

# Review: Lab Theater's 'Cabaret' shocks and dazzles

Charles Runnells, crunnells@news-press.com 4:12 p.m. EST February 12, 2015



(Photo: Special to The News-Press)

Wilkommen, ladies and gentlemen, to Lab Theater's first musical. And it's a doozy.

The Fort Myers community theater goes all out for its funny, ferocious, bawdy and ultimately shocking take on "Cabaret." You know you've done something right when the last song fades, the actors leave the stage and the audience just sits there — stunned.

Director Brenda Kensler deftly juggles the show's sauciness, romance and jet-black darkness, and she does it with a suitably ragtag seven-piece band and an impressive cast — especially the core trio playing The Emcee, cabaret star Sally Bowles and bisexual American novelist Cliff Bradshaw.

To better immerse audiences into the story, Kensler transforms the entire theater into a mock nightclub with an illuminated sign outside, a table selling German cheeses and a cluttered maze of cocktail tables (which requires some annoying navigation for audience members to get to their seats).

Presiding over this seedy nightclub is Ty Landers as the Emcee, and the actor goes deep to make the most out of this juicy role. He leers at the Kit Kat Klub audience as he dances and flirts with his hard-eyed, sexy-scary showgirls — especially in the hilarious ode to threesomes, "Two Ladies." It's a whole lot of naughty fun, but later Landers exhibits profound sadness and a growing menace as his character reflects what's going in 1931 Berlin. The Nazis are coming to power, and soon the party will be over.

Jason Drew is likable and suitably square as the relatively innocent novelist Cliff, who comes to Berlin to write but ends up getting seduced by the decadent night life. And Taylor Adair mesmerizes as the pretentious, damaged Bowles — especially when she's performing with a frazzled, punk-rock energy on "Don't Tell Mama" or bearing her wounded heart on the ballad "Maybe This Time," (where she masterfully mixes pain, sadness, longing, defiance and a brave face — all in the course of just one song).

The rest of the cast might not be as consistently stellar as that core trio, but they're still quite good. Beverly Cannell and Joseph Loiacono, in particular, shine as star-crossed lovers Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz. She's a German, he's a Jew, and their love is doomed after the Nazis come to power. Cannell and Loiacono make you root for their late-blooming love to succeed, and then they break your heart when it doesn't.

David Kensler's set adds a slim second floor to the Lab Theater stage, where six of the seven band members perch shirtless in leather vests and bow ties. Actors walk through three red doors and run up and down two sets of stairs (although the short stairs from the stage to the audience proved a bit treacherous for several actors on opening night. But they recovered from their stumbles nicely).

"Cabaret's" costume designers and make-up artists aren't credited in the show's program, but they should be. Both the costumes and the make-up are fun, inventive and memorable, from the bruised showgirls with heroin-chic looks and ripped lingerie to Bowles' glamorous get-ups to The Emcee's black leather trench coat, suspenders, combat boots and two-tone shorts that conjure a Yin-and-Yang-style dichotomy.

Now back to that ragtag band. Sure, they don't always reach the same level of power as a full-sized orchestra, but that works for what's supposed to be a house band in a seedy Berlin nightclub. And despite the band's small size, music director Julian Sundby coaxes skillful, fun and emotional music out of all seven musicians. They particularly impress on the electrifying jazz instrumental at the beginning of Act 2.

"Cabaret" starts out light and fun, but don't let that fool you. The show takes a dark turn in Act 2 when someone interrupts the good times by uttering the hate-filled word "Jew." It's an unexpected punch to the gut, and things don't lighten up much after that.

It all ends with The Emcee reprising his fun "Wilkommen" number, only this time with spooky whispered lyrics and eyes full of regret and sorrow. Then he leaves the stage, the house lights go up and the audience is left there with its collective jaw dropped.

No curtain call. No bows. Nothing. Just an unsettling, rock-in-your-stomach feeling that lingers long after you leave the theater. You're not even sure whether you should clap or not. So you do nothing.

In a word: Wow.

This is Lab Theater's first musical, and I can't wait to see what they do for the next one.

Connect with this reporter: Charles Runnells (News-Press) (Facebook) @charlesrunnells (Twitter)

## If You Go

<PS.FRT7.187><TH>**What:** The musical “Cabaret”

•**When:** Now through Feb. 28. Performances are 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday with one 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday, Feb. 15.

•**Where:** The Laboratory Theater of Florida, 1634 Woodford Ave., downtown Fort Myers

•**Tickets:** \$20 (\$12 for students)

•**Info:** 218-0481 or laboratorytheaterflorida.com

Read or Share this story: <http://newspr.es/1E5jWUw>



# Design Your Retirement!

Attend a FREE Information Presentation!

**February 2015**

Tuesday	<b>February 3</b>	1:30 p.m.
Wednesday	<b>February 4</b>	9:30 a.m.
Tuesday	<b>February 10</b>	9:30 a.m.
Wednesday	<b>February 18</b>	9:30 a.m.
Wednesday	<b>February 25</b>	1:30 p.m.

LIGHT REFRESHMENTS WILL BE SERVED

[CLICK FOR MORE INFO](#)

**SHELL POINT**  
*Lifestyle With Lifecare*

## MORE STORIES



**[Fun times for students at Celebration of Reading event](#)**  
[\(/picture-gallery/news/2015/02/13/fun-times-for-students-at-celebration-of-reading-event/23353369/\)](#)  
Feb. 13, 2015, 12:17 p.m.

[celebration-of-reading-event/23353369/](#)



**Where there's smoke, there's Brisket Brothers**

[\(/story/life/food/jean-le-boeuf/2015/02/12/brisket-brothers-smoking-fort-myers-jean-le-boeuf-review/23298307/\)](#)

[\(/story/life/food/jean-le-boeuf/2015/02/12/brisket-brothers-smoking-fort-myers-jean-le-boeuf-review/23298307/\)](#)

Feb. 12, 2015, 3:46 p.m.



**Lee County Arrests, 2/12**  
[\(/picture-](#)

[\(/picture-gallery/news/crime/2015/02/13/lee-county-arrests-212/23352403/\)](#)

[gallery/news/crime/2015/02/13/lee-county-arrests-212/23352403/\)](#)

Feb. 13, 2015, 11:51 a.m.



Schedule A Consultation Today

**239.229.4444**

