

Will-O-Way's 'Cabaret' captures pre-war Berlin

By HELEN ZUCKER

review

The Will-O-Way production of "Cabaret," skillfully directed by Celia Merrill Turner, has a smashing finale, a lively cast and singers that do justice to marvelous lyrics.

Ms. Turner and crew manage to capture the atmosphere of decadent Berlin in the days preceding World War II. Death is in the air but the nightclubbers are filled with dancing girls, sailors and citizens out on the town.

The show runs weekends through Aug. 26.

Tim Hall turns in a delicate, savvy, intense performance as the master of ceremonies. No one can top Joel Grey, and Hall doesn't try. He brings his own Marcel Marceau lightness to the part. Hall moves well and manages to convey nasty thoughts with lifted brows, a flash of his green eyes and a quick shrug.

Hall gives us an M.C. who understands the Berlin scene. He makes a

grand living for the two girls he lives with by turning his country's prejudices into cabaret entertainment.

Steve Lavender is convincing as Ernst Ludwig, the friendly Nazi, who shows the American innocent, Bradshaw, how to "make large whoopee." He finds Bradshaw rude, introduces him to the Kit Kat Klub, takes English lessons and we like Ludwig a lot. He seems so "civilized."

SHIRLEY BENYAS, as Fraulein Schneider, has enough stamina, presence and experience to carry a show alone. Ms. Benyas' face registers all the nuances of a Berlin landlady who finds love in middle age and finds herself making the hardest compromise she's had to make in a life filled with compromises.

Ms. Benyas has a magic soprano and complete control of her voice. Her sense of timing is a pleasure to watch. She works from deep inside the role and she is very funny singing about pineapples like a delicious school girl hard when bargaining over rents and deeply moving in the last act when she tells us she must survive.

Leo Mogill as Fraulein Schneider's elderly fiancée — the fruit store owner, Herr Schultz — turns in a poignant, endearing performance. Mogill is believable as a little shopkeeper, transformed for a few days. Smitten by love, Schultz kicks up his heels and sings the funny "Meekies" number with gusto to the party in his fruit store.

But Schultz and his Fraulein are no Tristan and Isolde. Schultz retreats into trying to convince his beloved that "it's nothing, it's children who are throwing bricks through my windows." Fraulein Schneider, the survivor, knows her fellow countrymen better than

Herr Schultz does. Mogill sweetly delivers a last bag of oranges and moves across town.

Lee Rosender is marvelous as Fraulein Kost, the brash renter who is "related" to all the sailors in Berlin. Ms. Rosender bounces a tough vulgarity off Fraulein Schneider's struggling sense of propriety. The two are natural enemies locked into needing each other.

Time Turner's poised, clear diction and understanding of a difficult role gives us a satisfying, dizzy Sally Bowles. Young Ms. Turner catches the death wish Sally shares with the citizens of the city she happens to be living in. Ms. Turner's best moments belong to the scene where she announces she has turned in her fur coat for an abortion and has "paid" too much.

BRETT REYNOLDS is the sleep-

walking writer who falls for Sally, wakes up politically but is unable to wake anyone else. Reynolds sits around looking handsome and at loose ends. I missed the energy he brought to last year's "Music Man." Reynolds woke up during the last act and lent some tension to the abortion-departure scene. His pleasant, healthy-boy personality carried him through the show.

David Leo Sinkus was a sinister Max. Sinkus looked very oily and early 1930s. He showed nice timing as the lead male dancer.

Steven Cole, Tim Scully, Tim Christensen were good sailors, "relations" and dancers. Jeff Upchurch, Robert Paul and Christopher Hart filled out the male chorus and dancers.

Dancer and Choreographer Michelle Levine was especially good as the Russian dancer. And her fellow Kit Kat Klub Girls, Lorraine Poirier, Carol

Gold, Sue Kacamar, Michele Stock and Jeanne Lyle, were very energetic, mobile telephone girls and dancers.

Don Mulligan was a properly phlegmatic Customs Official and Bonnie Weinreb was a talky Frau Wendel. Costumes, especially Sally Bowles' outfits by Helen B. King, were imaginative. Light Tech by Eileen Weiss was good, especially the slow motion cabaret fight lights blipping on and off.

Jeff Scolnick's spots were effective. Music director Dave Wilson wrote scores for all the musicians and high praise goes to Wilson on piano, Ed Benyas on the oboe, sax and drum, Caryn Alexander on the flute, Terry Smith's trombone and Charlie Thomas' cello. Credits to both Ms. Turner's for thinking up the splendid mask ending.

Will-O-Way is at Square Lake and Telegraph. For reservations, call 644-4418.

Music hall era lives again

By JIM WINDELL

Sunday night's pops concert at Meadow Brook Music Festival saw William Bolcom and Joan Morris provide an evening of entertainment in the best tradition of the music halls.

Bolcom and Morris, specialists in early American music, charmed and entertained through 25 American popular songs covering the period from the Gay 90s to the 1950s.

Veterans of concert stages, they are at their best when pianist Bolcom plays

a ragtime number or Ms. Morris, a mezzo-soprano, dramatically interprets a musical comedy song. Bolcom is a musical genius with a firm foundation in the classics. He has written operas, études, concerti, string quartets and symphonies, yet is right at home with ragtime and early jazz.

WHEN THE RAGTIME revival came along in the mid 60s, it was Bolcom who was at the forefront. The leading pianist in that movement may have been Joshua Rifkin, but it was

Bolcom who introduced Rifkin to ragtime. Bolcom has recorded a number of albums of ragtime music.

At the Meadow Brook concert opening, on the Oakland University campus near Rochester, Bolcom played "Pineapple Rag," a Scott Joplin song from 1909. Ms. Morris sang lyrics (added and published by 1911). Very little is known about the lyricist Joe Snyder who seems to have disappeared without a trace.

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