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'Cabaret' Captivates

TUESDAY, 27 JULY 2010 12:30 | JENNA BROGAN [A&E - THEATER](#)



Show's actors, ensemble ignite the Cabrillo Stage

When director Trevor Little took on the task of bringing all the glitz, glamour and grime of 1931 Germany to life, he had one choice: go big or go home. Lucky for us, he chose the former. With an awe-inspiring cast of commanding vocalists and dancers, an enveloping storyline that mixes romance, promiscuity, fascism and enough lingerie to make anyone's head spin, Little's rendition of "Cabaret" ends Cabrillo Stage's summer season with a bang.

The Tony-winning musical, which garnered a great deal of attention thanks to the Oscar-winning film version starring Liza Minnelli in the '70s, chronicles love and hope, and the destruction of innocence and ideals in the midst of the rise of the Nazis in Germany. Twenty-five-year-old Aptos High

School graduate Briana Michaud steals the show here as Kit Kat Klub femme fatale Sally Bowles.

During the play's first half, when Michaud's Sally breaks into song with the sinful "Don't Tell Mama"—and later "Mein Herr"—the actress does more than charm the audience. She keeps us invested in the story and its characters all the way to the end.

Michaud certainly stands out, but so do many of her co-stars, for a number of reasons. There's strong chemistry between Cabrillo Stage veteran Kathryn Adkins and Doug Baird who shine as the tragic couple Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz—Schneider's a German boarding house owner; Schultz a Jewish fruit vendor. But their romance, while heartwarming, is doomed, and the actors manage to evoke compassion every step of the way.

Then, there's the looming presence of the Kit Kat Klub Emcee (Roddy Kennedy). With his heavy eyeliner, maniacal laugh and tilted top hat, Kennedy's Emcee is an ominous constant, sometimes lurking in the corners of the stage as the drama unravels. "We have no troubles here! Here life is beautiful," he tells us at the beginning of the show. But it's a metaphor of the times, a haunting reminder that while questionable politics were on the rise, many were asked to look the other way—this is evident in the first act. But Kennedy is a triple threat—actor-singer-dancer. He simply commands the stage.

Andrew Ceglio, who played the Scarecrow in Cabrillo's "Wizard of Oz" last year, rounds out the main cast as Clifford Bradshaw, the American writer who falls for Sally. Together Michaud and Ceglio make a winning and, more importantly, believable team. They croon "Perfectly Marvelous" as their love blooms. Yet later, Cliff sings, "Why Should I Wake Up?" which, again, can be interpreted on a number of levels.

Meanwhile, there are other scantily clad performances, sexual innuendos, bedroom romps and more, thanks to a dynamic ensemble of singers and dancers who are truly on the mark.

Interesting to note: The orchestra, under the direction of Michael McGushin, sits at the back of the stage, where the action mostly shifts between the Kit Kat Klub and Fraulein Schneider's boarding house. Little makes great use of a multi-leveled set and Costume Designer Maria Crush's sequined flapper dresses, floral kimonos and detailed military uniforms effectively capture the era. But it's the score, which builds emotionally as the play evolves, and how well the cast tackles it, that truly impresses. From the buoyant "Two Ladies" to the more foreboding "Tomorrow Belongs to Me," the ensemble is pitch perfect. Little, who also choreographed the numbers here, also offers a slightly different take on the show's signature number, "Cabaret." Here, our Sally is near complete meltdown, desperately trying to bolt from the startling realities of life—and her life circumstances—that she suddenly has to deal with. It's a unique twist and Michaud handles it well without playing it over the top.

Little and crew manage to do something very well with Cabrillo's "Cabaret." Delving into important issues like the influence of politics on relationships, the question of whether ignorance is bliss, and the

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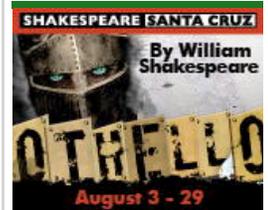
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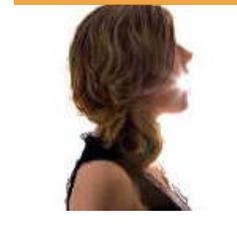
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correlation between religious practice and national allegiance, it is nearly impossible to leave the theater without some self-reflection. An excellent summer surprise, "Cabaret" will leave a lasting impression.

"Cabaret" runs until Aug. 15. For showtimes and more information, visit cabrillostage.com.

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