

## Leon & Eddie's

Leon and Eddie's was on 52nd Street, NYC, back when the block between 5th and 6th was known as Swing Street for its many jazz clubs, and later as Strip Street when the jazz clubs became striptease joints, creating a mecca of burlesque.

Most popular during World War II, Leon & Eddie's (said, but not in the club's signage, with an apostrophe S) was beloved by servicemen. Sailors and soldiers, along with civilians, were invited onstage to play "Booms-A-Daisy" with the chorus girls, butting their hips together for a cheap thrill.

In 1939, *Time* magazine said of the place, "Its ferocious Apache dance is the next thing to murder, but the crowd really goes to hear Proprietor Eddie Davis, whose smutty jokes and songs like Myrtle Isn't Fertile Any More are subtle as a burglar alarm." *LIFE* described the place in 1942, "To the average out-of-towner seeking noisy fun, Leon & Eddie's offers sly ditties, fan dancers, smoky jokes, and a general old-style hot spot atmosphere."

Jerry Lewis recalled: "Leon and Eddie's was a mecca for nightclub comics. Sunday night was Celebrity Night: The fun would start after hours, when anybody in the business might show up and get on to do a piece of their act. You'd see the likes of Milton Berle, Henny Youngman, Danny Kaye. It was magical. I used to go and gawk, like a kid in a candy store."

One of the regular regulars in 1942 was Chinese fan dancer Noel Toy. Said *LIFE*: "Noel Toy provides a traditional dash of nudity to Leon & Eddie's floor show. Miss Toy majored in French in college, never drinks, goes out with New York dramatic critics. She is named Noel because she was born on Christmas." But Sherry Britton was the burlesque queen of the street. Wrote the *Times* in her 2008 obituary, "Sometimes Ms. Britton — at 5 feet 3 inches tall with an 18-inch waist — peeled off chiffon evening gowns to the strains of Tchaikovsky; sometimes she balanced glasses of water on her breasts."



Britton recalled her usual night at Leon & Eddie's: "I used to strip down to an itsy-bitsy G-string and nothing else. Not even pasties. I did this even during the dinner hour when lots of children were in the audience. Please remember that this was March 1941. But my body was so perfect and I did it with such good taste that no one ever thought of complaining--quite the opposite!"

The act didn't last forever. After burlesque, Britton tried singing, but the reviews weren't good. Billboard saw her sing at Leon & Eddie's in 1948 and said, "Sherry Britton is apparently serious about dropping her strip act for singing. The gal looks good... Unfortunately she doesn't have a voice."

Leon & Eddie's didn't last forever, either. Owner Eddie Davis (Leon had gone to Florida) closed it in 1953. L&E manager and bouncer Toots Shor moved his own popular restaurant into the space and ran it until 1971.

By 1977, the space was turned into the New York, New York discotheque, featuring the city's first-ever laser light show. New York magazine said, "this is a place for those who can't or won't cope with a heavy disco scene. (Take your brother-in-law from Miami.)" That club lasted until 1981.

The building was torn down circa 1982, when the Deutsche Bank tower took its place. The glassy tower is known today for its "austere" urban plaza made of granite slabs, a miserably far cry from the "8th wonder of the world" that was Leon & Eddie's. [<http://vanishingnewyork.blogspot.com/2011/01/leon-eddies.html>]



[Sherry Britton]

