

Dread Can Dance

MSU struts and moves with ‘Cabaret’

By **MARY C. CUSACK**

As the audience filters in for Michigan State University’s “Cabaret,” the ladies of the Kit Kat Club prepare for the show-within-a-show, primping and hissing at each other in their on-stage dressing rooms. Some lucky audience members are seated at café tables on stage, becoming part of the show to a slightly higher degree than the rest of the audience, who are nonetheless charmed and cajoled into responding to the fervent wishes of the Emcee.

Rusty Broughton takes on the dual role of the deliciously naughty Emcee and the introverted writerwannabee Cliff Bradshaw, from Harrisburg, Pa. Playing these parts means taking on the roles of ringleader, director and subversive in the guise of the Emcee, then flipping effort less l y into a naïf turned he-man protector who wants desperately to save the woman he loves from herself and the Nazis.

That woman is Sally Bowles, played by Jennifer Shafer. Shafer warms to her role a bit more slowly than her counterpart. While she performs her early burlesque numbers acceptably, Shafer brings more gravitas to her role as the play progresses and Sally is removed from her element, transitioning from free-spirited, fun loving hussy to a real girlfriend and potential mother. When Sally realizes that her circumstances and the Nazi threat have her backed into a corner, she lashes out with a heart-ripping version of the title song that finally lets her show the power of her pipes, expressing the loss of power over her own life. The play, with book by Joe Masteroff, lyrics by Fred Ebb and music by John Kander, starts out in good fun and poor taste, a true lesson for those who think the Pussycat Dolls invented dirty dancing.

Kids, it’s called burlesque, and it’s been around in one form or another since the beginning of time. And the more someone tries to ban it, the better it gets. The degenerates of Berlin had it down, and the choreography of this production does it justice. Without a doubt, there is more crotch grabbing in this play than in an entire Lil Wayne tour. From the beginning, the club is under the watchful eye of a Nazi observer, who is taunted and teased by the cast.

The growing Nazi threat is illustrated through the subplot of romance between Cliff’s landlady and one of her tenants, a Jewish fruit stand owner. As the threat increases, the cast starts to lose its early cockiness, becoming more intimidated with each scene and song in Act 2. The breathtaking final scene in the play-within-the-play mesmerized the opening night crowd. All the laughter of earlier scenes is forgotten as the cast is forced to finish the play under duress. The claustrophobia is palpable among the audience members. Nobody wants to play this scene. As the play closes, never has a single light bulb been such a powerful symbol of dread.

Designed by Samantha Bostwick, the lighting throughout the play is fantastic, as are Amber Marisa Cook’s costumes. The play falls short only in the audio capacity of Fairchild Theatre itself. Poor acoustics and accents don’t mix, and in a play where the blocking places the actors perpendicular to the audience, dialogue gets lost. Director Rob Roznowski and the rest of the cast and crew have brilliantly staged a show that deserves to be heard as much as seen.

‘Cabaret’

Through Oct. 19 MSU Theatre Department The Fairchild Theatre, MSU Auditorium 7:30 p.m. Wednesday & Thursday 8 p.m. Friday 2 p.m. & 8 p.m. Saturday 2 p.m. Sunday \$20/\$12.50 1 (800) WHARTON www.theatre.msu.edu