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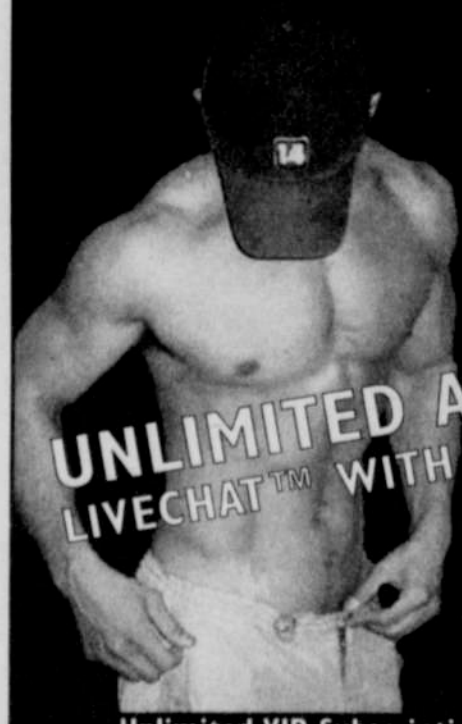
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theater

From Berlin to Broadway

Two gays in two plays face real-life drama
from chance encounters

by Timothy Krause

“Every person is a new door, opening up into other worlds,” realizes an insular character in Profile Theatre’s *Six Degrees of Separation*. Coincidentally across the Willamette, the rouged Emcee of Portland Center Stage’s *Cabaret* bids “Willkommen” to a different world of his own. The former is a play set in 1980s New York City, while the latter is a musical echo of World War II Berlin. Yet for as vastly different as their environs might be, the journeys—each inspired by true stories—are remarkably similar in their search for identity and belonging amid the dichotomy of coincidence and connection, action and inaction.

Based on memoirs of gay author Christopher Isherwood, *Cabaret* is the tumultuous tale of American writer Cliff (played by imported hottie Romain Frugé) crossing paths with nightclub naughty Sally (Storm Large). Sidetracked from writing his novel, Cliff follows Sally deep into the heart of Berlin’s outrageous Kit Kat Klub, a seedy,

sexually ambivalent oasis hosted by a titillating master of ceremonies (Wade McCollum).

On break recently from rehearsing the Act 1 finale, musical director Rick Lewis explains that Portland Center Stage is presenting the tweaked version from the most recent Broadway revival. Left behind are now-tame ’66 morals prevalent when the multiple Tony-winning musical originally opened. Now Cliff—previously only questioning or bi—is sexually open in an era when anything goes, giving fresh turns to numbers such as “Two Ladies...” and “If You Could See Her” while further complicating his leave-her-or-love-her relationship with Sally. The texture of the ominously vaudevillian score, too, has an even stronger European flavor, says the gay maestro. “Not big and glossy Broadway, but high-end kletzmer. *Cabaret* with a ‘K’.”

But even as Lewis joyfully sounds out the Broadway oom-pah that is a signature sound of composer-lyricist team Kander and Ebb (remember *Chicago*?), he turns serious when discussing the production’s relevant reflection on the glory of



A titillating Emcee (Wade McCollum) serves as host of the seedy, sexually ambivalent Kit Kat Klub in *Cabaret*.

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