

# UVM stages fabulously rich version of 'Cabaret'

By Brent Hallenbeck  
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The theme of "Cabaret" is one of "live and let live," which is to be expected from a musical dealing with the notoriously debauched world of Berlin as the Nazis were ascending to power.

The message from the musical, however, is more than that world of titillation would suggest. "Cabaret" asks why we can't just live and let live, and why that slogan of ultimate freedom is so hard to make real.

The University of Vermont Department of Theatre opened its fabulously rich version of "Cabaret" Wednesday night at Royall Tyler Theatre (only a few seats are left for the run that goes through Nov. 16). "Cabaret" is that rare musical that leaves you not with a smile on your face but with a punch to your gut. The UVM production entertains, often wildly so, but never

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## Review

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forgets that its main mission is to remind its audience that life might be a cabaret, but it's often a complicated and difficult one.

"Cabaret" centers on Sally Bowles (played by Taryn Noelle), the down-on-

her-luck British singer made famous by Oscar-winner Liza Minnelli in the 1972 Bob Fosse film. She meets up with down-on-his-luck American writer Clifford Bradshaw (Samuel Durant Hunter) who arrives in Berlin looking for inspiration — "It's tawdry and trouble and everybody's having such a great time," he says of the

city — and finds that inspiration in the captivating star of the Kit Kat Club.

Their story intertwines with another tale of love and the obstacles that often stand in its way. The courtship of Clifford's landlady, Fraulein Schneider (Katie Owens) with shopkeeper Herr Schultz (Craig Wells)

drags compared with the more intense story line of Sally and Clifford until the second act. That's when the older couple's lives reveal the deep, dark tunnel Germany is about to go down, a much darker path than the one taken by the creative, decadent denizens of the Kit Kat Club, the ones the rising

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# CABARET: Bright tunes, thought-provoking dialogue

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powers of Germany so despise.

As the tragic figure at the center of "Cabaret," the actress playing Sally Bowles has to be compelling, and Noelle is all that. Vermont music audiences know her voice from her solo singing career as well as appearances with Pine Street Jazz and Rick and the Ramblers. But she also has a magnetic stage presence, one capable of stopping the spotlight in its tracks and holding the focus of each scene she's in.

Noelle gives Sally a sensual aura of danger only a woman in control can convey, yet also leaves her in a state of shoulder-sagging vulnerability. Sally Bowles can be brazen and scared within a matter of seconds, and Noelle takes her there effortlessly.

Matthew Trollinger is phenomenal as the emcee, Joel Grey's Oscar-winning role from the film. He flares electricity every time he's on stage, whether playing up the flirtatious, dirty humor of the Kit Kat Club's acts, dancing comically with an especially hairy female or bringing heavy drama to bear when the realities of the 1930s in Berlin start to hit home.

Edward C. Nagel also turns in an outstanding performance as Ernst Ludwig, Clifford's first friend in Berlin. Nagel makes Ernst sincere and likable in the first act and duplicitous and dangerous in the second act without those opposing characteristics feeling cobbled together. Hunter is at times awkward in his portrayal of the aspiring writer from America but ultimately satisfies as the man who tries to make sense out of the senseless world he has found himself in.

Director Gregory Ramos keeps the production and its various moving parts consistently energized, and his choreography with the talented dancers from the Kit Kat Club is smooth yet sizzling. Costume designer Martin A. Thaler has the often barely clad cast looking appropriately classy-trashy.

"Cabaret" manages to be dark, sinister and thought-provoking while offering bright show-stopping tunes and moments of ribald humor. That's not an easy combination to hold together, but UVM's Department of Theatre pulls it off with style.

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