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Mr. Bengford

Musical Theatre 5

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Cabaret: A Critique

On Friday March third, I had the enjoyment of seeing American Musical Theatre's production of Masteroff, Kander, and Ebb's Cabaret. This production was directed by the talented Bill Berry. This musical is based on John Van Druten's play. The motifs of Cabaret were racism, discrimination, hate, sex, and love. All of these revolved around a care-free lifestyle. The show is set in Weimar, Germany between December 1929 and December 1930. The plot follows an American who comes to Germany for a place to write his novel. He gets wrapped up in the crazy life of the Kit Kat Klub; a cabaret. Cliff, the novelist, falls in love with the club's star – Sally Bowles. The rest of the show follows the progression of their relationship and its eventual tragic end. Just like the end of Cliff and Sally's relationship, the musical ends with a depressing and dramatic ending with the Nazis and hatred toward the Jewish.

The talented Nick Garrison portrayed the extremely strange Emcee. First and foremost, Garrison had the perfect voice for this role. He was clearly audible from the moment he flew in from the "C" to the last line of the show. Throughout all of his songs he kept great tempo and rhythm, especially in the opening number. His character had a heavy German accent which was hard to understand at times, but for the most part was articulate. His interpretation of voice fit the mysterious Emcee perfectly; the audience was always intrigued. Garrison played the Emcee a little flamboyant and very theatrical.

Thus his hands were always moving and he always used his whole body to make gestures (no T-Rex syndrome). The Emcee was portrayed very show business like and was always entertaining, which fit the Emcee excellently. Garrison's emotions were huge. This made it extremely easy for the audience to understand what was going on because his smiles and frowns were huge. His emotions and facial expressions were easily readable. His reactions to others were real and because of this, climaxes were achieved in the play. The Emcee had relations with just about every character in the production. Garrison developed these relationships throughout the show both when he was in the spotlight and in the shadows. This shows that Garrison is a great team player and that he knew all of the correct relationships between characters. His movements were all big enough to understand from the back of the theater and his diction made his oral projection just as impressive. Finally, Garrison portrayed the character of Emcee exactly as I imagined and I do not think that his performance could have been topped.

Tari Kelly's portrayal of Sally Bowles was equally impressive. She had a simply beautiful voice. It carried so much power and emotion and was purely awing. In all of her lines and songs, Kelly had a loud and clear voice. Her character is from England, so she had an English accent which she effectively used throughout the entire show. Her character was provocative and equally mysterious. Kelly portrayed this with her gestures and movement. Kelly also used her business with other characters to help develop her character. Her emotions and reactions to others were true and very dynamic. Her song "Cabaret" was so full of emotion that I do not think I took a breath until the end. Her emotions had such dynamic changes throughout the show that the audience completely believed everything that she said and did. From watching her performance, I can tell that

she is a good team player and has strong relationships with everyone in the cast. Her relationships on stage were extremely true. This made her character even more believable. The final aspect of Kelly's portrayal was her projection. Her oral and physical projection made her character easily understandable. All in all, Tari Kelly's portrayal of the infamous Sally Bowel was a performance I will never forget.

The set of Cabaret was extremely appealing and visually stimulating. The bare light bulbs, mirrors, and lavish colors gave the ambiance of the provocative and suggestive atmosphere. In front of the stage wings, there were gigantic mirrors in abstract shapes that added to the absurdity of the characters and their stories. An amazing part of the set was a hanging cabaret sign – the emcee was flown down in the opening number. The lighting for this production was excellent. The color of the show seemed to be red because it is a very provocative and cabaret-like color. Because of this there were many hues of red used throughout the show. The red tied everything together which helped remind the audience that the emcee was telling them the story of what was happening to the people of this time period. When the scenes changed to take place in the apartment building, the lights changed to more of a bare white color which was perfect because it helped portray that their life outside of night clubs was plain, harsh, full of consequences, and real (not a lavish cabaret production). As said earlier, the color of the show was red. The costumes were no exception. All of the cabaret dancers, men and women, were clad in promiscuous outfits. These costumes were true to the characters, but I do not think they quite fit the period. Costumes of this sort are needed in order to demonstrate to the audience what kind of club they are in. The club's lead singer, Sally Bowles wore flapper dresses which fit both the time period and her character. The makeup for the show was

simple and effective. The showgirls and boys wore heavy eye makeup and rouge, and the other characters wore basic makeup. With all the color on stage, bold makeup was not needed. Finally, the sound and score were extremely powerful and fun which made for an even more enjoyable experience.

Cabaret was one of the most enjoyable shows I have ever seen. It was comedic, tragic, and harsh all at the same time. I think this characteristic makes Cabaret a unique and effective show. It presents incomprehensible ideas in a way that one can digest. Considering the somewhat uncomfortable content of the show (beginnings of the Holocaust), I think that the audience stayed well attentive. The only complaint is that the first act was long. However, I feel that it needed to end with the Hitler speech; it was a powerful ending to act one. As a whole, I loved the show and the way that the actors, sets, lights, costumes, and music created the world of the risqué Kit Kat Klub. In my opinion, this show needs to be performed more frequently, so that audiences everywhere can have the same enjoyable experience while being exposed to the important motifs and themes of Cabaret.