

Cabaret

Show Summary

Auckland Theatre Company presents Cabaret

Music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb, book by Joe Masteroff.

Cabaret is a classic musical, first staged in the 1960s and set in Berlin in 1929 and 1930. A cabaret is a nightclub with a floor show of singing, dancing and comedy, flirtatious and a little bawdy, and the Kit Kat Club is that world. Many people know one or two of its songs, but the musical itself is darker and more poignant: as the fun of the club plays on, the Nazi party is rising outside. The 1929 and 1930 setting shapes both the sexual freedom on stage and the politics closing in.

This show summary tells the story from beginning to end and separates out the sensory and staging notes, so you can see where the lighting, sound and startling moments fall. Because this is live theatre, some things may be a little different at the performance you attend. Included are photos from the dress rehearsal and links to short video clips, to help you know what to expect.

Production Notes

What to expect in the theatre

The whole show is staged as a cabaret act, so we never really leave the Kit Kat Club. When the story moves to a boarding house, a fruit shop or a train, those places are built from the world of the club, and projected signs help show where we are.

There is a lot of audience interaction, especially in the front rows and along the side aisles, with a lot of eye contact and performers coming in close. No one is brought on stage, and you are never expected to respond. The cast take their cue from you and look for eye contact and willingness before they interact, so if you do not make eye contact they will not single you out.

The characters use a range of accents. There is haze and atmospheric smoke throughout, and the sound is well balanced and mostly from the stage, without much heavy bass. There is no strobe, and the one short burst of flashing light in the second half is noted in its place.

A note on spoilers

Please read only as far as you would like

This summary tells the whole story, including the ending. If you would rather be surprised, read only as far as you would like.

To talk anything through, reach out to Sam, Auckland Theatre Company's Head of Learning and Participation, on sam@atc.co.nz.

Act One



The show begins

A quiet start, then a sudden blackout and a loud bang

Story: The stage is set up as a rundown old club, with chairs scattered across it.

Sensory and staging: Quiet, old-fashioned music plays, like an old record player, and two lights flicker very gently. Then, without warning, the stage snaps to black and there is a loud bang, like an explosion. It is sudden.



Willkommen

The Emcee welcomes us to the Kit Kat Club

Story: The Emcee, the host of the club, enters and welcomes us, and brings the wrecked club back to life around him. The cabaret performers are introduced one by one, and so is Sally Bowles, the club's singer.

Sensory and staging: A bright spotlight snaps on as the Emcee enters. A large tattered pink sheet flies away to reveal the band, the performers are picked out in bright spotlights, and the letters of the sign light up and fly into place to spell CABARET. Sally runs down the stairs and along the front of the audience saying hello, then leaves through a side door in the auditorium.



On the train

Cliff arrives in Berlin

Story: An American writer, Clifford Bradshaw, is arriving in Berlin by train. A friendly German called Ernst Ludwig helps him through customs and offers to help him find his feet in the city. Cliff does not yet know that Ernst is carrying something across the border.

Sensory and staging: The band makes the sound of the train, with a squeal as it stops. The Emcee appears as a customs officer, now speaking in a deep voice.



The boarding house

Cliff finds a room

Story: Cliff rents a room from Fräulein Schneider, who runs a boarding house and sings about making do with what life gives her. One of her lodgers, Fräulein Kost, is a sex worker.

Sensory and staging: A lodger complains there is no hot water, and shortly after, a man enters the stage almost completely naked, with only a hat covering him, for about fifteen seconds.



Don't Tell Mama

Sally performs at the club

Story: At the Kit Kat Club, Sally Bowles performs.

Sensory and staging: During her song the front three rows are lit, though they are not the focus. Sally makes a cheeky joke towards one person in the audience; it is only a joke and no one has done anything wrong. The costumes here are lacy underwear and states of undress, and the dancing is sexual and suggestive.



Perfectly Marvelous

Sally moves in with Cliff

Story: Sally and Cliff talk on the telephone, and Sally charms her way into moving in with Cliff. It is New Year's Eve. Once she has moved in, the two eat prairie oysters, which are raw eggs with sauce.

Sensory and staging: Music plays softly behind the phone conversation. A projection on the back wall shows the year change from 1929 to 1930. Some of the audience gasped as she drinks the prairie oysters.



Two Ladies

A cheeky number behind a bright sheet

Story: The Emcee performs a playful, cheeky song with two of the performers.

Sensory and staging: The number happens behind a large, bright white sheet that can feel glary. Around the club, lights set behind shell shapes at the front of the stage pulse and change colour, and bare bulbs shine brightly in different colours.



It Couldn't Please Me More (the Pineapple Song)

Herr Schultz courts Fräulein Schneider

Story: Herr Schultz, a kind Jewish man who owns a fruit shop, is falling in love with Fräulein Schneider, and brings her a pineapple as a gift.

Sensory and staging: During the song, around twenty pineapples covered in small mirrors fly in from above and catch the light like disco balls.



Tomorrow Belongs to Me

A song that turns into a Nazi anthem

Story: The performers sing a gentle song that slowly reveals itself as a Nazi anthem.

Sensory and staging: There is backlighting on the band, casting long shadows down the stage. At the end, the Emcee holds an umbrella towards the audience as if it were a weapon, then opens it.



The Money Song

Cliff takes a risky job

Story: Cliff needs money, and Ernst offers to pay him to carry a suitcase back from Paris, which Cliff does not yet realise is smuggling for the Nazi party. Around this, Sally is pregnant, possibly with Cliff's child, and begins to think about ending the pregnancy, which the characters talk about indirectly as going to see the doctor.

Sensory and staging: In this number, Sally and the Emcee come down into the front two rows on either side of the aisle. Flickering lights play across the front, middle and back of the stalls, so the light reaches the audience. There is loud tap dancing on the stage floor, and a singer hits very high operatic notes. Sally leaves through the same side door as before.





Married

An engagement to celebrate

Story: Herr Schultz and Fräulein Schneider celebrate their engagement.

Sensory and staging: The Emcee throws a handful of glittery confetti over them. Drinking is part of the world of the show, and characters drink gin and schnapps.

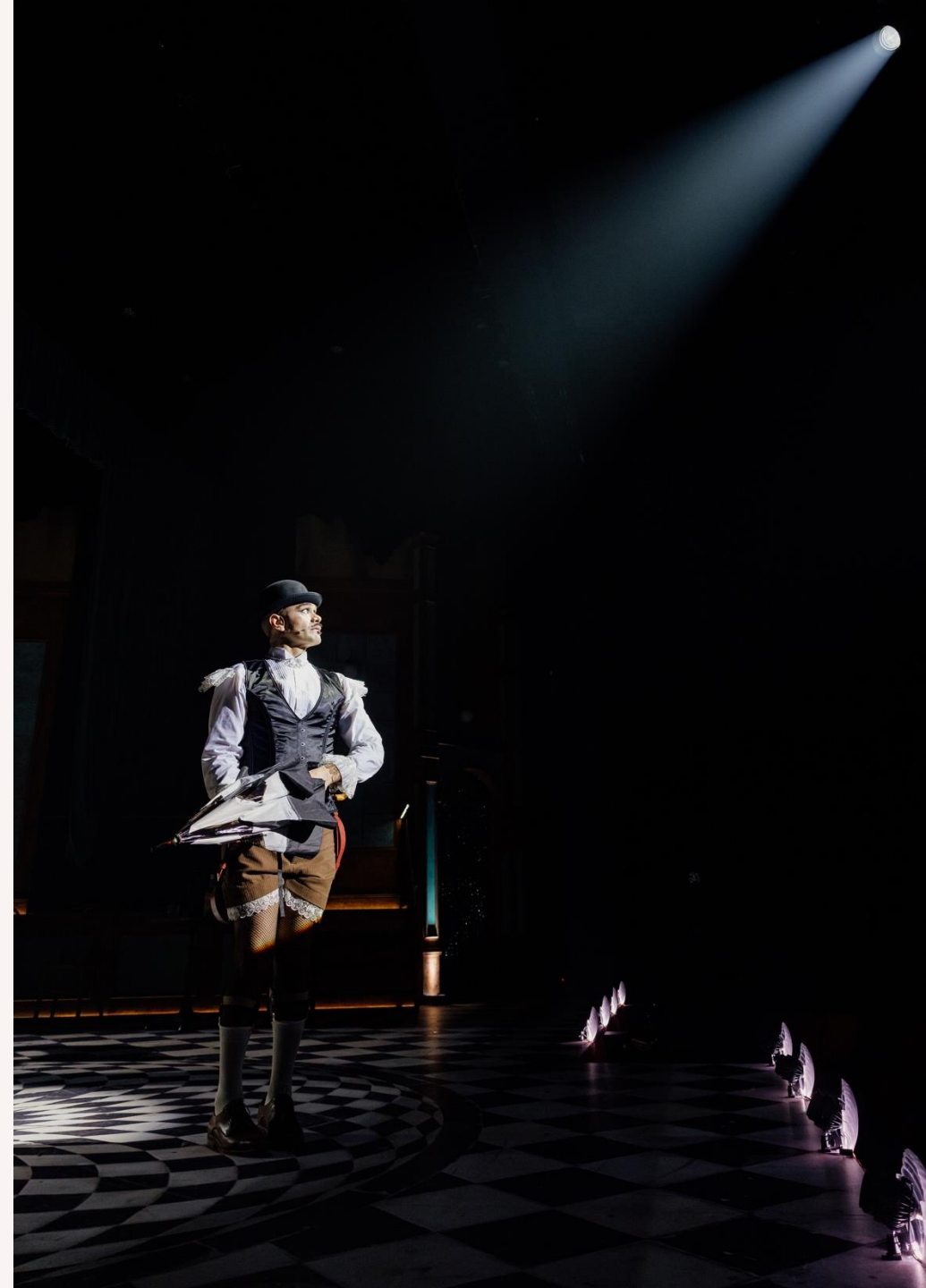


The armband

The Nazi threat arrives (end of Act One)

Story: At the engagement party the mood turns. Ernst arrives wearing a Nazi armband, the first one we see. Fräulein Kost reveals that Herr Schultz is Jewish and makes an anti-Semitic joke. This is the end of the first half.

Sensory and staging: The Emcee opens an umbrella with a swastika on it.



Interval

About twenty minutes

The interval is about twenty minutes. You can leave and come back, or stay in your seat.

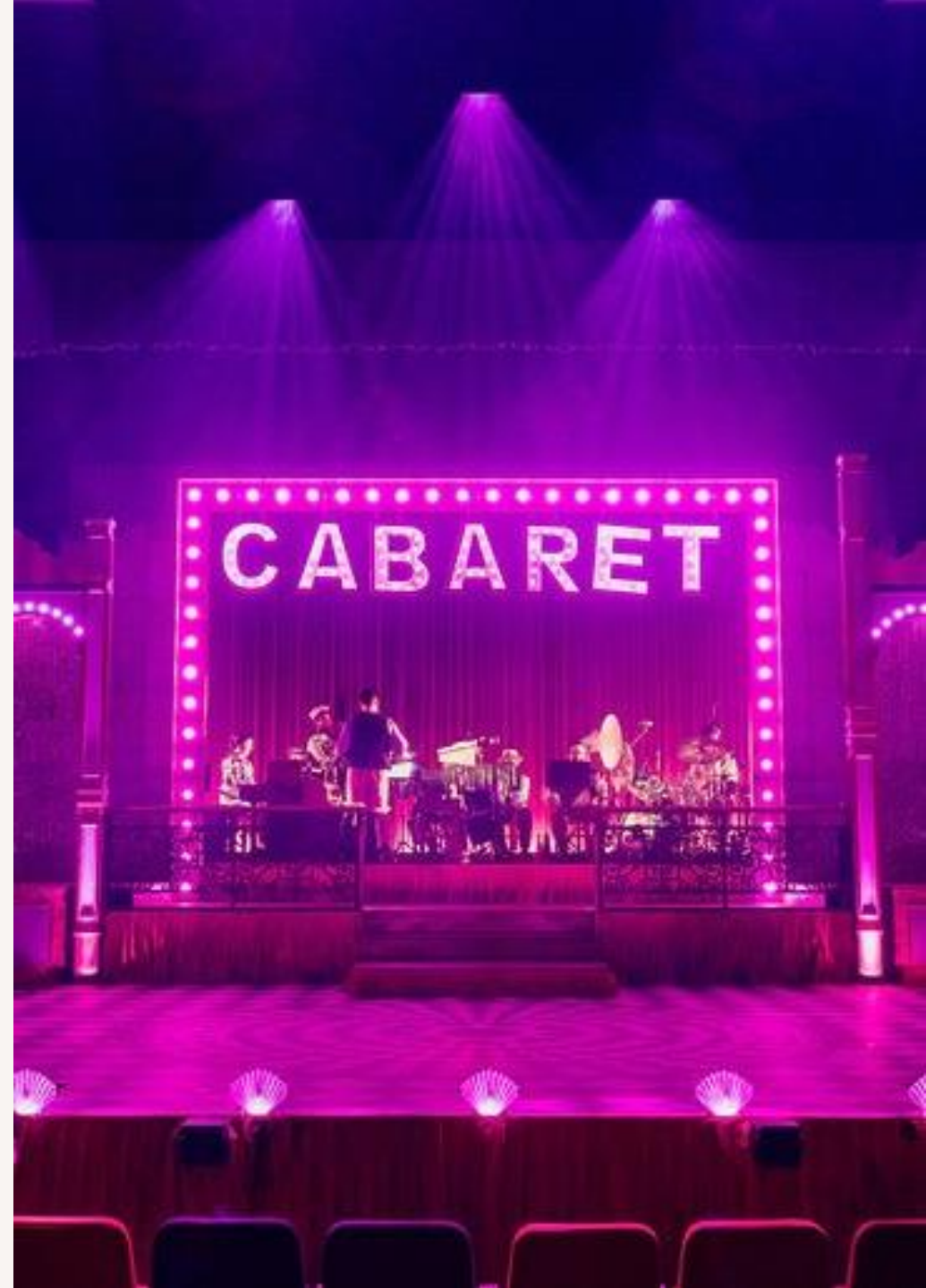
Act Two

The second half begins

The Entr'acte, then a kick line ending in a Nazi salute

Story: The second half opens with the Entr'acte, several minutes of music before the story starts again. It then moves into a kick line that ends with the whole company in a line giving a Nazi salute.

Sensory and staging: During the Entr'acte the band plays alone while colourful lights move around and shine into the audience's eyes, especially at the front. During the kick line that follows, the lights fade out on the audience.



The brick through the window

A loud shattering-glass moment

Story: We are in Herr Schultz's fruit shop.

Sensory and staging: At the end of a short reprise, the Emcee leans over a balcony and throws a rock to stand for a brick coming through the shop window. The window and its string of lights shake, there is a loud sound of shattering glass, and the lighting changes sharply, with light coming through the back of the set.



If You Could See Her

The gorilla song and its anti-Semitic turn

Story: The Emcee performs a song with a performer in a gorilla costume. At the end, the song reveals itself as an anti-Semitic image, comparing the gorilla to a Jewish person.

Sensory and staging: The gorilla runs through the audience, up one aisle, around and down another, and back to the stage.



What Would You Do?

Fräulein Schneider makes her choice

Story: Frightened of what is coming, Fräulein Schneider decides she cannot marry Herr Schultz. She sings, asking what anyone in her place would do.

Sensory and staging: This is a quiet, still number.

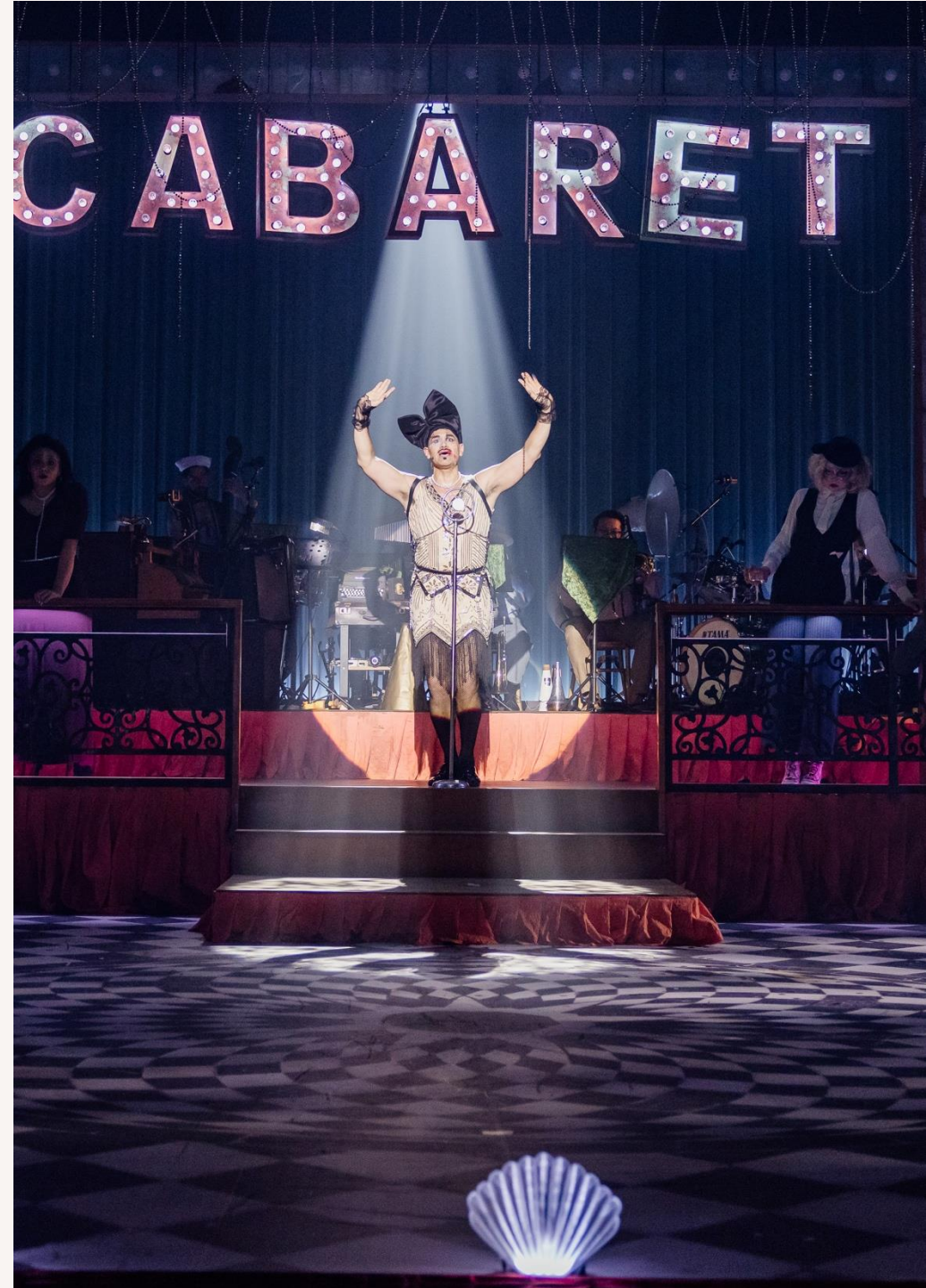


I Don't Care Much

The world outside presses in

Story: The Emcee sings, and the world outside the club presses in.

Sensory and staging: Performers come down the onstage stairs and sit at the cabaret tables. At the top of the number, dancers wearing swastikas dance with the Jewish characters and treat them badly, and one is thrown to the ground. At the end, light shines through the back of the set.



The fight

Cliff is beaten; a burst of flashing light

Story: Cliff has realised what Ernst and the party are, and refuses to carry any more money for them. After the line, "Is it because of that Jew at the party?", Cliff is beaten by Nazi guards.

Sensory and staging: During the beating there is a fifteen second burst of flashing light. It stays on the stage rather than shining out into the audience, the stage stays lit, and it is not as bright, so it reads as a flashing effect rather than a strobe.

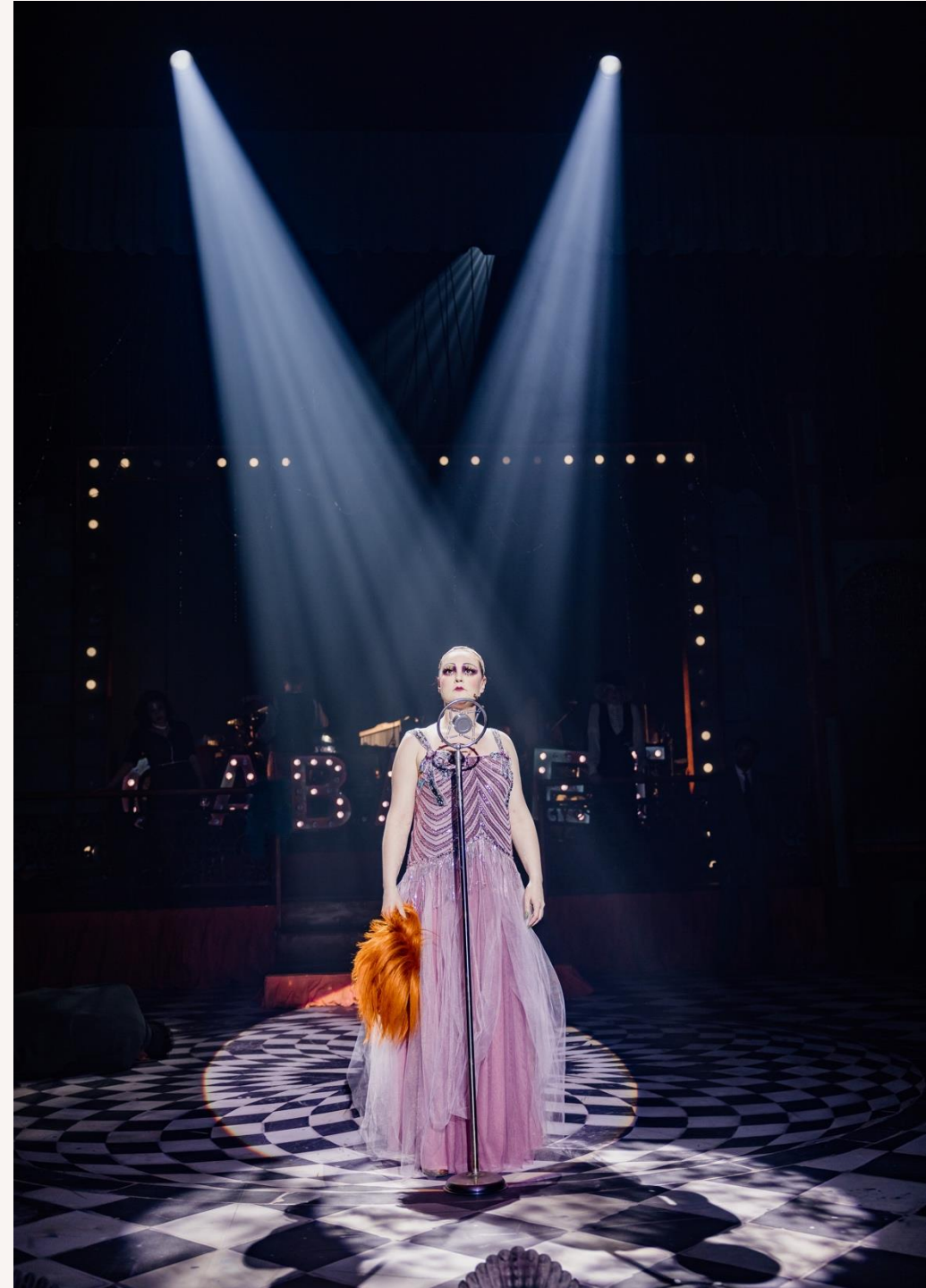


Cabaret

Sally chooses the club

Story: Sally has ended her pregnancy and will not leave Berlin. She returns to the club and sings the song "Cabaret," choosing the world of the club whatever happens outside it.

Sensory and staging: This is one of the show's biggest emotional moments. The staging, lighting and music all build to a release, and the sign shines brightly above her.



Sally and Cliff part

Cliff leaves Berlin

Story: Cliff wants to leave Berlin and take Sally with him, but she stays. In one moment Cliff goes to hit Sally, but stops himself. Cliff leaves Berlin on the train, and begins to write about everything he has seen.

Sensory and staging: The Emcee appears again as the officer, and an announcement is made through a hand-held megaphone. This is a quiet, tense scene rather than a loud one.



The end of the show

A stark final image, then bright bows

Story: The whole cast gather and look out at the audience as the world of the club falls away.

Sensory and staging: The green borders around the stage fly away to reveal black. The lights brighten to a stark white. The Emcee lifts a chair and brings it down hard so it smashes, which is loud and sudden. The stage goes quickly dark, and you hear the sound of aeroplanes and war. After this, the cast return for their bows with bright, upbeat music, so the evening finishes on a lighter note.



Want to know more?

We are here to help

Reach out to Sam, Auckland Theatre Company's Head of Learning and Participation, on sam@atc.co.nz.

We hope you enjoy *Cabaret*.