

Cabaret

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Life is a ...: Jon Peterson stars as the Emcee in a scene from Kander and Ebb's Cabaret, opening Tuesday at Detroit's Fisher Theatre.

for the intimacy of these venues, far as the singing, we've spread it out. Some people have said they prefer it this way," he said.

Background

"Cabaret" is based on a 1930s series of Berlin stories by Christopher Isherwood. The story takes place during the Weimar Republic, the period of time between World War I and the rise of Fascism marked by economic hardship and a blossoming of the avant-garde. Cabarets were decadent clubs where nakedness and perversion reigned.

In "Cabaret," Sally Bowles meets American writer Clifford Bradshaw at the boarding house of Fräulein Schneider, and they befriend Max. Several stories weave their way through the trio's trials, all under the leering eye of Emcee, who is both the symbol of Nazism and its vice.

To prepare for his role, Peterson said he watched documentaries about pre-World War II Germany, but a lot of it is just to intuition. "I know it sounds corny, but I feel very lucky. I've wanted to do this role for a long time," he said.

Besides Peterson and Thompson, the cast includes Fort Huron actor Drew McVety, who plays Ernst Ludwig, Rochester native Carl Pasberg in the show's general manager.

Though Peterson said audiences in some of the 15 cities he has toured have reacted to the show's rawness, he isn't discouraged.

"This is the best production of 'Cabaret' if you are looking for the truth," he said.

rehearsing for a Little Princess or Tosca, or both. The Michigan Opera Theatre's production of Tosca opens Saturday, May 6.

"I like Tinderbox productions because of the musical theater and it has dancing," said Schmidt. "We have a lot of fun. My favorite songs are 'Every Little Girl Can Be a Princess,' which Sara sings to the girls at the school, and 'The Best Gift of All' (The Pizza Song) because it's Sara's birthday and she misses her father. The best gift of all would be to him. I get to put a lot of emotion in it and put out on tour -- both headlining and performing an opening stint for several No Doubt shows -- the band will miss some of the staples they take for granted at home. Nunley won't be snowboarding nearly enough, or playing video games for that matter. Navarro said he'll miss some of his

favorite restaurants, like Cafe 317. And Vandenberghe will miss just hanging out with his friends from his hometown, Rochester Hills.

But they all agreed snagging a quick tour with No Doubt is a good change from usual life on the road. While the Machines are used to the ups and downs of traveling -- being far from family and friends, leaving that famed pup behind, and doing what three out of four Suicide Machines dreads most, flying -- it's all worth it to get out and play.

"It's cool being on tour," said Vandenberghe. "It's better than working 8-10 hours a day."

And traveling has its perks. Las Vegas is one stop the boys were looking forward to before they left. "Last time we were there, I wasn't 21," said Vandenberghe, a reminder of how early stardom has struck for this band.

With the release of "The Suicide Machines," the band is poised to explode onto the national spotlight. Though it only took one month to record, the CD is a departure from the raw punk vibe that drove the likes of "Battle Hymns" and

their 1996 debut "Destruction By Definition." New songs like the furiously-paced "Too Many Words" and "Green" have unforgettable hooks, the kind that weave and wind through your head hours after the CD player is shut off.

There are even a few ballads tossed into the mix, the kind that'll make girls in the audience blush and swoon. Guitarist and Farmington Hills resident Dan Lukacinsky penned "Extraordinary," but his band mate said he's the "furthest thing from a romantic." That's debatable when listening to the ballad, with its dreamy lyrics about a boy and girl chasing around on a sunny day in the park -- not your usual raucous, rebellious punk trivia, but it'll do.

Nunley admitted he was surprised to see the song at first. When he asked Dan where it came from, his bandmate supposedly replied, "It's just a fictional girl song."

"Sometimes I Don't Mind" starts out like a "fictional girl song," but it's a true love song, about a dog. Navarro said: "I think it's about time an animal had its own song." While Chewy's been immortalized in song, Nunley didn't plan on taking his furry pal on the road with the band. "It's not a good place for an animal." Chewy did make a public appearance at the band's record release party at Royal Oak's Fifth Avenue Bistro Feb. 22, no one knows if he'll make it to the State Theatre show.

Where would there three Suicide Machines be if they weren't touring in a punk rock band? Royce Nunley said he'd be in college trying to get a degree in music. Ryan Vandenberghe claims he would still be working at the Family Buggy restaurant in Rochester and probably playing in bands. Jason Navarro is sure he'd be manager of Value Village by now.

At least sometimes, the machines probably don't mind playing music instead.

Machines

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JORDAN BUZZED

and guess what? For once, it's about punk decadence and rock and roll, rather than hip hop. "I think if anything, we're bringing attention to a different genre," said Jason Navarro. "It is Detroit Rock City after all."

The band mates live all over the metro area. "A lot of people think we're from California and that sucks," said Navarro, a Livonia native and Berkley resident.

Vandenberghe, a Rochester Adams High School graduate, agreed: "They don't think anything good can come from Detroit."

But the image is slowly changing, thanks to bands like The Suicide Machines -- who got started in the Livonia area in 1991.

"It's your home, you should be proud of wherever you have lived," said Navarro. "You grow up somewhere and you love it."

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age, she's certain that her daughter will be every bit as good in the part. Don't get her wrong -- Michele isn't a stage mother. She doesn't push Jennifer into every production in the area even though she proudly stated that Jennifer was singing Disney songs when she wasn't even two-years-old.

"She had the opportunity to perform in 'Der Rosenkavalier' with Michigan Opera Theatre (April 15-30) but I thought it would be too much for her to be rehearsing three productions even though it's a thrill seeing her up on stage."

The scrap book Michele's been keeping of Jennifer's acting and singing achievements reflects the pride beaming from her face. In 1996, Schmidt was in the children's chorus of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" with Donny Osmond. There is a photograph of the two together, cheek to cheek, that Michele especially treasures.

"Joseph" was the most fun and I got to dance a lot," said Schmidt. "But I don't want to be on Broadway. I want to be a Pop singer or an actor in the movies."

Family affair

Schmidt comes from a musical family so it doesn't seem unusual that younger sister Katie is playing one of the school girls in "A Little Princess." Her father, Raymond, is choir director at Pierc Middle School and organist/children's choir director at St. Aidan Church in Livonia. Mother Michele is a former organist at St. John Bosco in Redford. Schmidt studied dance at Miss Harriet's in Livonia and then at Milligan School of Ballet in Dearborn Heights. Among her Michigan Opera Theatre credits

are the productions of "Werther," "Carmen," "Turnadot," and "La Bohème."

"I could sing before I could talk," said Schmidt. "In third grade I was introduced to Nancy Florkowski, the founder and director of Redford Youth Theatre/Tinderbox Productions and began taking improvisational classes on Saturdays. She encouraged me to try out for the Michigan Opera Theatre."

Busy schedule

In addition to rehearsing for two productions and singing in the Honors choir at school and the children's choir at St. Aidan, Schmidt is on the track team at Pierc. But she is planning to slow down after the Tinderbox and Michigan Opera Theatre's seasons end. Schmidt, who started playing piano in fifth grade, attended the University of Michigan Summer Institute for choir and Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp for oboe last summer. This summer she'll attend only one of the camps. Her mother, for one, is glad she's taking a break.

While Michele enjoyed watching Shirley Temple in the movie version when she was Jennifer's

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