampires and other deadbeats, none of whom fold their arms.

That's because Lucha VaVoom has the pacing of a prison break. Before you can process what you see, they're off to the next segment in which *luchadores* (wrestlers) take on ... oh, I don't know what they're taking on. A mini-chicken? A minx/commando named Lux LaCroix?

Next thing you know, two performers are getting legally married right there on stage. It's like a hobbit wedding, but with more alcohol.

I cry a little, because romance does that to tough guys like me.

Mazel tov.

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