

'Cabaret' Celebrates The Bawdy Beautiful

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By **TRACI HUKILL** Wed, Jul 28, 2010

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Briana Michaud as Sally Bowles and Roddy Kennedy as the Emcee in 'Cabaret.' Photo by Jana Marcus

The audience never stood a chance. From the moment the lights came up on dynamo Roddy Kennedy in the impish, libidinous role of the Emcee, the cast of *Cabaret* was in charge. No provincial musical theater production this, with audience members tensed for blown high notes and lead-footed maneuvers by non-dancers. Cabrillo Stage's latest offering brims with big-city talent—top-notch singing, powerful dancing and strong acting, all marshaled by director Trevor Little into a dark tale about decadence, innocence and escalating racism in 1930s Berlin.

Into the roaring underground Kit Kat Club, where negligee-clad dancing girls in stockings and garters cavort

with omnisexual dancing boys and wealthy patrons, steps callow Pennsylvania native Clifford Bradshaw (Andrew Ceglie), looking very much like fresh meat to bombshell British expatriate Sally Bowles (Briana Michaud), queen of the cabaret. Improbably, the two shack up in the boarding house of the fussy but kind-hearted Fraulein Schneider (Kathryn Adkins), who is being courted by Herr Schultz (Doug Baird), a Jewish widower and fruit vendor. When Cliff's friend Ernst Ludwig (Josiah Frampton) reveals that he's working for an upstart political party with dark views of the Jews, things begin to unravel, first slowly, then with dizzying speed.

The stunning Michaud plays Sally Bowles as a goddess of the burlesque, alternately purring and belting out musical numbers in a huge, gorgeous voice. A powerful dancer, she commands the stage with every number, especially the bittersweet "Cabaret," directed by Little as a devastating preview of Bowles' future as a booze-addled has-been clinging to her love of the spotlight. Michaud owns it outright. "Liza who?" my husband whispered when it was over.

Similarly, Kennedy's Emcee anchors the production with an exceptional combination of athleticism, vocal skill and killingly charismatic stage presence. He darts in and out of scenes, slapping every firm set of buttocks within range and warming the stage with sexy, mischievous energy every time he appears. We are always glad to see him, and his performances of "Willkommen," "Money" and a hilarious bit of dancing in drag make him an easy audience favorite.

Numerous other performances deserve mention. As the older lovebirds Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz, Adkins and Baird are dignified and lovable; I'm sure I wasn't the only one struggling not to blubber during their last tender number together. Ariel Buck's gorgeous crystalline soprano in her small role as Fraulein Kost was, as usual, outstanding. Alexander Faulk's tenor solo as a laborer finding hope ("Tomorrow Belongs to Me") was heart-stoppingly beautiful, and he hit the high B-flat with control and apparent ease. The ensemble's dancing excelled throughout; a special nod goes to Elizabeth Shipton as the surly Helga, Skye Wilson as the ditzzy Fritzie and Emily Zimmerman as the Gorilla for bringing exceptional character to their dancing roles. And Maria Crush's costumes, Jim Culley's luscious set and the excellent band, conducted by Jon Nordgren, brought Berlin to life.

No review of this production would be complete without a mention of director Little's choreography of the last number. For anyone who's ever wondered how the Third Reich could have happened, Little suggests an answer: it happened while good people were sleepwalking.

CABARET runs through Aug. 15 at the Cabrillo Crocker Theater, 6500 Soquel Dr., Aptos. For schedule and

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