

Life is a Cabaret

Stage North

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ALEISHA HENDRY
Staff Writer

Glitz and glamour, with a heavy dose of political unrest, set to multiple song and dance routines make up Stage North's first production of the season, Cabaret.

Directed by theatre veteran Oliver Hachmeister, Cabaret is set during the early 1930s in Berlin, Germany, which was the 'place to be' for anyone who was someone at the time.

"It follows the story of a young American writer, who wants to find something to write about wherever he goes," said Hachmeister. "He's been a few places, and he comes to Germany, and along the way he meets an English cabaret singer. They move in together, they enjoy each other's company, and ultimately they fall in love."

But the show is not necessarily a happy one, he said.

"But this isn't a love story. I don't really want to give a whole lot away, but in truth, the whole thing is actually a tragedy."

The show primarily takes place in and around the Kit Kat Klub, a seedy cabaret that is the single variable that brings together several lives.

Many people will likely envision the film of the same name when they think of Cabaret, but Hachmeister said the stage show is not like the Liza Minnelli version.

"Other people said Cabaret was an amazing show, I didn't know that much about it. I went and I bought the movie that Liza Minnelli did in 1972 and won so many Oscars and I watched it and I liked it, it wasn't great, but it was good," he said. "I did some research on Wikipedia and then I downloaded some albums and I found a version of it on YouTube that blew me away, because the stage version is very different from the movie - like, extremely different."

The stage version isn't quite as focused on the Minnelli character, Sally Bowles, who is being played in the Stage North show by Naomi Shore.

For Shore, playing Sally Bowles was a dream come true.

"I found out before the beans were really spilled they were going to do Cabaret, I remember watching the

movie with my Nana when I was like... shouldn't have been watching it, like 11 or something," she said. "I remember Liza Minnelli was hilarious, like diva extraordinaire, so when they said they were doing Cabaret I was all 'I'm going to be Liza Minnelli!'"

The part of Bowles is Shore's first starring role which, she said, could have been more nerve-racking than it has been.

"Harold [Goodwin] who plays Cliff, and I have both never had a lead role in anything. It's not like he was here and I was here, we were both just as terrified, learning together. I'm glad that my opposite is just as inexperienced as I am, otherwise I think I would be really intimidated and terrified," she said.

Beneath all the glamour of the cabaret, a darker tone lingers during a turning point in Germany's history.

"Hitler has been elected to the leader of the [Nazi] Party, but they have not taken power yet. But they are visible in the community," said Hachmeister. This makes things difficult for the play's single Jewish character, Herr Schultz.

Played by Blair Scott, Herr Schultz is seemingly blissfully unaware of exactly how serious the situation is for the Jews at that time.

"He's a Jew, but he was born and raised in Germany, so he considers himself a German," said Scott, adding that all Herr Schultz wants to do is marry Fraulein Schneider, and doesn't see why the Nazi's wouldn't let that happen.

"There are themes of, you know, you need to pay attention to what your government is doing, you need to pay attention to what's going on, which is not to say it's a hard-hitting play where you're hit with all these heavy themes, but there's all these little bits and pieces that tie in together and still make sense in today's world, even though this play was written in 1966," said Hachmeister.

Much of the commentary in the show is done by the Emcee, an omnipresent figure whose purpose is to break the fourth wall and interact with the audience.

Normally a male role, in this production the Emcee is being played by Emry Mika - who said taking on this

part has been a different experience.

"It's different, there's no dialogue so there's less lines, but I don't have anyone to run the lines with or interact with on the stage, because right now, we don't have an audience, so it'll be a lot different when I get in there and I can see who I'm talking to," said Mika.

Hachmeister said the Emcee is a pivotal part of the end of the show.

"Really surprise ending with the Emcee at the end, I think people will be very shocked by the ending, Maybe not always in a good way," he said.

The 29-person cast has worked very hard for the past several months to ensure the show is a success.

"We've got a great cast, the band has worked really hard the past few months, getting the music ready, everything seems to be gelling really nicely. It looks like it's going to be ready just in time to hit the stage," said Hachmeister.

He added that there are a few very good reasons for residents to come out and see the show.

"Sexy ladies, and sexy sailors. Not nudity, but at the same time revealing costumes, a really good message, a really entertaining musical numbers, a great story - people are going to fall in love with the characters and some great actors," he said. "Ultimately, I think we've got everything that is needed for a great musical, a great band, some singers, actors, our set, which looks amazing, it's just going to be a great show for everyone to see."

Cabaret opens at the North Peace Cultural Centre on Oct. 21, with shows on Oct. 22 and 27 to 29.

for



(Above) Emry Mika plays the omnipresent, and ordinarily male, role of the Emcee in the Stage North production of Cabaret. (Right) Sally, played by Naomi Shore, listens to Cliff, played by Harold Goodwin during a rehearsal for Cabaret.



(Aleisha Hendry
Photos)

Stage North ready for new season

BRIANNE ZWAMBAG
Staff Writer

Drama, comedy and an interesting foray into Oscar fashion will mark the 2011/12 season for Stage North in Fort St John.

Seven shows are scheduled to entertain the community this year, with feature musicals, improv, drama and two hockey-themed shows that the company hopes will bring new people out.

To kick off the season, Stage North is presenting Cabaret – which was described as a roaring musical that promises to draw the audience in to a world of debauchery and decadence at the Kit Kat Klub in Germany during the 1930's.

"Chicago was such a big, huge success last year, we're doing Cabaret this year. We think it will be as popular," said Sue Popesku, Executive

Director at Stage North.

Following Cabaret, Stage North will be hosting Spontaneous Combustion – Dinner Palooza at the Quality Inn Northern Grand. In the past, this has been an improv show. However, Blair Scott, Vice-President of Stage North, warned people not to expect the same show this year.

"Our variety show is going to be fantastic this year. We've changed the format so that it's not just improv anymore. We're mixing it up – there is going to be a little bit of improv and lots of live singers and music alongside a great meal," said Scott.

For the holiday season, the theatre company will be performing the play You're a Good Man Charlie Brown. Scott pointed out that this show was done nine years ago, and he's excited it's coming back.

"Everybody loves Charlie

Brown – whether you're a kid or an adult. It's a great musical that is just a lot of fun as it follows the Peanuts gang," said Scott.

The second half of the theatre season will feature new themes and events that Stage North hopes will bring more people into the seats.

"We're going to try to entice a new crowd for the second half of the season where we've got a bit of a hockey theme going," said Scott.

According to Popesku, the inspiration for the hockey shows came from a partnership that the theatre company had with the Fort St John Flyers last year to exchange space in each other's programs for run schedules. Stage North also gave the team tickets for giveaways, which got them thinking about doing a hockey show.

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Busy theatre season for Stage North

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The first play of the second half of the season is called *The Good Game*, and follows a team of old-timers who have returned to play a reunion game 30 years after their last championship win.

"The whole play takes place in the locker room. There's a lot of reminiscing and a lot of stuff going on in this dressing room that anyone who has ever played a team sport will really be able to relate to. It's hilarious," said Scott.

As part of their season, Stage North will also be hosting a special Oscar Night on the Big Screen event at On The Rocks Nightclub. People attending this event will not only get to watch the Oscars on the big screen, but also take in a fashion show.

"We've initiated a new project that's never been done. We're going to go to On The Rocks and watch the awards, but along with that, we're doing a Fashion and Form Film competition so people can actually make dresses and clothing out of recycled movie film," said Popesku.

People who would like to participate are provided with all the recycled film they need and have between now and the event to create a dress or outfit out of the film. The winning design will receive a \$1000 prize.

"This particular project is really quite timely, because as of April there will be no more film. It will all be digital," said Popesku.

Popesku explained that Stage North is in partnership with both Aurora Cinemas and Northern Environmental Action Team (NEAT) for this project.

Aurora Cinemas will be providing the recycled film from old trailers that are no longer needed, and NEAT will be helping them to promote the waste management concepts behind recycling and reusing where possible.

The final two shows of the season are festival shows that will be a part of the Peace River Zone Festival in May.

The first is *Hockey Mom, Hockey Dad* – another hockey-themed play that follows two single hockey parents from the bleachers of their children's' hockey games as they develop a unique relationship.

"It's kind of a dram-edy. There's every kind of emotion running through this play- it's happy, it's sad, it's exciting. The whole play takes place in the stands of a hockey arena and follows two single parents who meet here and form a relationship. If you've ever been a hockey parent, you're going to get this play," said Scott.

The final play of the season is a dark drama called *Death and the Maiden*, which follows a woman who takes a Doctor captive to discover if he is the sadistic man who once brutally tortured her.

Popesku said that even though this show is quite heavy, it is going to be so shocking that people will still want to see it.

Stage North hopes that the season line-up will excite people and get them out to the theatre.

"When you're in a room with other people watching the same thing, there is a feeling of community and camarade-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Cabaret's *Master of Ceremonies* played by Emry Mika lures in the audience to the infamous Kit Kat Club in Berlin, Germany, 1931.

rie. You laugh together, you cry together. It is an experience rather than just another hum-drum thing," said Popesku.

"We have a committed following, but we're trying to get that following to grow. In this town, it can be a tough sell because, to put it blandly, it's an oil patch town and those guys don't go to theatre. But, boy, when we get them to go, they love it. It's really just about getting them in there that first time," said Scott.

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SUE POPESKU

Check the mics, cue the lights and the show begins. Seems smooth and easy from the audience point of view but the cast and crew work for many months to make it look that way. The cast of Stage North's Cabaret has been working since June and the show still has two more months of rehearsals before opening night October 21.

Stage North ushers in the 2011-2012 live theatre season in Fort St. John with the well-known musical Cabaret, complete with singing and dancing reminiscent of last year's season opener Chicago, which played to sold-out crowds.

The Big Ticket of 7 great Stage North shows is now on sale at the North Peace Cultural Centre for only \$148 for adults and \$118 for students and seniors. The Big Ticket was introduced last year and proved to be very popular. Individuals save about \$50 when

buying the Big Ticket for the season, which amounts to enjoying Dinner Palooza for free November 18 featuring Spontaneous Combustion Improv Theatre. Pick your dates up front, choose your seat for the season, and save all at the same time.

The Christmas show, December 29, 30, 31 with a special New Year's Eve Party on December 31 is the fun, family musical "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown". A hockey locker room themed comedy "The Good Game" opens February 17. A creative fashion competition making clothing and art forms out of reused commercial film will be a feature of the Oscar Night on the Big Screen at On the Rocks Nightclub March 4. The romantic comedy "Hockey Mom, Hockey Dad" plays in April and the drama "Death and the Maiden" in May rounds out the list of shows coming up for Stage North.