

WEEKender

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The cast of Otterbein College's production of *Cabaret*

Tom Dodge / Dispatch

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April 30, 1997

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

Technology aids Otterbein's 'Cabaret' update

By JULANNE HOHBACH

News & Public Opinion Reporter

Otterbein College theater and music students are hoping a large crowd will come to the *Cabaret* early next month for the school's newest musical production.

Otterbein will present *Cabaret* Thursday through Sunday and May 8-10.

The musical was adapted from several sources, including the play *I Am a Camera*, written by John Van Druten, stories by Christopher Isherwood and a book by Joe Masteroff. Lyrics were written by Fred Ebb and the music was composed by John Kander.

Cabaret begins about 1930 at the Kit Kat Club, a garish Berlin nightclub that serves as the pleasure haunt of the city before Adolf Hitler's reign.

Two main storylines come into play in the production, one a tale of Sally Bowles and Cliff Bradshaw, doomed lovers who, because of the era, are not exactly innocents abroad.

A parallel tale develops of a German landlady and a Jewish shopkeeper whose hopes for a relationship are broken by the encroaching Nazi movement.

"That's the metaphor for some of the more horrible aspects of the Nazi regime,"

said Director Dennis Romer.

Romer said he has tried to make a very bold visual statement in the last scene about how the Nazis take over their world.

But the musical is not just about the Nazi movement.

"There's a lot of humor and a lot of humanity in this piece," Romer said.

The era portrayed was a time of turmoil and hedonism among Germans because of growing uncertainty about the government.

"We try to capture that with the Kit Kat Club," the director said.

"It's a time of a lot of experimentation and people trying to find out who they are."

"I guess the most challenging thing (is) to get the students to believe in the project the way we're doing it and to get them to enter this world."

Aside from Romer, the production will be helmed by musical Director Craig Johnson and Choreographer Stella Hiatt Kane. The trio has worked together on past musicals *Phantom* and *Pippin*.

Romer said Otterbein last produced *Cabaret* in 1975. The piece lent itself well to revival because of a modern technological treatment of lighting and complex sets, including a revolving set and

a hydraulic train, he said.

Thirty-two performers, many portraying multiple roles, and many costume changes for the character of Sally amount to about 150 costumes by costume designer Ruth Boyd.

The production also includes 18-20 orchestra members.

Cabaret will be presented Thursday through Sunday

and May 8-10 in Cowan Hall, 30 S. Grove St. The opening night performance will begin at 7:30 p.m. All other evening shows will begin at 8 p.m. The Sunday matinee will be at 2 p.m.

Tickets are \$14 for Friday and Saturday shows and \$12 for Thursday and Sunday shows. They can be reserved by calling the box office at 823-1109.

ARTS BRIEFS

'Camille Claudel' to be presented

Laudonia Productions in association with Otterbein College will present *Camille Claudel*, a one-woman show exploring the life of the renowned sculptress, at 5:30 p.m. May 8 and 7:30 p.m. May 14 in the Nickelodeon Theatre downtown at the Center of Science and Industry.

Admission is free. Seating will be on a first-come first-serve basis.

A reception will follow the performance.

For more information call Sara Laudonia at 882-2078 or Amy Ellenberger at 823-2730.

Otterbein College to host 'Cabaret'

Otterbein College Theatre and the department of music will present the musical *Cabaret* Thursday through Sunday and May 8-10. The opening night performance begins at 7:30, other evening performances are at 8 and the Sunday matinee is at 2 p.m.

Tickets are \$14 for Friday and Saturday shows, \$12 for Thursday and Sunday shows. For tickets call 823-1109.

GABARET

Love and hate collide in pre-WWII Berlin
with Otterbein Theatre's 500th production

by Aaron Martin and Carrie Troup
STAFF WRITERS

The college departments of theatre, dance and music combined for "Cabaret," Otterbein's 500th performance.

"Cabaret" is a story of love and life in pre-World War II Germany. Anxiety runs high as Adolf Hitler makes his rise to power and the Kit Kat Club provides a haven from the uncertainty.

The story follows the affairs of two couples: an American writer and a German citizen, and a Jewish shopkeeper and a wicked landlady.

"This play has an emotional impact on the audience and they start to follow the characters' journeys," said Heidi Letzmann, who portrays Fraulein Schneider. "Everyone in the cast had to overcome personal challenges of their own and collaborate to put the show together."

Letzmann's character, Schneider, manages the boarding house where the cast of characters are brought together.

"I didn't want her to be an old woman," Letzmann said of her role. "She is vibrant in my mind and I wanted to convey her positively."

In the week preceding the play, Letzmann estimates she spent 30 to 35 hours on the production. She had to speak with a German accent as well as sing in a lower register for the part.

Other actors have seen Otterbein's production of "Cabaret" evolve.

"I've seen 'Cabaret' done different ways and I'm trying to bring energy into my role," junior Emily Cotton said.

Cotton plays nightclub singer Sally Bowles, whom she describes as "a bit naïve, eccentric, impulsive and needy for attention."

"Cabaret" also provides cast and crew with additional challenges in the forms of dance and music.

Eric Dysart, a sophomore musical theatre major, said he has enjoyed this role more than any other at Otterbein. His portrayal of the Emcee is Dysart's first leading role.



"Cabaret" tells the story of the social scene of Germany just before World War II. It follows the lives of two couples who must deal with a changing society. The musical runs tonight through Saturday. All shows begin at 8 p.m. and tickets are free to full time students with I.D.



"My dancing is probably one thing that sticks out about my interpretation," Dysart said.

Stella Kane, dance coordinator, choreographed the show, his sixth Otterbein production.

"Usually the role [of Emcee] is played by a singer," Kane said. "But because Eric is such a wonderful dancer, he adds something exceptional to the character."

Dance adds another dimension to "Cabaret," according to Kane.

"They dance to escape the sense of pain," she said. "The choreography helps the audience experience the thrust of the storyline."

"The music and dancing heighten the emotions of fear and

love," said Craig Johnson, the show's musical director. "It was a very scary time."

"This show was difficult for the orchestra, one of the most difficult of my career," Johnson said.

"The whole piece is politically fascinating," said Dennis Romer, "Cabaret" director. "These are human characters who are getting their lives torn apart by politics."

To Romer, it is interesting "how people can get seduced into something that ends up tearing apart a country."

"We need to keep raising the issues that come up in the play, such as racism and anti-Semitism," Romer said.

The issues brought forth by "Cabaret" will stay with audience

members, according to sophomore Chris Sloan.

"It's not one of the musicals that is superficial," said Sloan, who plays a German sailor and gorilla.

"The audience will not necessarily go away singing songs and being happy—it makes people think," he added.

"Cabaret" continues May 8-10 at 8 p.m. Tickets are free to Otterbein students with an I.D.

Set designers give landmark musical production a lift

by Carrie Troup
ARTS EDITOR

Their work is displayed on stage in Cowan Hall, yet the inventors themselves are never seen.

"Cabaret" would not be the same without the Emcee or Sally Bowles. However, components such as the set and sound play roles just as vital in the production.

The set of "Cabaret" is composed of four main units that are difficult to move around the stage, according to Assistant Technical Director Randy Bosh. A crew of seven, and also cast members, help make changes that require shifting up to three-fourths of the units.

"It was difficult to make the set changes, look smooth and choreographed for the audience," said Bosh, a senior.

New methods of set-changing were created to make things work easier.

Air casters, inflatable wheels attached to each unit, were developed by resident technical director Greg Bell.

In addition, a hydraulic lift was used for the first time in an Otterbein production to move a train on stage. While the lift did not give the crew any difficulty, the air casters either had too much pressure or would deflate, according to Bosh.

Besides construction, research was conducted to add authenticity to "Cabaret."

Assistant Set Designer Jonny Litmar studied social classes and European and Jewish architecture during the 1930s to design the fruit shop set.

"When I first started, things were elaborate," Litmar said, "then I learned that it was the typical 1930s Jewish fruit shop that didn't have a lot of money."

Construction of the set began during spring break and was completed a week before the show opened. The set crew worked until 2 a.m. some days and 12-hour days on the weekends to complete the project.

Based on the needs of "Cabaret's" storyline and set, sound effects were created.

Sounds, such as the conductor's voice combined with the train, were specially mixed for the production. Research of Adolf Hitler's speeches was conducted for specific clips.

"The addition of sound lets our imaginations go further with the show," Assistant Sound Designer Bill Wells said. "It conveys the 'militaristic' mood of the play."

Detail was even attended to in the look of the actors.

Junior Cydney Rooks designed the makeup and hairstyles for "Cabaret."

"The uniformity in the look of the characters stands out from shows I have seen," Rooks said.

"I emphasized bone structure—for example, I wanted Cliff, the American, to be different than the rest of the European characters," Rooks added.

Since it was difficult to find information about German fashion during the 1930s, Rooks researched Hollywood style. According to Rooks, the flapper style with short bob hairstyles was common.

Overall, it takes 20 minutes for each actor to apply their makeup, she said. The four wigs Rooks styled took 15 hours to complete.

"Some are more reluctant than others to experiment," Rooks said, "but it is all about trust and communication."



'Cabaret' continues

Emily Cotton is chanteuse Sally Bowles and Eric Dysart plays the Master of Ceremonies in Otterbein College's production of "Cabaret," which continues this week with shows on Thursday, Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. each evening. Tickets are \$14 for Friday and Saturday shows and \$12 for Thursday. Tickets may be reserved by calling the Otterbein College Theatre box office at 823-1109.

This week in Westerville

5/5/97