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Go-Go Gone?

How Putting on Lipstik [Inc.] is Turning on Nightlife

• Writing | Galya Button

It's Saturday night at the Ivy Hotel in Downtown San Diego. Envy nightclub is packed, the line outside is long, and the valet parking ain't cheap — but tonight it's well worth it. If you've been to Envy in recent months, you likely experienced an energy created by a new type of dance group so talented and jaw-dropping that it might leave you wondering if go-go dancers are a dying breed.

Meet Meli Charman and Melanie Blakely — both were regulars in the nightlife scene, having worked with DJhere and danced in numerous nightclubs. Noticing their distinctly different dance style, promoters hired the duo to start the party on the dance floor. Realizing the value of professional dancers in a club versus the traditional go-go dancers, Charman and Blakely started Lipstik Inc. in 2004 to bring together dancers with stellar abilities and turn nightclub dancing into a modern, theatrical show. The troupe is comprised of 15 dancers,

choreographer, photographer, lighting director, hairstylist, makeup artist and costume designer, who holds the keys to a walk-in closet packed with fantasy costumes from places ranging from Frederick's of Hollywood to Flashbacks to Bombay Fashions.

"My vision is to have a different theme every night," says Charman. "Tonight is Greek, last night was flapper. We have done [everything from] Asian to storybook to gothic, California girls, hip-hop ... we have a rockstar theme, we have a little tricycle ... we are really excessive on the props. That's what really makes the show."

Nothing is out of bounds for the dancers. With all the necessities at hand, they rehearse choreographed skits and dances during the week then spend two hours getting ready before the show on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

Now back to Envy: It's 10 minutes to 11 p.m. and the dancers are backstage getting ready

for their performances. The speakers pump club music, a photographer snaps photos of the dancers in costume and the dancers rehearse their moves one last time. For her first appearance, Charman will perform a fire dance. She makes her way to the floor and executes every fire-eating move flawlessly. Every person in the club is watching her.

Throughout the night, the show intensifies. Dressed as Greek goddesses, the girls freestyle to the music as two of them fan their god with large palm leaves, slowly breaking out into a dance best described as an artistic *ménage à trois*. On the stairs, dancers provocatively use the handrails as a prop (it's done so well, it could be a lesson in Kama Sutra). Upstairs at the rooftop lounge Eden, Charman fire dances again, only this time in the pool.

"It's like a sexy, hedonistic playground here," says Tim Thomas, nightclub manager at the Ivy Hotel. "We have these girls who bring that sexy, seductive surprise. That's killer. No one else does that. You have different DJs, you have different types of music, but keeping that energy is something these girls bring to us."

Check out Lipstik Inc. at the Ivy Hotel on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.
619.793.5312 | www.lipstikinc.com