

Barrington Stage Company, Pittsfield, MA

Cabaret, Book by Joe Masteroff based on the play I AM A CAMERA by John van Druten

and stories by Christopher Isherwood.

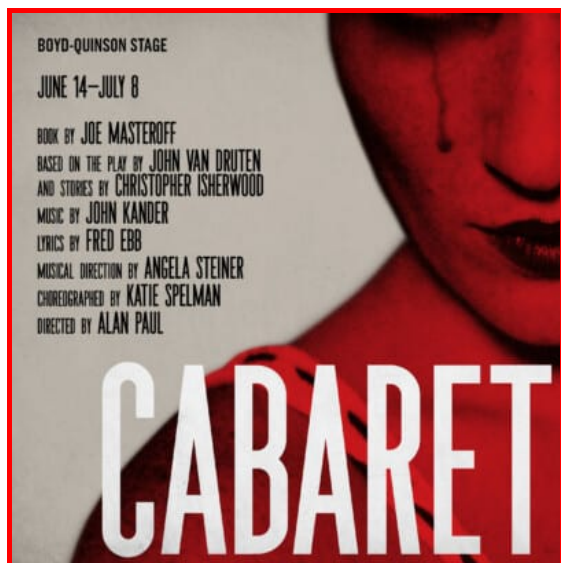
Lyrics by Fred Ebb. Music by John Kander.

Directed by Alan Paul. Choreographed by Katie Spelman .

Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman

“Don’t tell Mama!”

You’ve never seen anything like it! In 1966, age 20, I took my best friend, Susan Bierweiler to see “Cabaret” and fell in love with the most unusual show I’d ever seen (and I’d been seeing shows since 1950’s “Lost in the Stars”). The show was revolutionary touching on political tremors that shook the world of 1929-1930. This musical, produced only twenty years after the end of world war two moved audiences for three years and reintroduced New York audiences to composer Kurt Weill’s widow Lotte Lenya who played Fraulein Schneider, the landlady whose rooms became a staging ground for Clifford Bradshaw (loosely based on author Christopher Isherwood whose stories inspired the show) and Sally Bowles (based on actress Jean Ross who lived in Berlin with Isherwood for a while). In the original John van Druten play, “I Am a Camera” and its film version Sally had been played by Julie Harris who made Sally’s singing ability a limited one, an idea that later involved Jill Haworth in the original production of this musical. That image persisted until the 1972 film version of “Cabaret” when the role was given to Liza Minelli. In the past five years I have seen three regional productions of this show and really had no wish to sit through another one. However, this was different. Director Alan Paul, in his first major production at Barrington Stage Company in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, has taken a major step away from the precedent setting earlier versions to create a whole new vision for the show and in doing so he has brought in an edition of “Cabaret” that felt entirely new, kept me in tears for over an hour (not constant) and forced a new understanding of late Weimar-Age Berlin on me, something I never anticipated or even thought possible. John Kander *MUST* see it.



Sally is played by Krysta Rodriguez. Cliff is played by Dan Amboyer. Fraulein Schneider is played by Candy Buckley. Herr Schultz is played by Richard Kline. Fraulein Kost is played by Alysha Umphress, Ernst by Tom Story. The Emcee is played by Nik Alexander. With the exceptions of Umphress and Kline (featured on the TV show “Three’s Company) I have never heard of any of them but they will stay with me forever; they are all that good in this show.

No matter what anyone else has brought to this edition it is the director’s vision brought to life in an environmental setting that encompasses the entire theater that has made this show a

production and this production into a triumph. Here is a brilliant, creative mind shone through traditions to create something novel and fabulous. To be completely honest this weekend has been an appropriate prologue to “Cabaret.” Michelle Joyner’s visionary presentation of “The Stones” at Great Barrington Public Theater and David Auburn’s “Photograph 51” at Berkshire Theater Group’s Unicorn Theatre seem like great preparations for this musical. Both shows provided new visions of material experienced before in some way, but this one betters them by taking the most familiar work and giving it vital, new life in extraordinary ways.



Nik Alexander and the Kit Kat Klub dancers; Photos: Daniel Rader



Krysta Rodriguez, Dan Amboyer



Candy Buckley,
Richard Kline



Nik Alexander

Wilson Chin is the scenic designer and he has transformed the entire theater into a place we've never seen before and he's done it brilliantly. Rodrigo Muñoz has created the fabulous costumes and the show is lit dramatically and astoundingly by Philip S. Rosenberg. Ken Travis has done a brilliant job with the sound design. Without their work this show might not have the same impact but Paul's direction and vision is what has transformed this show we've grown so used to into the emotional entity we are privileged to have in The Berkshires.

I could go on for hours about this show but here's a much better idea: GO BUY A TICKET OR TWO OR TWELVE, See it soon and see it again if you can. This is definitely that good!

+ 06/18/2023 +

Cabaret plays at Barrington Stage Company's Boyd-Quinson Theater, 30 Union Street, Pittsfield, MA through July 8. For information and tickets go to barringtonstageco.org or call 413-236-8888.