

Cabaret

Yes we can CAN!

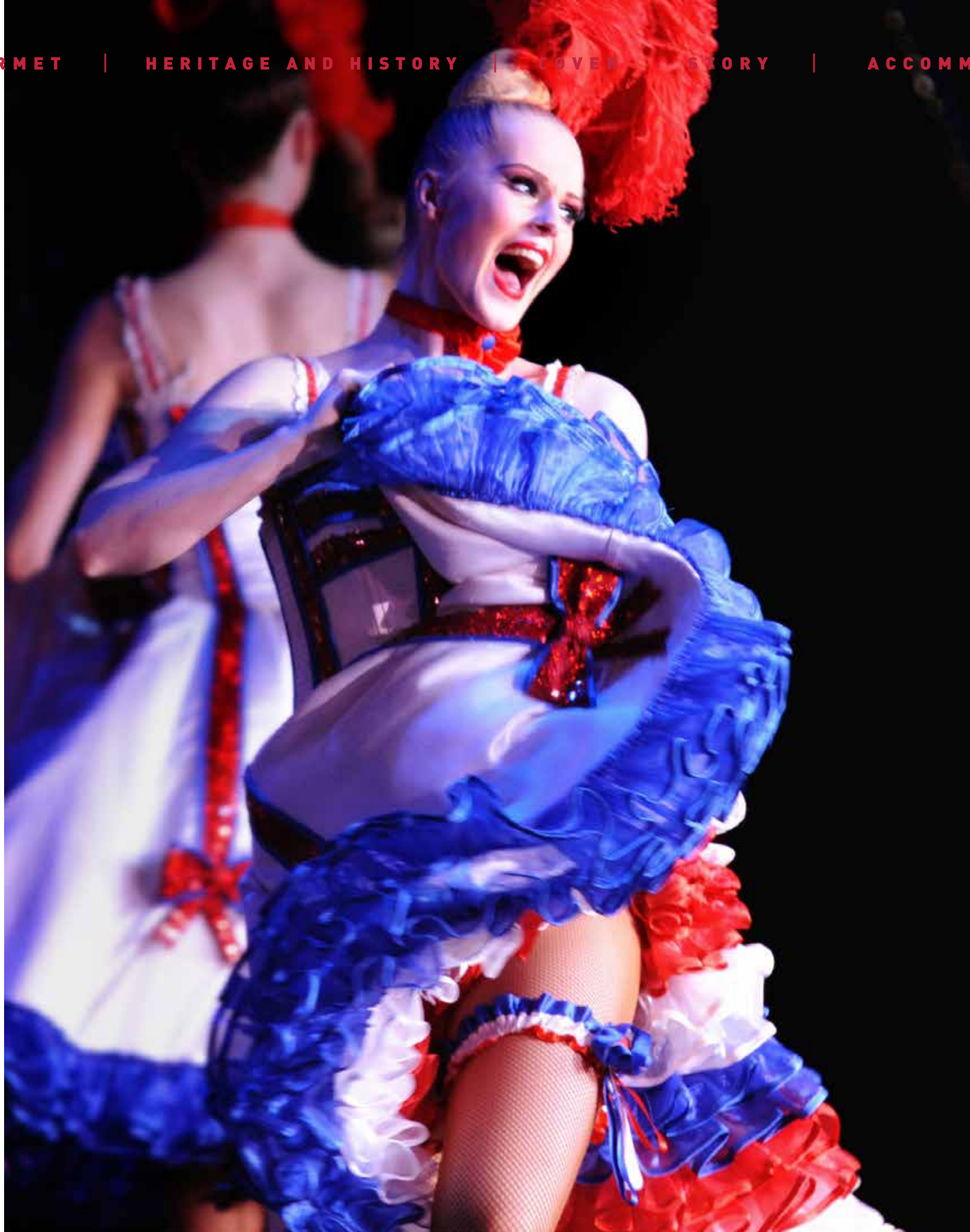
CABARET REMAINS AN IRREFUTABLY FRENCH EXPERIENCE. BUT ARE THE BIG-NAME ESTABLISHMENTS JUST MUSEUMS TO A BYGONE ERA, OR ARE THEY KICKING UP THEIR HEELS TO THE TUNE OF THE TIMES? BY RUBY BOUKABOU

Once a bustling dance hall where bohemians, intellectuals and aristocrats flocked to mingle and see its radical floor show, the cancan, the Moulin Rouge is arguably the most famous cabaret in Paris and the world. Its timeless dinner-and-show revue features a large cast of well-trained, long-legged dancers (many of them Australian), along with magnificent costumes and impressive sets.

Consciously camp choreographies are intertwined with sharp tableaux and modern dance influences, including jazz, hip-hop and oriental dance. The nightly routines are punctuated by dazzling acrobatic displays, circus acts and comedy sketches. It's light, tight entertainment, with the added polish of impressive fashion and modern lighting and stage effects.

At Paris' other famous cabaret, the Lido on the Champs-Élysées, punters can enjoy a mix of French and international cabaret. The renowned Bluebell Girls (and their impossibly high feather headdresses) perform extravagant routines that celebrate the cabaret's classical roots and modern influences, such as music videos, film and fashion.

Lido performances often feature ethnic tributes such as African, Greek or – in the case of the current revue, Bonheur – Indian, so cultural referencing is taken very seriously here. Last year, three Bluebell Girls visited Papua New Guinea to witness male dance performances first hand. But, rather than attempt to wholly export the Papuan dance to France, artistic director Pierre Rambert sought simply



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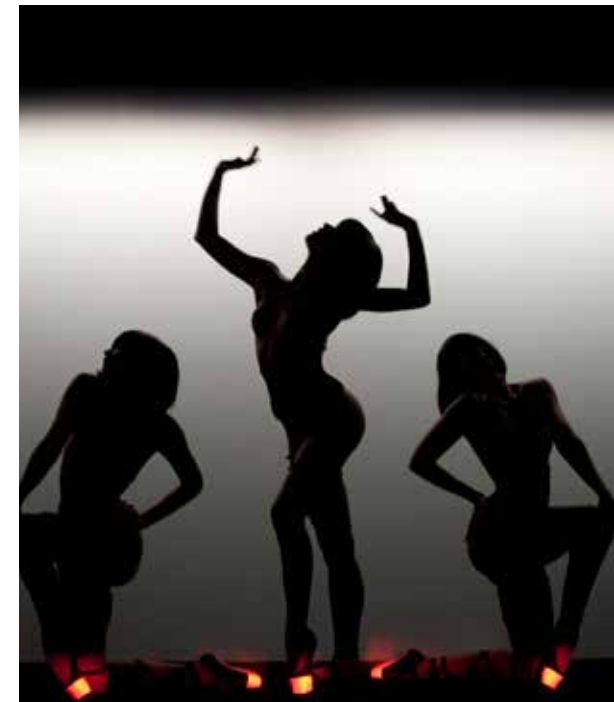
to borrow its spirit. "I wanted to give some kind of patterning and design to the bold and vibrant steps of the male dancers," he says.

Classical influences aside, the French cabaret scene also offers avant-garde and saucy interpretations – especially if we're talking about Crazy Horse. Founded in 1951 by Alain Bernardin, Crazy Horse has hosted specialty acts including burlesque star Dita Von Teese and ex-Riverdancers Suzanne Cleary and Peter Harding of Up & Over It, known for their comic, percussive delirium.

Seeking something more offbeat? Circus-style acts have enjoyed increasing popularity over the last decade, and one venue with a highly original cabaret-meets-circus show is the intimate Zèbre de Belleville. Here, contemporary dance meets the circus against the stylised background of a giant zebra in mid-leap above the stage.

If you prefer a show where you can stay late, dance, and get right among it with the locals, pay a visit to Juliette Dragon's Le Cabaret des Filles de Joie. This collective offers affordable cabaret and new-burlesque shows in various venues across Paris (such as La Bellevilloise in the 20th arrondissement and Le Klub in the first), and runs the Paris Burlesque Festival every October.

If you have the time and the budget, make cabaret the theme of your trip and experience them all. ■



FURTHER INFORMATION

Moulin Rouge
www.moulinrouge.fr
 Lido
www.lido.fr
 Crazy Horse
www.lecrazyhorseparis.com
 Le Zèbre de Belleville
www.lezebre.com
 Le Cabaret des Filles de Joie de Juliette Dragon
www.lebison.com