



Society : Bishopshalt ODS  
Production : Cabaret  
Date : 4<sup>th</sup> December 2015  
Venue : Bishopshalt School  
Report by : Tony Austin

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## Show Report

After twenty years of attending the BODS pre-Christmas musicals at Bishopshalt and admiring the very special expertise put into each production by Staff and Pupils, there came something even more special on the Friday evening which I attended as your Reviewer together with the Head of NODA London (also the London Representative on the National Council of the organisation) Jacquie Stedman, keen to see what I have been raving about in my reports, along with our respective spouses. Not just the famous show *Cabaret* by Kander and Ebb, but the school hall turned into a cabaret club with the audience (some in very decorative party costumes) at tables with drinks and refreshments and dim lighting with 1920s recordings (some lovely forgotten Gershwin, though Weill would have been more authentic for Berlin) over the sound system as we got into the cabaret atmosphere. And then, a collection of mainly pre-WW2 numbers from four pupils showing us how cabaret has changed in the succeeding years with jazz interpretations of more familiar Gershwin and others given by the gorgeously dressed **Ama Mainoo-Jones, Tuvana Hizarci and Eleanor Greenwood**, and **Chris Underhill** showing his skill on saxophones large and smaller bringing us a little more up to date. They had honed their performances to the (uncredited as far as I could see) backing tracks with skill (and fine microphone technique by the singers) for their solos and received generous applause from the whole audience, and I must add my extra praise now for the way they got up on stage and performed alone and unprotected, without the build-up of the storyline of a musical and without showing the nerves many of us would have felt.

And then back to Berlin in 1930 and the Kit Kat Club, glamorous but sleazy with its glitter strip curtains, represented by the whole of the stage and its central “runway” out into the audience and the front of the auditorium where the clientele lounged to watch the club’s show before getting involved in the musical numbers with great vigour and volume within touching distance of their audience, plus a raised steeldeck balcony (holding MD **Stuart King’s** ten-piece brilliant professional band) with a decorative staircase allowing other uses for plot or artistic reasons as devised by Director **Michael Glen**, designed by **Terry Sharp** and **Jonathan York** and constructed by them with the assistance of **Liam Why**. A word here for the efficiency of Stage Manager **Chris Alaru**, ASMs **Diksha Bent, Amy Browne** and **Sian St Luce** and their Crew of **Harry Calton, Yasha Najafi, Jerry Ekpe, Fahad Choudhury, Sheleena Samra** and **Olivia West** as they later changed the huge number of items of furniture needed to alter the scene to other locations, including the bed which cleverly doubled as a railway carriage, and for the Lighting (designed by **Terry Sharp**) varying appropriately between those locations and so often isolating a character for a song on the runway or to direct our attention to part of a scene, with good work from Follow Spot operators **Henry Lambert** and **Tom Stevenson**.

Welcoming us to the Club in three languages, hefty high heels (managed as if he normally wore them) and provocatively androgynous manner, **James Dingwall** could not have been bettered as the Emcee, flirting with the audience, his delicate finger-wiggle wave always accompanied by the right facial expressions and body language, his winks to emphasise points always obvious but never over-emphatic and his almost constant presence watching over scenes away from the Club never less than meaningful

even when he was not required to add surreality as in the Pineapple scene or menace with the window-breaking brick. Dominant in song and dialogue, as immediately shown in the opening number and his introduction of the individual Kit Kat girls, and dance (where he matched their wiggles with style and extra panache in that scene and the extended Kickline sequence opening of Act 2 among others), he also revelled in the comedy of his speciality cabaret acts: the *Two Ladies* (with **Sheena Raichura** and **Rosie Ferris** superbly playing up in the singing and sufficiently suggestive dancing) benefiting from his looks at the audience to make it seem more daring, and *If You Could See Her through My Eyes* which with **Kieran Holbrook**'s Gorilla cartwheeling and doing back flips and the like (confirming his ballet and gymnastic expertise seen elsewhere in the show) concluded with a spectacularly danced extra chorus by both of them before his final line given with its full original impact emphasised the number's satirical relevance. A superb leading performance which must have helped to inspire the whole cast.

Introduced by the Emcee, Kit Kat Girls **Nikita Feustel** as Lulu, **Cathrine Moloney** as Helga, **Kiyala Matanga** as Sadie, **Celeste Williamson** as Fritzie, **Hannah Merion** as Baby, **Kayleigh Boswell** as Texas, **Monica Georgieve** as Frenchie and **Sheena Raichura** as Cherry spoke their names clearly and danced well together as a troupe, supporting principals and helping to lead the ensemble with style, flair and energy, while **Tuvana Hizarci**, **Loretta Balogun**, **Tilly Gilder** and **Freya Kenny** put over their lines as Telephone Girls (with mimed telephones) in the Club, and all contributed to the frenetic *Telephone Dance*, which I don't recall being included in any previous performance of the show I have seen, but which suited them and the rest of BODS cast superbly. **Robbie Young**, **Drew Kahrs** and **Ollie Hopkins** looked great in their sailors' uniforms both while doing ensemble work and in their featured entrances as Fräulein Kost's young clients, with intelligent reactions and odd lines. Sadly, **Chris Underhill**'s Maitre D' role didn't give him enough dialogue to star as last year, while for **Adam Maidment**, after his initial objection to Sally talking to Cliff, most of Max's role seemed to take place offstage and be reported by others. **Shamar Lewis-Stephenson** and **James Douglas**, as the Customs Officers duped by Ernst, had better fortune with two brief scenes well played by both showing some fine German from one and beautifully German-accented English from the other and nice comedy particularly on their second exit. The nineteen other members of the ensemble **Sameer Aboobaker**, **Ben Booth-Bennett**, **Rodrigue Burnett**, **Lillie Bristow**, **Thomas Bennett**, **Daniel Hill**, **Jessica Hook**, **Reanna Isaacs**, **Sophie Lawrence**, **Ama Mainoo-Jones**, **Julia Meanda**, **Paulina Met**, **Iman Miller**, **Richard Okoabah**, **Katy Rankin**, **Bradley Rowland-Small**, **Lily Sutton**, **Daniel Teague** and **Fahad Zaman** contributed immensely when acting as Club patrons (behaving naturally and not distracting us from the action, watching it intently when required, singing lustily and dancing their hearts out in the numbers), as well as being the crowd at the party in the shop, and frighteningly showing the rise of nationalism in *Tomorrow Belongs to Me*, as Swastikas became more in evidence. And I can't overstress the value and impact of the wonderfully varied choreography provided and rehearsed by **Jane Gooch**, with assistance from **Laura Arnold**, in giving the Company the wherewithal to impress and delight us all evening with the succession of wonderful dance numbers.

I have just one minor criticism of the evening with which to link the Ensemble and the Principals, concerning their German pronunciation, firstly of the word Fräulein, in which the umlaut, which comes when the diminutive 'lein' is added to the word Frau (wife), indicates that the vowel sound changes from 'ow!' to 'oy!'. Fine for newcomer Cliff to mispronounce it as 'ow', and possibly even Sally, although she might be expected to know better as a longer term resident, but unacceptable from any of the German-speaking cast; and secondly 'Prost!', the toast joined in by everyone, which should have a long 'o' sound and rhyme with toast – as in fact should the name of Fräulein Kost (it only now strikes me!). To require the authentic German 'r' sound in either word, I agree would be a step too far.

**Charles Titmus** as Ernst Ludwig managed the accent well, and the duping of the Customs Officers, with the business of the hidden Emcee passing his note to Cliff raising a good laugh, the only chance in his role to show the funny side he mentions in the programme. Immaculately expressive in his dialogue and apparently charming at first, we saw him become ever more German, developing into a humourless Nazi to lead the chilling *Tomorrow Belongs to Me* and were glad when his baiting of Cliff provoked a violent response. Joining him rather unexpectedly to lead that number, **Chloe Powell** as Fräulein Kost, showed a different side following the comedy of her visiting sailors. Her dialogue was equally strong and expressed with meaning, her battle of morals with Fräulein Schneider being especially memorable.

**Jade Kempster** gave another beautifully judged performance as Fräulein Schneider, the no-longer-young survivor of life's troubles with standards to keep up (but subject to practicalities). Her two solo songs expressing her philosophy, to music really reminiscent of 1930s Berlin, were superbly sung, unusually with her standing still in the spotlight on the runway and the stage lighting cut, a magical effect only possible because her perfect (accented) diction made every word clear and her intonation and facial expressions underlined their meaning. Back on stage, her dialogue with Fräulein Kost and others was delivered as a landlady would, her coy and hesitant acceptance of the pineapple and Herr Schultz's advances and their duet *Married* touchingly done, and their agreement to part even more so.

**Shane David-Joseph**, hair greyed and adopting a stoop (brilliantly held through thick and thin), was so believable as elderly Jewish optimist Herr Schultz that it was hard to credit that he was still at school. Gloriously clear in all his dialogue and maximising his character's humour, he was also just right in the tender moments of the Pineapple scene and sang beautifully in character for that and *Married*, then demonstrating how wrong professional revivals have been to omit the number *Meeskite*, which he performed with all its verses brilliantly differentiated, showing his character's rather intoxicated hyper-excited state without blurring the words, and giving the Gorilla song its proper relevance to the plot.

**Dominique Reid** made a superb Cliff Bradshaw, a would-be writer, with a lovely American accent and un-American diffidence as he met Ernst on the train, but charm enough to enchant both Fräulein Schneider and Sally. Doubts put aside, it would be *Perfectly Marvellous* (beautifully sung) for the two to live together, later inspiring his lovely *Why Should I Wake Up?* on the runway with darkness behind, the answer being provided by Sally's pregnancy and Ernst's offer of money for being a mule with Sally overruling Cliff's doubts. Returning to find Nazi-ism rising further, his efforts to get Sally to come with him to the US or even to Paris were played with conviction, rising to desperation when she refused to leave after having an abortion. Finally, back on a train with his heartbreak well shown, he managed to start his novel: "There was a cabaret . . .", a fine touching end to a beautifully played role.

**Rebecca Ryan** was really amazing as Sally Bowles, glamorous, sexy and sensational in *Don't Tell Mama*, as she talked, sang and then belted with verve and style (the Kit Kat Girls nicely individual as they joined in) and not an easy star for jealous Max to replace after her conversation with Cliff. In the boarding house no one could have resisted her combination of vulnerability and manipulateness, put over so perfectly marvellously (as was the song), and her refusal to recognise the seriousness of the Nazi threat was made understandable in her beautifully expressed dialogue, with her superb Chelsea accent a clear sign of a privileged and sheltered upbringing. The suppressed emotion in the departure scenes was perfectly indicated and the return to sing *Cabaret* a brilliant statement of defiance.

Congratulations and thanks from all our party to everyone involved in getting the wonderful show onto the stage, especially the so-far unmentioned **Kerry Magee** (Assistant Director, in charge of Costumes and MC of the modern cabaret) and **Clare Harvell** (Production Manager and Box Office).