

Cabaret Bowles you over with ecstasy and irony

THEATRE

Cabaret, St Oswald's Hall, Montpelier Park ★★★

THE ecstasy and the irony are present and correct in local amateur company Tempo's production of the hit Broadway musical Cabaret, up in Morningside.

Even before the show itself starts, the bar opens early and there's half an hour of cabaret entertainment to set the scene, with members of the cast performing moody numbers of the 1930s Berlin nightclub era by the likes of Kurt Weill.

Maybe they wouldn't all have passed the auditions for a spot at the real Kit Kat club, but there's plenty of attitude to their performances and their attention to detail is exactly right. It is definitely worth arriving early to see them and there's also the benefit of getting a good seat down at the front.

The show itself starts at a pace which lives up to the company's name. Norma Kinnear makes a nicely androgynous and cynical Emcee, as she introduces the girls of the Kit Kat club – all wearing the sort of underwear which, while it reveals less than a modern bikini, is the staple of the saucy picture postcard.

The ten-strong girlie chorus line, with the solidly purse-lipped and pouting boy members of the chorus, put on a suitably lascivious performance. The hip-thrusting moves look good, but more adventurous direction on the part of Colin Peter and Jill Cruttschank could have let the cast engage more fully with their audience.

If it is the stockings, suspenders and displayed flesh which are Cabaret's headline assets, it is the play's plot which lingers. And this production has an easy telling of the story of Clifford Bradshaw, a young American author in pre-war Berlin who meets up with a naive young English cabaret performer, Sally Bowles, and falls in love. James Dickson makes a steadfast

Cliff, he has an easy singing voice and creates a quite believable character in the man who is horrified to find out that he has been running errands for the Nazi Party.

Gabrielle Pavone is also strong as Sally Bowles. If her cabaret-stage movement could be more emphatic, her singing voice is easily up to its task.

Unfortunately the company does not keep the pace up when the show moves away from the Kit Kat club and into Fraulein Schneider's boarding house. However, the jump between erotic, seedy intensity and subtly developing piece of political theatre is not an easy one, and they do well to keep the story clear and flowing.

Ken Christie is fine when creating the role of Herr Schultz, the elderly Jewish man who lives in the room down the corridor from Cliff and is in love with Fraulein Schneider, played by Doreen McGillivray. But if

their characters are fine, their duets could still have done with a bit more preparation.

It is the depiction of the closing in of the Nazi Party on free-living Berlin which makes or breaks any production of Cabaret. And on this front, Tempo have got it just about right, leaving the audience just a little shocked at its sudden and brutal ending.

● Runs until Saturday
Thom Dibdin

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WARM WELCOME: The cast of Cabaret, including the Kit Kat girlie chorus, dressed in their 'saucy postcard' underwear.

Picture: COLIN MATTERSLEY