

Blu-Ray Review: Christina Aguilera's 'Burlesque' Lives Up to Bad Reputation

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on March 15, 2011 - 3:50pm

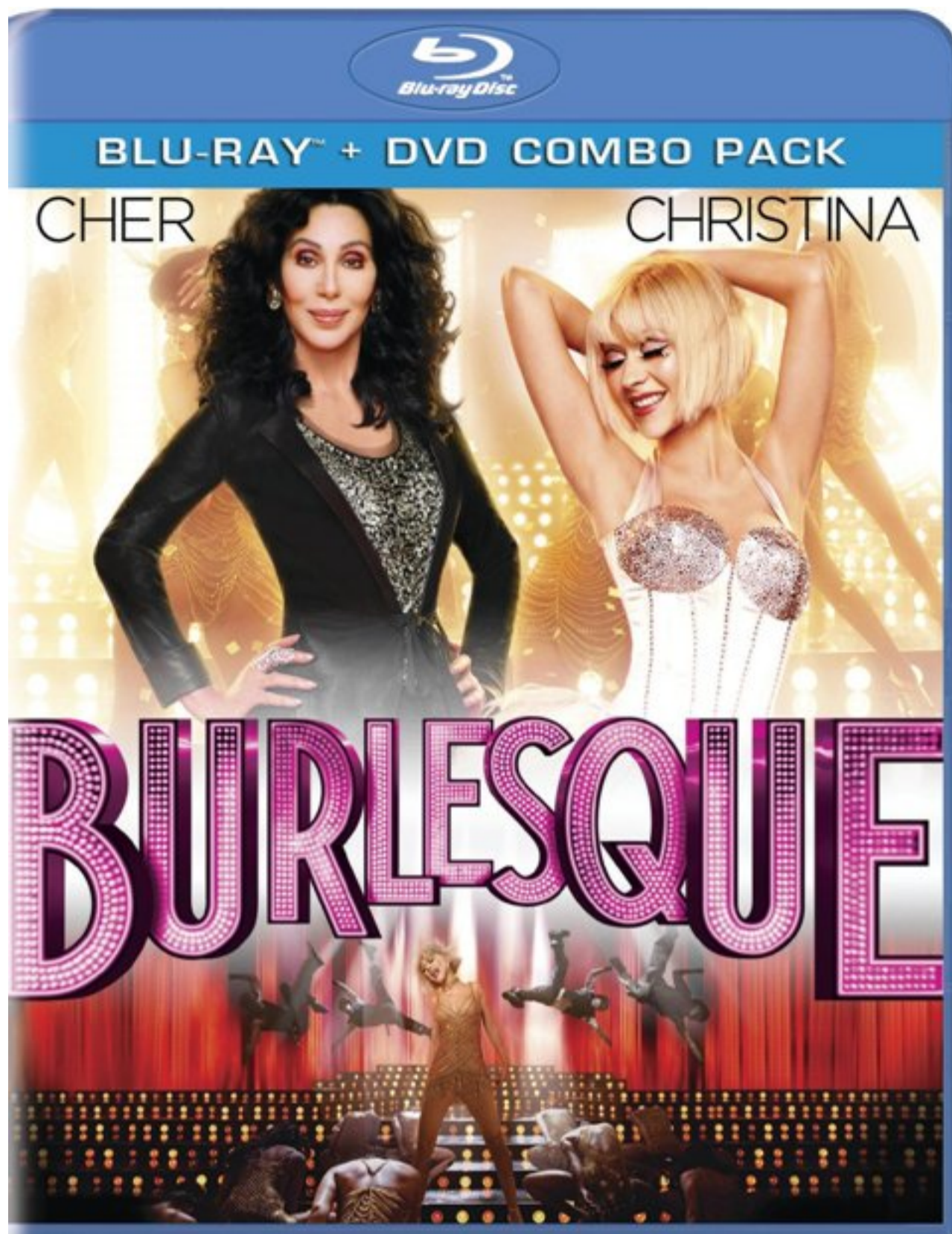
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CHICAGO – If a musical miscalculation as epic in ineptitude as Steve Antin's "Burlesque" is considered eligible for a Best Musical or Comedy Award, then the Golden Globes are officially advised to a.) Retire the outdated category, or b.) Retire the entire hopelessly corrupt awards show. Either decision is guaranteed to prove beneficial in the long run.

"Burlesque" is the sort of turgid pop star vehicle that has its own built-in applause track. Characters repeatedly assure each other of their brilliance while lame gags are rewarded with extreme close-ups of audience members spitting up water into the lens. Every frame reeks of desperation, as glittery divas Cher and Christina Aguilera struggle to solidify their reputations as movie superstars. Yet while Cher has already earned her stripes as a gifted actress, the big-voiced, dead-eyed Aguilera has unwisely chosen this film to make her acting (if you can call it acting) debut.



As small town singer Ali, Aguilera is unconvincing right off the bat, even when she's merely required to walk down the sidewalk while looking for an address. Her mouth hangs open as her fingers point in opposite directions. She makes silent movie acting look subdued by comparison. But hey, at least she has a powerful voice capable of devouring a song like a ravenous grizzly bear. Too bad all the songs in this film are instantly forgettable, while a few numbers rise to the level of apocalyptic badness. The setting is an LA nightclub, the Burlesque Lounge, run by former dancer Tess (Cher), who enters the picture looking like an embalmed Nosferatu. Cher isn't nearly as much of an embarrassment as Aguilera, though it sure would be nice to see her make a facial expression every now and then. Her mouth is eternally frozen in a curt grin, while her face seems to consist of the same material used to make Anjelica Huston's rubber mask in "The Witches." She's followed everywhere by an adoring gay best friend played by everyone's favorite gay best friend, Stanley Tucci. Now that Tucci has portrayed the exact same role opposite both female stars of "Silkwood," I'm already counting the days toward his inevitable "Birdcage" remake with Kurt Russell.



Burlesque was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on March 1, 2011.

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

If you haven't already guessed, the plot follows Ali's transformation into a lounge superstar, after she switches the venue's series of lip-sync routines into live song and dance numbers. The irony here is that Aguilera appears to be lip synching every step of the way, as she belts out a series of indiscernible melodies that are the very definition of movie musical hell. As snooty rival Nikki, Kristen Bell is given the impossible task of passing herself off as a star dancer while lip synching to the grating voice of Megan Mullally. Yet her character is no worse than Ali, an insufferable whiner and self-absorbed opportunist who wouldn't think twice about leaving the lounge for a better gig (of course, the sentimental script has other ideas). Since everyone on the screen is a walking cliché, the film leaves very little room for surprises. The biggest shock comes late in the picture, when Cher finally steps out into broad daylight and doesn't burst into flames.



Christina Aguilera misfires in Steve Antin's Burlesque.
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment

"Burlesque" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.40:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and French audio tracks, and includes a DVD copy of the film. Antin's commentary spends most of the time stating the obvious, while labeling the film as a "pastiche of different types of entertainment" (all of them unwatchable). Editor Virginia Katz was clearly trying to mimic Martin Walsh's Oscar-winning work for "Chicago" by cutting nearly every sequence to the rhythm of the music, resulting in numerous scenes that move too fast for Antin's comments. The writer/director also explains his film's pretentious "Alice in Wonderland" symbolism, typified by Ali's various glances "through the looking glass" of the nightclub mirrors, while Alan Cumming (as the sidelined, Joel Grey-like comic relief) stands in for the Mad Hatter. For the tune "But I'm a Good Girl," Antin rewrote the lyrics to highlight various hot spots in modern day LA (alas, "Empire State of Mind" it is not).

The disc includes six uncut songs, all of which are torturous to view in their entirety. If the uncut versions of Bell's humiliating "Long John Blues" and Cumming's burlesque routine, "Jungle Berlin" were used in the film, it would've easily garnered the R-rating. That begs the question, 'Why did a two-hour, scantily-clad advertisement for gleefully naughty sex, complete with a Cher-launched F-bomb, have to be rated PG-13?' Do parents really feel better about their thirteen-year-old seeing this tacky exercise in vulgarity over the resoundingly tasteful yet inexplicably R-rated "King's Speech"?

Rounding out the extras are a 5-minute blooper reel where Aguilera is seen being repeatedly fed the same line, and an alternate opening that merely switches Ali's first song with the film's initial scene of dialogue. In 33 minutes of back-slapping featurettes, crew members reflect on their efforts to recapture the magic of "Cabaret," while evoking the decadent atmosphere of LA clubs in the '20s. Antin describes burlesques as comedies and parodies of the 18th century that "borrowed and stole" from everyone, while earning the reputation of low rent theatre (sort of like his film). Cher admits that her Golden Globe winning song, "You Haven't See the Last of Me," was the hardest she's ever had to sing, since it forced her to sing three notes higher than usual. Sadly, her efforts were in vain, since the song sounds like nothing more than calculated Oscar bait, with blunt lyrics such as, "Don't Count Me Out Just Yet!" Luckily, the Academy did.

'Burlesque' is released by Sony Pictures Home Entertainment and stars Christina Aguilera, Cher, Stanley Tucci, Cam Gigandet, Kristen Bell, Eric Dane, Peter Gallagher, Julianne Hough and Alan Cumming. It was written and directed by Steve Antin. It was released on March 1, 2011. It is rated PG-13.



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