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Theater BY KAUKAB JHUMRA SMITH

CABARET CONTINUES
 AT VLT THIS WEEKEND.



Review

CLIFF COLES

Willkommen to Berlin

Partying with the Kit Kat Club at VLT.

If there is a star in the Very Little Theatre's production of *Cabaret*, it is Tegue DeLeon as the sexy Emcee. Every inch of DeLeon's sculpted body and shaved head is so carefully controlled that he practically prowls the stage. Whether dressed in sequins, drag, a diaper, or flashing a swastika on his perfectly muscled naked butt, DeLeon commands the space as if it's the most natural thing to do in the world.

Set in Berlin just before the rise of the Nazis, *Cabaret* pairs two very different romances against the backdrop of the glitzy Kit Kat Club and a shabby guesthouse run by Fraulein Schneider (Shaunie Schmoll). The master of ceremonies (DeLeon) weaves through the storyline vaudeville acts demonstrating the growing shadow of the Nazis.

The first unexpected romance blooms between Cliff Bradshaw (Evan Howells), a shy American writer who's in Berlin seeking inspiration for a novel, and Sally Bowles (Liz Kadel), a pouty-lipped British cabaret singer.

After a hesitant beginning, Howells convincingly portrays Cliff's increasing attachment to the flighty Sally and his desperation to keep them together. As Sally, Kadel's British accent tends to come and go, and her airy casualness sometimes leaves one cold. But she springs to life when she begins to sing. She also looks delicious, especially in a slinky red dress during her saucy opening number "Don't Tell Mama." The chemistry between Howells and Kadel feels real, although the emotional conclusion to their relationship is a little flat.

The other romance is the unlikely pairing of Fraulein Schneider, Cliff's middle-aged landlady, and the cuddly Herr Shultz (Bill Furtick), a Jewish fruit shop owner and a tenant. Furtick's sweater-vested appeal and tender pursuit of the lonely Fraulein make him more endearing than a teddy bear. Schmoll and Furtick's scenes together literally tremble with the hope of companionship.

Michael Watkins, who directed and choreographed *Cabaret*, plays the role of Ernst Ludwig, a pleasant businessman who befriends Cliff — and who turns out to be a Nazi. As support for the Nazis spreads and anti-Jewish sentiment grows, Herr Shultz has a brick thrown through his shop window. Relationships begin to sour, and Sally's flip-pant comment, "It's only politics. What's it got to do with us?" rings more and more hollow. Soon it seems everyone, including the dancers at the Kit Kat Club, are snapping the Nazi salute to the chilling anthem, "Tomorrow Belongs To Me."

The Emcee's loving dance with a female gorilla (Riley Pristyk) turns what seems a ludicrous sequence into a statement of despair when he ends, "If you could see her through my eyes, she wouldn't look Jewish at all." Watkins leads *Cabaret* to a restrained, emotional end, the despair of the times perfectly captured in the Emcee's still silhouette and the pile of shoes in the center of the stage.

Written by John Kander and Fred Ebb, *Cabaret* runs at the Very Little Theatre through April 3.

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