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Cabaret

Lyric Theatre, London



First performed on Broadway in 1966, *Cabaret* has seen a swathe of stars grace the stage on both sides of the Atlantic. On Broadway Alan Cumming, Natasha Richardson, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Joely Fisher, Brooke Shields, Molly Ringwald, Teri Hatcher, John Secada and John Stamos have featured over the years; in London, Judi Dench, Peter Land, Wayne Sleep, Alan Cumming, James Dreyfus, Honor Blackman, Sheila Hancock and Kim Medcalf have all already been and gone.

It's the early 1930's in Berlin and Sally Bowles is a 19 year old English girl singing and dancing at the seedy Kit Kat Club. Cliff Bradshaw is an idealistic young American, searching for somewhere or someone to inspire him enough to write a novel.

Sally and Cliff meet and start a relationship, setting up home at Frau Schneider's guesthouse, while around them the Nazis are gaining power within German society. Frau Schneider's relationship with Jewish fruit seller Herr Schultz is in jeopardy as the pressure mounts, and Cliff realises that certain packages he has been transporting to Paris in return for payment make him a part of the problem. When Sally falls pregnant Cliff takes control and insists they leave Berlin, but he underestimates the willpower and independence of the

girl he's grown to love.

Attend a matinee version of this show and enjoy the shocked gasps of the elderly ladies surrounding you. Yes, there's nudity (male and female), dirty jokes, bawdy songs and a chorus line dripping with sex - even the orchestra are decked out in fishnets and garters. In general the costumes are sex shop slutty for the boys and the girls, who all exude an earthy sense of humour. The sets are sparse but cleverly planned; walls on wheels are twizzled round by the characters to show the scene from the opposite end and sliding panels change position to create a different sense of space.

Former Emmerdale regular and EMI recording artist Amy Nuttall gives an incredible performance as the complicated Sally Bowles, with a butter-wouldn't-melt posh girl accent and blazing scarlet pout. Her singing voice has a gritty quality that makes it more interesting than most, and her natural charisma shines out through her animated facial expressions. A cheeky 'Don't Tell Mama' at the start and an utterly unhinged performance of 'Cabaret' at the end of the show display her at her very talented best.

Christopher Akrill (standing in for Julian Clary) is likewise brilliant, bringing a very visceral, sleazy aspect to the character of the Emcee. He's at turns jocular and threatening, echoing the state of Berlin and pulling a real punch when things get serious. Other notable performances come from Angela Richards and Barry James, as Frau Schneider and Herr Shultz. Their gradual love affair plays out adorably and their duet about pineapples, 'It Couldn't Please Me More', is really sweet. Steven Cree is a little hammy as the American, Cliff Bradshaw, but plays up the ignorant innocence of the character well.

Although populated by scantily clad boys and girls, *Cabaret* is a musical of substance and dramatic depth. The seemingly harmless fun and frolics of life at the Kit Kat Club pale in importance as the Nazi rise becomes increasingly more apparent and things turn nasty. The final scene is utterly chilling, with the juxtaposition of the nightclub and a concentration camp an abrupt shock.

As Cliff says so poignantly, "There was a city called Berlin, in a country called Germany. There was a cabaret, and there was a master of ceremonies. It was the end of the world, and I was dancing with Sally Bowles - and we were both fast asleep."

Cast List

Amy Nuttall - Sally Bowles
Christopher Akrill - Emcee
Steven Cree - Cliff Bradshaw
Angela Richards - Frau Schneider
Valerie Cutko - Fraulein Kost
Barry James - Herr Schultz
Michael Beckley - Ernst Ludwig

Directed By
Rufus Norris

Reviewed October 2007 by Laura Kidd