

CABARET

THE MUSICAL AT THE KIT KAT CLUB

EDUCATION PACK ONE: PRODUCTION OVERVIEW



Pack One: Production Overview

This pack gives you insight into the synopsis and themes of CABARET, and the creative processes of the individuals who created this new production.

It can be enjoyed on its own or read in conjunction with Pack 2.

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SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

“There was a Cabaret, and there was a Master of Ceremonies and there was a city called Berlin in a country called Germany and it was the end of the world...”

The Emcee appears and welcomes the audience to the Kit Kat Club on New Year’s Eve – a place in which we are encouraged to ‘leave our troubles outside’ (*Willkommen*). The world inside the Kit Kat Club brings together a range of members of society, many of whom might not find acceptance outside the club (*Welcome to Berlin*).

In a railway carriage on the way to Berlin, Cliff Bradshaw meets Ernst Ludwig who, by a sleight of hand, avoids the train guard looking too closely in his bags which contain luxury items smuggled from Paris. Ernst tells Cliff about rooms to let with Fraulein Schneider and volunteers to be Cliff’s first English pupil.

Cliff and Fraulein Schneider negotiate the cost of a room in her boarding house. Cliff cannot afford the 100 marks she demands and offers her 50, which she eventually accepts as better than nothing (*So What?*). Fraulein Kost, a sex worker, appears complaining about the lack of hot water and is warned by Schneider about her frequent (and forbidden) guests. Herr Schultz arrives with a bottle of schnapps with which to toast the new year, and Fraulein

Schneider introduces him to her new lodger.

At the Kit Kat Club, Cliff watches Sally Bowles sing her first number of the evening (*Don’t Tell Mama*). Later, she calls Cliff on the club’s telephone which allows guests to communicate with other people in the club. Cliff then takes a second call from Bobby, a man Cliff once met at the Nightingale Bar in London, who invites him to meet him backstage.

Max, one of the owners of the Kit Kat Club fires Sally, telling her it’s time for new talent. Cliff arrives for the drink Sally has promised him. Sally explains her relationship with Max – he’s ‘*just the man (she’s) sleeping with*’. After she leaves, Bobby arrives, with his room mate Victor, and Bobby kisses Cliff.

In a moment of rebellion and assertion, Sally sings one final song at the Kit Kat Club before she loses her job (*Mein Herr*), introduced by the Emcee.

Back at his lodging, Cliff teaches Ernst English. Ernst suggests that Cliff can solve his financial problems by smuggling goods from Paris, just

as Ernst does. Their conversation is interrupted by Sally who arrives with all of her belongings. Fraulein Schneider objects, until Sally offers to increase the amount that Cliff is paying for the single room. Sally suggests that Max has thrown her out due to jealousy of Cliff, and insists on staying with him. She picks up a copy of *Mein Kampf* assuming it is the novel Cliff has written, but he's reading this book by Adolf Hitler to increase his understanding of German politics. Sally also asks briefly about his relationship with Bobby and whether it was a love affair – a

question that Cliff finds difficult to answer.

Sally decides that their lives are nobody else's business and that they can tell a story of their relationship to anyone who asks (*Perfectly Marvellous*). The Emcee and two members of the Kit Kat Club then perform *Two Ladies*, a risqué and bawdy cabaret number.

At Fraulein Schneider's house on Nollendorfplatz, Fraulein Kost once again has forbidden guests and points out to her landlady that



Photo:
Marc Brenner





Photo:
Marc Brenner

without her sex work, she will be unable to pay her rent. They come to an agreement that Kost must not let Schneider catch her with any more sailors. Fraulein Schneider is calmed when Herr Schultz arrives bearing the gift of a pineapple. His job as a greengrocer means that he has showered her with an array of fruits as gifts in recent weeks. Interrupted briefly by Kost who propositions Schultz, the two exchange flirtatious conversation and eventually exit towards Schneider's room.

In his dressing room, Emcee sings *Tomorrow Belongs To Me*. This is a rare moment where the audience sees

Emcee without a wig, as he lines up the dolls which represent his 'toys'. The song, which sounds patriotic, is a chilling reminder of the propaganda and Fascist influence which is beginning to infiltrate German life, and the lives of those in the Kit Kat Club and the house on Nollendorfplatz.

Sally and Cliff discuss a letter from Cliff's mother, to whom Cliff has lied about finishing his novel. The letter contains a cheque, and Sally hopes to use the money to dine at the Adlon with champagne. Cliff describes Berlin as both tawdry and wonderful. Sally suddenly makes to leave, with her suitcase, saying she's had other offers

giving him a message that Bobby has telephoned him and left a message. Cliff placates Sally who then reveals that she is pregnant. It is unclear who is the father of the child: whilst it could be Cliff's, it could also be Max and at least one other man with whom Sally has slept. They discuss the possibility of an abortion – not a new experience for Sally – but Cliff declares happiness that the baby might take their lives in a new direction. Sally sings *Maybe This Time*, revealing the opportunity for her to settle down and relish a healthy relationship.

Ernst arrives, with the offer of a smuggling mission for Cliff, who accepts the job offer for 75 marks - thinking ahead to needing to provide for a potential family. The Emcee enters and sings *Money*, revealing the poverty and desperation experienced by many in Berlin and Germany as a whole, and the wealth enjoyed by the few.

Whilst sneaking another sailor out of her room, Fraulein Kost sees Herr Schultz leaving Schneider's room. In an effort to protect Schneider's reputation, Schultz tells Kost that he is engaged to Fraulein Schneider. Despite it being an impulsive suggestion, they agree that they will indeed marry (*Married*).

Cliff returns from Paris. Sally and Cliff present Fraulein Schneider with a crystal fruit bowl as an engagement present. Herr Ludwig arrives and drinks a toast with Herr Schultz, who removes his coat to reveal a Nazi armband. Kost takes the opportunity to mention that Herr Schultz is Jewish. Herr Ludwig takes Fraulein Schneider aside and suggests that this marriage to a Jewish man is very ill-advised, stating that Schultz is not a German if he is Jewish. Fraulein Kost and the ensemble sing a reprise of *Tomorrow Belongs To Me* conducted by Emcee, marking their turn towards the Fascist politics of the Nazi party.



Photo:
Marc Brenner

SYNOPSIS

ACT TWO



Photo:
Marc Brenner

The ensemble enjoys some interaction with their audience at the Kit Kat Club (*Kickline*) until the Emcee arrives and the atmosphere changes to one of military precision. Under the watchful eye of the Emcee, the ensemble leave the stage.

Herr Schultz is visited in his fruit shop by Fraulein Schneider who rebuffs his excited remarks about their wedding. Schneider tells Schultz that she has changed her mind and would prefer the marriage not to happen: the Nazis are her friends and neighbours and her license to rent rooms will be revoked

if she is married to a Jew if and when the Nazis come to power. As Schneider helps a shaking Schultz peel an orange, a brick is thrown through the window as Emcee wraps a glass in a cloth and stamps on it - in a chilling parody of the Jewish marriage ceremony.

In the Kit Kat Club, the Emcee performs a parody number in which he professes his supposed love for a gorilla (*If You Could See Her*). He asks the audience '*is it a crime to fall in love?*' and whether it is possible to '*live and let live*'.

Sally tells Cliff that she has been

given her job back at the Kit Kat Club, and starts tonight. She is excited, but Cliff admonishes her, saying she should be much more aware of the political climate in Europe. Sally refuses to admit that politics have any impact on their life. They are interrupted by Fraulein Schneider who has come to return their wedding gift now that the engagement has been called off. Cliff tells Schneider that she shouldn't give up that way, but Fraulein Schneider refuses to take his advice (*What Would You Do?*) She is a survivor and intends to continue to be one.

Sally trivialises Schneider's decision and mocks Cliff for appearing to lose his sense of fun. She is determined to return to the Kit Kat Club rather than go to Pennsylvania with Cliff, who tells her '*the party's over*'.

Emcee sings *I Don't Care Much* as Sally begins packing. She changes into Cliff's suit, and the scene morphs into the Kit Kat Club where the ensemble also appear. The threat of Nazism is surrounding them. Herr Ludwig enters and asks Cliff to take on another smuggling mission for 200 marks. Cliff refuses, criticising Ludwig for his Nazi sympathies. Cliff hits him, and Max and Ludwig then beat Cliff up, leaving him lying injured on the floor.

Sally appears, clearly in emotional distress. She is still attempting to deny the reality of the world around her, alluding to the world of fantasy and illusion represented by the Kit Kat Club (*Cabaret*).

In Cliff's room, he is visited by Herr Shultz who is moving to new lodgings at the other side of Nollendorfplatz in order to 'make life easier' for Fraulein Schneider. He has brought a parting gift of Italian oranges for Cliff and Sally. Sally tells Cliff that she has had an abortion, selling her fur coat in order to pay for it. Cliff gives Sally a ticket to Paris, but she tells him she's always hated the city, but he should dedicate his book to her.

On the train, Emcee appears as the Customs Officer, asking if Cliff found Germany a beautiful country. The Emcee begins to conduct a reprise of *Willkommen (Finale)*, and is surrounded by the Ensemble who are all wearing matching suits. There is no longer room for self-expression or individual identities. Many of these people do not have a future in Germany.



Photo:
Marc Brenner

'Come to the Cabaret'

DIRECTING CABARET

Jordan Fein (Associate Director and Prologue Direction)
discusses creating a new production of CABARET.

Can you tell us about the Prologue to the show?

The Prologue was always part of the proposal for this production of CABARET. As soon as the audience enter this theatre (which has been renovated for this show), there is a performance happening around them. The Prologue serves an important function of bridging that gap between 1929-1930, and the present day in which audiences are seeing the show.

The performances you'll see in the Prologue are very much informed by research into the performance style of that period: it pushed the boundaries of dance, music and acting. There was a strong presence of performance art, and so we've brought that into the prologue. Much of the movement is somewhere between gesture and full dance, but it's certainly not mime. It's as if the audience have wandered into

a particularly awesome jam session!

We wanted the Prologue to live in that world of performance art, rather than a musical number or even a Cabaret! There's an idea that the company are ghosts in the building – part of the fabric and architecture of the place. They're moving the visiting audience towards the Cabaret by initiating them into the entire space of the theatre.

The Prologue was created through a lot of improvisation, through introducing ideas and research and images. The improvisation was often partner based, with a lot of the dancers working with musicians within a certain style of music. We might build an 8-count sequence in that improvisation and then build on it from there. The dancers are from a wide variety of different dance backgrounds so there's a great mix of movement.

Logistically creating the Prologue was a big challenge. We had to make huge maps of where people are in the building, and who is doing what. It was on a massive piece of paper with a lot of post-it notes! There are certain sections that are set (about half of it) and the other half lives somewhere between improvisation and choreography. The ideas of the sections are really specific, as is the movement vocabulary but the dancers and musicians have room to improvise within that.

One thing this production does is challenge peoples notions of gender and sexuality, and we're playing around with what's considered 'sexy'. There's an expectation from people coming to see CABARET that it's going to be sexy in a commercial, traditional way. It's important that the audience is challenged in the Prologue as well as in the main piece.

It's been amazing watching the company grow as improvisers throughout the process. It was a learning curve for all of us, particularly as we didn't really know what it was going to be. We didn't even know what the building was going to be like – it was a construction site when we did our technical and dress rehearsals!

What's an example of a choice that you and Rebecca Frecknall (Director) have made for this particular production?

Cliff started out as a straight character in the original production, then he was portrayed as bisexual and then gay. It's the hardest role because the writers were never really sure who he is. We had to make some choices for our production. Pretty definitively, we can say in this production he's a queer man. With that, he and Sally have a relationship that isn't



traditional in any sense.

Every decision we've made has been carefully thought out and discussed so that it is truly a contemporary and relevant production.

What do you think are the most important moments in this production of CABARET?

For me, there are a number of key moments in the main show that are particularly important.

The kiss between Bobby and Cliff is significant. Bobby is not a large role but in a lot of ways he represents what Cliff wants and needs and won't allow himself to have. That kiss generated a lot of discussion in rehearsals. It was important to gay and queer members of our cast that we saw Cliff need and want it. It's not Bobby making it happen, it's Cliff.

In some ways it's the most passionate moment in the show. Bobby tells Cliff to *'relax, loosen up, be yourself'* and then Cliff does open up and kisses



Photo:
Marc Brenner

Bobby.

The smashing glass in Act Two was difficult to watch in preview, it was very tense. The idea textually is that it's a brick through a window. The idea came from the end of a Jewish wedding and the breaking of the glass by Emcee. That moment feels like it's the marriage of Schneider - or the lost marriage of Schneider and Schultz - and the Emcee revealing himself for who he is. It's a deeply political and personal moment. The reference to the Jewish wedding is new to this production - it's not included in the script. Other productions might simply have a brick dropping on the stage, for example.



Photo:
Marc Brenner

CHOREOGRAPHING CABARET

Julia Cheng (Choreographer) discusses her process during CABARET.



Photo:
Marc Brenner

What was your approach right at the beginning of the project, working with the director Rebecca Frecknall, and the rest of the creative team?

Firstly I took note of what Rebecca Frecknall's intention was for her direction of the work and went into a mode of searching what the story of CABARET meant to me and possibly to others today.

Initially on my own, I spent much time researching and building my own personal catalogue of inspirations and findings. I listened to many different variations and recordings of music from past CABARET productions; I tried to find as much aural material possible

and I was especially influenced by the melodies and approaches to the early stage productions. Much time was spent researching the art during the 1930's Berlin, looking up a lot of artists and images of the timeframe that the musical is set in. I analysed the lyrical content and the story lines with the work as well as all the different possible characterisations of the people in the stories.

Thereafter, key things to respond to were listening to Tom Scutt and Rebecca Frecknall talk about the design concepts and ideas of the beginning to the end structure and within that, the driving force for each musical number that had a more specifically choreographic focus.

I annotate and make notes a lot, it helps me process information, and so I did a lot of listening to their ideas and bounced off their thoughts and Tom's rich visual montages and vision boards of his thoughts.

Can you give an idea of what the initial workshops were like? What tasks or exploration did you do?

The initial workshops were really fun, playful and intimate. We workshoped with a special selected group of dance artists that had a variety of dance specialisms as I knew the range of movements and textures that I had wanted to draw into the work. I created lots of improvisatory tasks based on feelings and body responses that I was exploring for each number. There would be dance motifs created and then taught and then evolved through each exchange between dancers. Some tasks were about intimacy, connection and honesty, much was also about being able to observe each other in the space, verbal feedback/response and be inspired by one another. I also made very eclectic compilations of music that I had created for specific feelings and emotive responses which I was aiming to draw out in the work.

How did you work with Music Supervisor Jennifer Whyte, in particular?

I listened to how Jen played and approached the piano/musical direction notes and responded to that live in the space with bodies. Working with Jen was important whilst creating and devising with the cast in rehearsals; sometimes it would be talking about the feelings

in the music and listening to how she responds or interprets the quality of sounds and emotions. It was always really informative to listen to how Jen interprets the lyrics and the stories within the music which gave different contexts to how I saw the physicalising of the music.

In rehearsal, was it a workshop approach, facilitated exploration or teaching choreography that you had already set beforehand?

It was a combination of all three of the above. We had two workshop phases and then a separate two-week preparation phase before rehearsals officially began. In this time, I focused on working with set phrases and improvised ideas to create a loose structure with just Kayla and I in the studio. This way we could go into rehearsals with a strong plan, foundation of ideas and choreographed movement. Devising with the company for different numbers and specific moments in numbers was a part of the process and sculpting in space with bodies is a way I really like to work.



Photo:
Marc Brenner

How do you work with each individual Emcee to find their particular style of movement?

For this work, it is really important to have time working with each Emcee in order to discover what and how each person who takes this role physically expresses in their world. We improvise a lot and we find out about one another deeply through this process. I set out lots of tasks and we have intense sessions dancing together and drawing out the different qualities of movement and textures so that we have a strong palette and base to extract when working on the choreography. Through the process of exchanging in the dance studio to lots of ideas and music, I observe a lot and see what the Emcee is expressing and find motifs and shapes from their own organic and natural way of moving. In every addition and evolution of the Emcee, the movement is reincarnated and changed with flexibility and resetting of choreography based on each individual's instinctive response to tasks, music and storytelling.

What research informed and inspired your work on CABARET?

- Lots of older musical compositions of the work, Eartha Kitt and Judi Dench renditions.
- Club culture and underground dance renditions
- Club culture and underground dance cultures, Street dance, Punking/Waacking, Ballroom culture, Contemporary dance
- Otto Dix, George Grosz



- Drag Queens in 1930's photography
- Berlin Cabaret by Peter Jelavich
- Radicalised political movement and contemporary societal struggles
- Worldwide prostitution
- Tom Scutt's design and Rebecca Frecknall's direction

The choreography will, for many, be a big contrast to the Liza Minelli/ Fosse idea of CABARET that is often associated with the show. Can you reflect on how this style supports this specific interpretation of the piece?

For me, the choreographic language is built from different influences I have trained in personally in my movement. This includes a range of street/club dances (Hip Hop, Punking/ Waacking, House, Popping), modern dance techniques (Graham, Horton, Jazz, Gaga) physical theatre. For me, how the combination of these styles support the interpretation of the work is the way in which the dance language varies and the range of physical ways to switch different feelings, emotions and intentions in each number.

We discussed briefly the need to ensure that students/all audience members seeing the show can see themselves in it, can be inspired to create their own work and be aware of both traditional and non-traditional routes into the industry. Could you explain how this idea expands to include the dancers and their varied skill set?

The fundamental difference in our process is to see what best qualities an individual can bring to add to the pool of this world. It is important to make visible a range of mixed ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientation, gender and artistic backgrounds which is evident for example as some members of our cast have never been in musicals productions or other who are in dance roles where their background was acting.

All of the people interviewed have been asked about a song, a piece of advice, a Spotify playlist, an image etc that has inspired their practice. What would be yours?

‘Dance is always there for you’ is a phrase my mentor told me and it is really true. Artistic expression is hugely powerful and important and this inspires my practice because during my hard times dance is always and has always been there for me.



'This is the hottest spot in the city'

LIGHTING THE KIT KAT CLUB

Isabella Byrd (Lighting Designer)
discusses her approach to CABARET.

CABARET was a dream play to design. With its incredibly iconic history, the gravity of the narrative and the impact of its visuals were both inspiring and intimidating to approach.

Darkness is paramount to my design work: how it can hold so much mystery, music, sexiness, and fear. It was a critical balancing act in the lighting realm— how to support the exuberance of the Kit Kat Club as delightful expression and escapism — and then swiftly turn it all on its head with the reality of the encroaching Fascism.

The Opening is simple. We've swept up the audience in the revelry of the Prologue, and feel the anticipation of a *show* and then we plunge you into a blackout, as the chandeliers rise... and very simply reveal the Emcee, holding centre stage. The simplicity is key, and ultimately essentialism is a critical mode of design for Frecks (Rebecca Frecknall), Tom Scutt, and myself. As the number rushes on, it becomes more and more saturated, and frenetic in light movement. This follows the music, as the music and characters are guides,

and the design meets them— supports them— and never tries to topple them.

Darkness allows our imagination to ignite— and *Tomorrow Belongs to Me* walks a beautiful and fine line in the dark. The music is ghostly beautiful, 'innocent' in its choral structure, and to see a familiar figure, the Emcee, walk through a dim shaft of light suspended by these soaring harmonizes captures the spirit. The ensemble is very intentionally left in the dark here, and their shadow figures placing the identical dolls into formation, taps both into a sort of music box forecasting— eventually to turn into an assembly line, or conveyor belt of vacant suited bodies... but the pairings, the packaging of the first introduction... it feels almost sweet. Maybe confusing for some, but I think its simplicity enables it to haunt us later.

This first *Tomorrow Belongs To Me* moment pairs directly with the end of the show, as the same image is of course repeated but with the ensemble in suits, versus the cookie-cutter dolls. My work relies most on intensity and timing in the final moments. Over the course of the final drum rolls, the single beam of light is intensely brightening and tightening on the Emcee, as conductor. In the final symbol crash, he is engulfed by darkness— our eyes struggling to recover from the immense exposure. But we deliberately linger, slowly fading out on the ensemble, who remain as our last image. It was a simple and bold choice we could make as a team to softly underline the gravity of choices.

All of my design work attempts to create similar mirrored images through the piece, but with small differences that flip the gravity, dramaturgically. Colour temperature does a huge amount of this work. The club works lives in a warm, fairly cozy and sparkly place. The Boarding House in Act One is warm and neutral, which simply presents as safe and welcoming but then this warm can be pushed too far... so it starts to feel garish, and almost sour in moments. Warm cozy incandescent feelings are only a 'few ticks away' in saturation from yellow verging on putrid. I hope that this fine line of control taps into a sensitivity to colour, ultimately making sneaky emotional impact.

Act Two's colour space is much cooler, more grey and slightly green leaning. There is less light, and in some ways you can actually see them more clearly. A very simple example of all this double-



edged design expression is the moment of the glass breaking and confetti. The history of this Jewish tradition holds immense complexity, and I wanted to ensure the lighting was not overly complicating anything. The sound and event of the confetti and the shift in colour are more than enough to support this thematic gesture. This is one of my favourite moments.

Another favourite moment begins in the transition into *I Don't Care Much* and stretches into *Cabaret*. The staging is beautiful, and we very simply sink into a soft leading beam of light. This stage picture ultimately mimics the colour temperature and aesthetic we created

earlier in *Mein Herr*, a more psychological space. Sally is captive—and we see her abstractly navigate the pressures of the world— and perhaps make the choice to have an abortion. I use very few lights here—and I truly believe less is more.

In some ways, Sally is captive and fighting the same psychological space in *Cabaret*. The stage picture is so simple: two spotlights, unmoving, only shifting in intensity. It is reminiscent of a sad comic, or clown, alone and yelling at their own past choices. The music and the character do the world, and lighting underscores the emotional waves.



Photo:
Marc Brenner

'Something to write about'

THEMES OF THE SHOW

Ambition:

Sally Bowles wants to be a star. However, this comes at huge personal cost and sacrifice. Cliff also has ambitions to be a writer but is struggling to complete his novel. Both Sally and Cliff find it difficult to succeed in their ambition and in their personal lives.

Acceptance and inclusivity:

The Kit Kat Club contains a diverse range of people who accept each other. However, outside the Kit Kat Club, the world is a much more sinister and hostile place. The rise of fascism threatens creativity and individuality, and the audience is aware that the Nazi regime caused huge destruction – of places and of people – in the years that followed their rise to power.

Survival:

Many of the characters in CABARET are struggling to survive. This is because of hunger, prejudice, the precarious economic state of post-war Berlin in the 1920s, and human tragedy. There are some characters who are optimistic about their futures, whilst others are more cynical and realistic.

Love:

We witness various relationships – none of which are conventional – in CABARET. Cliff and Sally fall into a relationship after Sally is sacked from the Kit Kat Club. However, their relationship fails. Schneider loves Schultz and agrees to marry him but breaks it off because of the pressure from Nazi sympathisers. Some audience members may question the depth of Schneider's love in her willingness to abandon Schultz to his fate or even leave the country before it's too late.

Active citizenship:

At key moments in the production, the audience is challenged to wonder '*what would you do?*'. In turbulent political times, we have a responsibility to fight for justice and not be afraid to challenge discrimination. If we do not act, history will repeat itself.

CREDITS

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