

CABARET



STUDY GUIDE

**JANUARY
8-31, 2015**

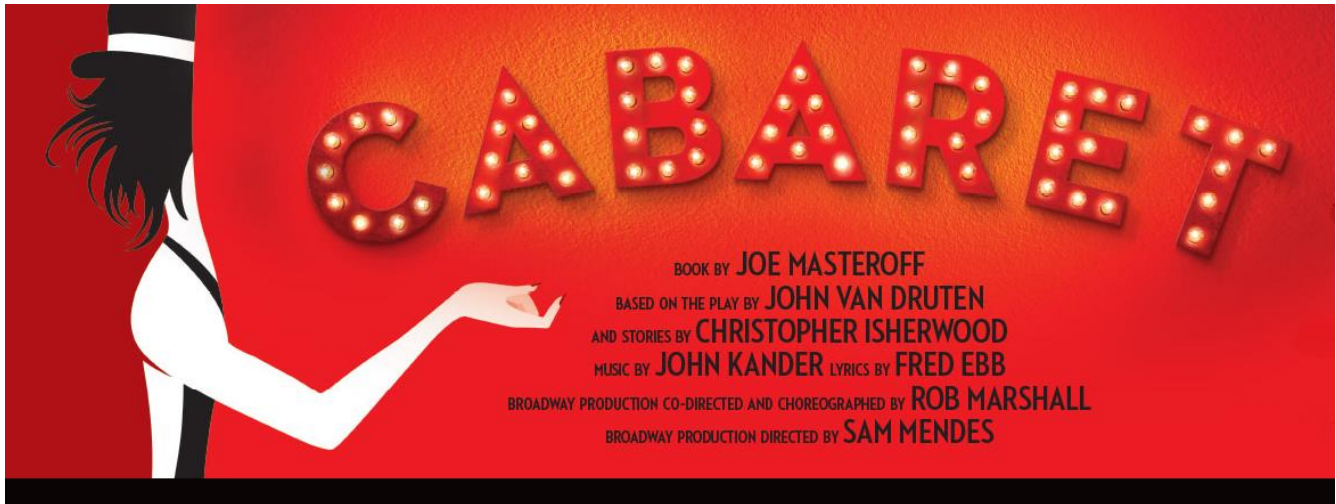
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This guide compiled by Anna Schmidt, December 2014.

Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre
Presents



Director/Choreographer/Fight Director – Tracey Flye
Musical Director – Joseph Tritt
Set & Costume Designer – Tamara Marie Kucheran
Lighting Designer – Hugh Conacher
Sound Designer – John Bent Jr.
Dialect Coach – Oliver Dawson

Apprentice Set & Costume Designer – Ksenia Broda-Milian
Stage Manager – Leslie Sidley
Assistant Stage Manager – Anne Murphy
Assistant Stage Manager – Candace Maxwell
Apprentice Stage Manager – Holly LaJambe

THE CAST

Texas - Mary Antonini
Karl - Matthew Armet
Hans - Jak Barradell
Louie - Cameron Carver
Ernst Ludwig – David Coomber
Max/Herr Schultz – Oliver Dawson
Sally Bowles – Steffi DiDomenicantonio
Cliff Bradshaw – Alex Furber
Fräulein Schneider – Debbie Maslowsky

Emcee – Mike Nadajewski
Rosie - Laurin Padolina
Lulu - Kimberley Rampersad
Helga - Jade Repeta
Frenchie/Dance Captain - Jennifer Rider-Shaw
Victor - Stephen Roberts
Bobby - Conor Scully
Herman - Brett Andrew Taylor
Fräulein Kost / Kit Kat Girl – Dayna Tietzan

MUSICIANS

Musical Director/Keys – Joseph Tritt
Reeds – Sharon Atkinson
Upright Bass – Julian Bradford
Percussion – Steve Broadhurst
Trumpet – Dave Lawton
Trombone – Brad Shitega
Keys 2/Rehearsal Accompanist – Andrew St. Hilaire

THEATRE ETIQUETTE

"The theater is so endlessly fascinating because it's so accidental. It's so much like life." – Arthur Miller

Arrive Early: Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. Please ensure you arrive with enough time to find your seat before the performance starts.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please **TURN OFF** your cell phones/iPods/gaming systems/cameras. We have seen an increase in texting, surfing, and gaming during performances, which is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. The use of cameras and recording devices is strictly prohibited.

Talking During the Performance: You can be heard (even when whispering!) by the actors onstage and the audience around you. Disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait to share your thoughts and opinions with others until after the performance.

Food/Drinks: Food and hot drinks are not allowed in the theatre. Where there is an intermission, concessions may be open for purchase of snacks and drinks. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

Dress: There is no dress code at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, but we respectfully request that patrons refrain from wearing hats in the theatre. We also strive to be a scent-free environment, and thank all patrons for their cooperation.

Leaving During the Performance: If an audience member leaves the theatre during a performance, they will be readmitted at the discretion of our Front of House staff. Should they be readmitted, they will not be ushered back to their original seat, but placed in a vacant seat at the back of the auditorium.

Being Asked to Leave: The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave the performance if that person is being disruptive. Inappropriate and disruptive behaviour includes, but is not limited to: talking, using electronic devices, cameras, laser pointers, or other light- or sound-emitting devices, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

Talkbacks: All Tuesday evening performances and final matinees at MTC feature a talkback with members of the cast following the show. While watching the performance, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors. Questions can be about the story, the interpretation, life in the theatre, etc.

Enjoy the show: Laugh, applaud, cheer and respond to the performance appropriately. Make sure to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause during the curtain call.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The creation of a new work of musical theatre is always a team effort.

The story of *Cabaret* is based on characters and events first told as *The Berlin Stories*, a collection of works by writer **Christopher Isherwood**. *The Berlin Stories* were, in turn, based heavily on real people and events. The character Sally Bowles is based on Jean Ross, a British nightclub singer Isherwood met in Germany in 1931. Ross shared lodgings with Isherwood in Berlin, and he immortalized her as the “divinely decadent”

Sally Bowles in his 1939 memoir *Goodbye to Berlin*, one of the works later included in *The Berlin Stories*. Ross was never happy about being identified with the fictional Sally Bowles.



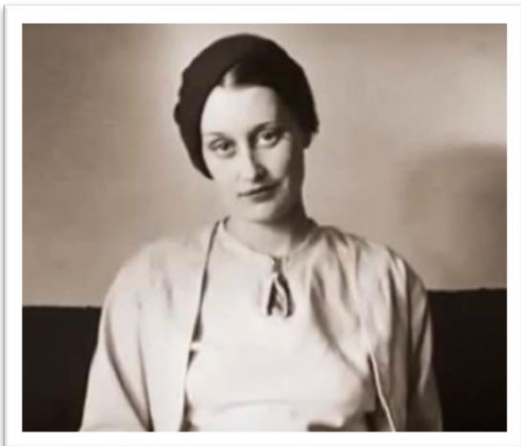
Christopher Isherwood

Playwright **John Van Druten** first adapted *Goodbye to Berlin* for the stage as the 1951 Broadway play *I Am a Camera*. The play takes its title from a quote from the first page of *Goodbye to Berlin*: “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.”

Isherwood’s characters were brought to the stage again in 1966 with the debut of the musical *Cabaret*, a project of acclaimed American theatrical producer **Hal Prince**. Prince acquired the option on Van Druten’s play and Isherwood’s original stories, and engaged American playwright **Joe Masteroff** to write the book for a new musical theatre production.

The music of *Cabaret* was created by the highly successful songwriting team consisting of composer **John Kander** and lyricist **Fred Ebb**. The team is known primarily for their stage musicals, which also include *Flora the Red Menace* — the musical that marked Liza Minelli’s Broadway debut — and the hit

Chicago. Kander and Ebb scored several movies including the film version of *Cabaret*, as well as their most famous song, the theme from Martin Scorsese’s *New York, New York*.



Jean Ross-- inspiration for the character Sally Bowles

Cabaret won Tony awards for Best Musical, Best Score, and, in 1998, Best Revival. The 1972 film version, directed by Bob Fosse and starring Liza Minelli as Sally Bowles, was a further re-interpretation of the story. While the movie uses Ebb and Kander’s music, the storyline is more aligned with Isherwood’s original novel than with the musical theatre version.

PLOT

The curtain rises on the opening act of the Kit Kat Club, a night club in 1931 Berlin. The master of ceremonies, a character referred to simply as the **Emcee**, sings a multilingual welcome to the patrons and introduces the other cabaret performers, including the club's star singer, **Sally Bowles**.

Meanwhile, **Cliff Bradshaw**, an American writer in his late twenties, is travelling to Berlin on a train, where he meets **Ernst Ludwig**, a German citizen who is about 30 years old. Cliff can't help notice that Ernst goes to careful measures to ensure that the German border police think the briefcase he is carrying belongs to his American cabin-mate. Ernst is grateful when Cliff doesn't give away his deception, and offers to show Cliff to a place where he can rent a room.

Fräulein Schneider, a 60 year-old widow, is the proprietor of the rooming house. Times are tough, and the economic situation has forced her to take tenants of whom she doesn't entirely approve, such as the prostitute **Fräulein Kost**. Cliff is introduced to another boarder, **Herr Rudolf Schultz**, the proprietor of a well-regarded fruit market. Herr Schultz has brought schnapps to toast the New Year with Fräulein Schneider. He is in his fifties, and Jewish.

It is New Year's Eve, and Cliff goes to the Kit Kat Club, where he encounters Sally Bowles for the first time. Sally introduces herself to him using the network of telephones provided so that patrons can call from table to table. Sally, who is British, is delighted to discover that Cliff speaks English, and they strike up a conversation. We get a clue to Cliff's bisexuality when one of the male dancers recognizes him from another club.

The next day, Cliff is tutoring Ernst Ludwig in English when Sally arrives unannounced with all her possessions. She has been fired from the Kit Kat Club by her jealous boyfriend **Max** and, in spite of Cliff's protests, moves into Cliff's tiny room. Sally greets Ernst as an old friend, and we learn from her that he regularly smuggles cash over the border from France for some unnamed political organization.

A few months pass, and Fräulein Schneider continues to argue with Fräulein Kost about the steady stream of sailors that visit the boarder's room. As much as she disapproves of the manner in which Fräulein Kost earns a living, Fräulein Schneider is unwilling to give up the income from the rent. Meanwhile, romance blossoms between Herr Schultz and Fräulein Schneider when he woos her with the costly and exotic gift of a fresh pineapple.



Judy Dench as Sally Bowles in the first London production, 1966

Sally announces that she is moving out, to Cliff's dismay. When he presses her for a reason, she reveals that she is pregnant and doesn't know who the father is. There is a possibility it could be Cliff, and he begs her to stay with him. She considers settling down with Cliff. Just then, Ernst Ludwig arrives and asks Cliff to smuggle a briefcase for him. Cliff agrees, desperate for easy money with the prospect of a child on the way.

Fräulein Kost catches Herr Schultz sneaking out of Fräulein Schneider's bedroom. In an attempt to cover their indiscretion, Herr Schultz announces that he and Fräulein Schneider are getting married. They decide that they do, in fact, want to get married, and announce the good news to Sally.

Everyone gathers at Herr Schultz's fruit market to celebrate the engagement. Ernst Ludwig arrives late, and pays Cliff for his delivery. The festive event takes a dark turn when Ludwig removes his coat, revealing a swastika armband. Cliff is horrified to realize he has been smuggling for the Nazi party. When Ludwig learns in the course of the conversation that Herr Schultz is Jewish, he sternly advises Fräulein Schneider not to go through with the marriage.

The disturbing turn of events at the engagement party causes Fräulein Schneider to have second thoughts about the wedding plans. She realizes that if the Nazis come to power there will be risks in being married to a Jewish man. Herr Schultz's attempt to reassure her that her fears are unfounded is interrupted when a brick is thrown through the window of the fruit market.

Cliff's efforts to find employment are unsuccessful but, to Sally's delight, Max has a change of heart and decides to rehire her. Fräulein Schneider decides to return the engagement gift because the wedding is off. Cliff informs Sally that he intends to take her home to America with him. Sally storms out.

Cliff follows Sally to the Kit Kat Club. Ernst Ludwig is there, and he offers Cliff a great deal of money to do one more job for him. When Cliff refuses, Ludwig makes an anti-Semitic comment about Herr Schultz, and Cliff hits Ludwig in anger. Two bodyguards intervene and beat Cliff severely, carrying him out as Sally takes the stage.

The next morning, Cliff is packing to leave when Sally staggers in, minus her expensive fur coat, which she has used to pay for an abortion. Cliff leaves for the train station, but Sally refuses to join him. The play closes on Cliff riding the train out of Germany while the Emcee sings "Wilkommenn" in defiance of the growing Nazi threat.



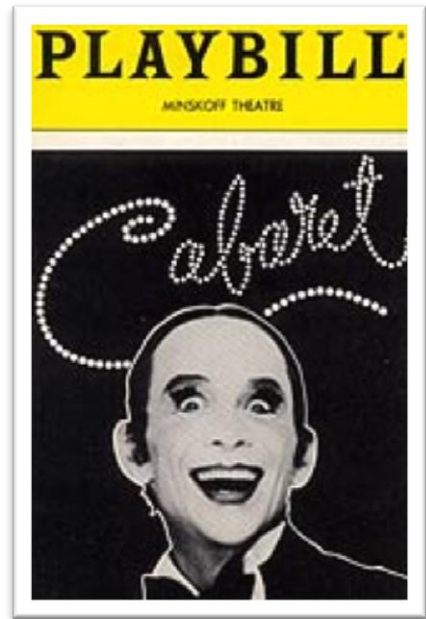
CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The Music

The songs in *Cabaret* fall into two groups: songs sung by the main characters to advance the plot, and “cabaret songs.”

Throughout the play, the action is interspersed with musical numbers from the Kit Kat Club, always presented with the Emcee’s characteristic flair. These songs complement the plot as it unfolds. For example, Cliff’s decision to smuggle for Ernst Ludwig is punctuated by “Money makes the world go ‘round,” and the growing anti-Semitism is satirized in “If you could see her through my eyes.”

Sally’s songs offer a window into her thoughts and feelings. When she is contemplating the option of settling down with Cliff she sings “Maybe this time,” and she declares her commitment to her wild and carefree life with “Cabaret.”



The playbill from the original Broadway Production features actor Joel Grey who created the iconic role of the Emcee

Cabarets in Berlin

The Kit Kat Club is modeled on real Berlin cabarets of the 1920s and 30s. One famous cabaret was the Residenz-Casino, nicknamed “The Resi.” The Kit Kat Club depicted on stage has features reminiscent of this description of The Resi:



The dance-floor was large enough for 1,000 people and its ceiling made from reflective glass. There were four bars, private rooms and even a carousel.

Above the dance-floor were one hundred mirrored globes which opened and closed to the rhythm of the orchestra, and in 1928 a dancing water feature was installed. In the late 20s the venue housed 86,000 electric lights!

Its most talked-about feature was 200 private telephones fixed to tables and various stations around the venue, where customers could contact other tables or flirt anonymously with other patrons. Guests could also choose from a menu of 135 gift items and have them sent to other patrons via pneumatic delivery tubes (Rohrpoststation) suspended above the tables.

(Source: <http://www.cabaret-berlin.com/?p=491>)

Historical Context

The Weimar Republic

Following Germany's defeat at the end of the First World War, Wilhelm II, the last emperor of the German Empire, stepped down and Germany became a federal republic called *Deutsches Reich* ("German Realm"). Historians typically refer to this time period in the history of Germany as the "Weimar Republic" after the city in which the nation's new constitution was written and adopted in August 1919.

In its efforts to recover from the war and address the reparation requirements agreed to in the Treaty of Versailles, throughout the 1920s the Weimar Republic relied on massive loans from the USA to boost its post-war economy. When the stock market crashed in 1929, America called on Germany to repay the loans, and no other nation could afford to provide the kind of assistance to Germany that America had. The effect on the German economy was devastating. Companies went bankrupt, and the number of Germans unemployed leapt from 650,000 in September 1928 to 3 million in September 1930.

In this time of economic crisis, many people looked for hope to the ideologies of extreme political parties like the Communist Party on the far left of the political spectrum and the Nazi Party on the far right. The Nazi Party had financial problems of its own, having nearly gone bankrupt in 1928. They were bailed out by a wealthy businessman, however, and made a strong showing in the 1930 election of the German parliament or *Reichstag*. By 1932, the Nazi Party held the largest number of seats in the Reichstag. After a brief attempt by the Centre Party to hold onto power, the leader of the Nazi Party, Adolf Hitler, was sworn in as Chancellor on January 30, 1933.

Gay Berlin

During the Weimar era, Berlin gained an international reputation as a center of cultural transformation and modern thinking. A prominent feature of this transformation was Berlin's long history of gay culture. In spite of the fact that homosexuality had been criminalized in Germany since 1871 by a section of law known as Paragraph 175, Berlin was somewhat of a haven for gays and lesbians in the 1920s. The character of Cliff Bradshaw is based loosely on the real-life experiences of gay author Christopher Isherwood on whose stories *Cabaret* is based. Likewise, the atmosphere of the fictional Kit Kat Club is based on real Berlin cabarets of the 20s and early 30s. The first gay magazine started in Berlin in 1896, and the first gay demonstration was held in 1922. The non-profit *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* (Institute of Sex Research) opened in Berlin 1919, offering a research library and large archive, a research division, and a marriage and sex counselling office. The Institute was a pioneer worldwide in the call for civil rights and social acceptance for homosexual and transgender people. In part due to the success of the Institute, on October 16, 1929 a Reichstag Committee voted to repeal Paragraph 175. Sadly, this historic decision was overturned when the Nazis assumed power just a few weeks later, and in 1933 the Nazis burned the Institute's library and began to send homosexual people to concentration camps.

Jewish Berlin

Of course it was not only the gay community that had reason to fear the Nazis. In 1933 the Jewish community in Berlin numbered 160,000, representing one-third of all Jews in Germany. Many Jewish people saw the growing danger and fled to other countries. Between 1933 and 1939 Berlin's Jewish population dropped by half to 80,000 as a result of emigration. At the time when *Cabaret* is set, the Jewish community was just beginning to grasp the magnitude of the threat.

GLOSSARY

A **Cabaret** is a nightclub or restaurant where a show is performed — typically singing and dancing — while the patrons eat and drink. Cabarets became a popular form of entertainment in Europe and America in the 1920s.

A **corset** is a tight undergarment worn around the torso, either for cosmetic or medical reasons.

In order to understand the things he sees going on around him in Berlin society, Cliff is reading *Mein Kampf*, the book in which Adolf Hitler outlined his political views and his plans for Germany.

There is a famous gay club in Birmingham, England called the **Nightingale Club**. While the club would not have been around in 1931, the use of the name gives the contemporary audience a clue to Cliff's sexual orientation.

Fraulein Schneider remarks that Cliff's window offers a view of the whole **Nollendorfplatz**, which is a square in the Schöneberg district of Berlin. This area has been known as Berlin's gay district since the turn of the 20th century. The Nollendorfplatz is the location off Berlin's most famous **U-Bahn**, or subway station.

Schnapps refers to a strong alcoholic beverage made from various fruits. The name comes from the German word *schnaps* which means "swallow."



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Discussion questions

1. Interspersing the plot with cabaret songs that are not part of the plot, but which link to it thematically, was something very new to the original *Cabaret* audience. What is the effect of this staging technique on your experience of the story?
2. When we watch *Cabaret* today, we do so from the perspective of knowing that the lives of the characters will be impacted by the Nazis' rise to power. How does this knowledge colour your viewing experience?
3. *Cabaret* is, in part, a story about a writer trying to tell a story about the things he sees happening around him. What value is there in telling stories like this one? And what is it about this story in particular that has made it the focus of multiple re-tellings?

Activities

1. In the process of re-imagining the characters and events first written by Isherwood and then rewritten for the stage by John Van Druten, the creators of *Cabaret* made a number of changes. Read *I am a Camera* by Van Druten, or *Goodbye to Berlin*, which can be found in a contemporary collection of Isherwood's work called *The Berlin Stories*. Explore the ways in which Masteroff, Ebb and Kander have altered the story and characters in staging *Cabaret*. Why do you suppose they chose to make these changes? What theatrical purpose do the changes serve?
2. Watch the 1972 film version of *Cabaret*. How is it the same as the stage version? How is it different?
3. The Historical Context section of this study guide touches only briefly on a number of topics that can be researched in greater depth. Some topics to explore are:
 - a. Germany in the era of the Weimar Republic
 - b. The rise of the Nazi party in 1930s Germany
 - c. The history of cabarets in the 1920s and 30s.
 - d. The role of the Berlin Institute of Sex Research in the historical movement towards civil rights for LGBTQ* people
 - e. The Jewish community in the Weimar Republic

Curriculum Connections

- English Language Arts
- Drama and Musical Theatre
- History of modern Europe
- Human Rights

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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