

“Borrowed Time”

“The Dangers of Political Inaction”

“dancing on the edge of the volcano”

**“hedonism on one hand and utter despair on the other.”**

THEME is the most important Aristotelian Element in this play:

**“human apathy will always facilitate human horrors”**

### **Why this play now?**

This is an election year. I have heard many people express fatalism and despair about their perceived lack of agency to make positive change in society. For example, I have heard people say that they won't bother to vote because neither candidate is the one they want, and because “it doesn't make a difference anyway.” This hopelessness leads to inaction and apathy and is an absolute harbinger of doom. If people who care for other people just give up and stop striving towards the good we are lost lost lost. I aim to draw a parallel between the despair and subsequent inaction and apathy of Weimar Berlin, and the despair and inaction of many people today. I want this production to be a clear warning: hopeless apathy facilitates evil. Apathy that enables evil has happened before and it is on us to prevent it from happening again.

### **Cabaret takes place 1929-30 Berlin.**

The word Cabaret comes from an old word for “small room” (Walloon? Norman French? Picard?) German Cabaret (Kabarett) was known for its satire, and especially its **Gallows Humor**. Intensely cynical. Pointedly irreverent. Nazis worked on crushing it as soon as they came to power in 1933. Many Kabarett performers were forced to flee, many went to concentration camps (a fact that I will reference in the finale of our production).

### **The Weimar Republic**

Germany (The Weimar Republic) had borrowed money to help pay for the reparations it owed after WWI (1914-1918), and to help get itself out of its inflation crisis. When the American economy imploded in 1929, it called in its debts from Germany. This led to a complete economic collapse and total political and social chaos. Germany was desperately poor. While there was some celebratory social liberation that took place in the period, this is overshadowed by the despair of the people. The Kit Kat Club doesn't represent a celebration of Weimar Berlin's sexuality, it's a **desperate** sexual trade inspired by the economic crisis.

There was a Nihilistic hedonism brought about by a loss of faith in the meaning of anything post WWI. Sort of: ‘Nothing matters and death is coming so get drunk and party.’ This self-indulgent despair allowed

things to get worse because distracted, apathetic people did nothing to stop the rising nazi regime. The increasing social desperation made Germans vulnerable to hate, scape-goating, and demagoguery and allowed Hitler to take control.

**The Emcee is the lynch pin of our production. He is Mephistopheles, The Joker, Loki (of myth not of Marvel), Mr. Dark.** Sinister and cynical. Charmingly seductive but delighted to watch the world burn. Doesn't take action to destroy humans, just gives them the means with which to destroy themselves then sits back to watch the show. He was created by Hal Prince to represent Germany (and was not a character in Isherwood's book). Based on an Emcee Prince saw in a bar housed in a bombed-out church outside of Stuttgart while he was in the Army in the 50s. "Moximes" The club is the metaphor for Berlin and **the Emcee is the metaphor for a malevolent Id that intentionally distracts the citizens of Berlin, allowing nazis to take control.**

An important note to remember: Hal Prince asked the audience to look inward to consider how they would have reacted to the growing evils in Berlin. He started rehearsals by showing his cast a current news image of racists in the USA. Find a way to emphasize current events in our production. Facilitate the association, in both the audience AND the cast/production team, between the rise of racism and hate then, and the rise of it now.

### **Character Analysis and Casting Needs. Proof before Posting to Audition Call Board:**

#### **Emcee:**

~any gender/age/ethnicity

~strong singer/dancer

~German dialect

~sexual content/dancing, lewd behavior. The Emcee will mime sexual acts with other performers in an exaggerated burlesque style

An incredibly **charismatic** deceiver, the Emcee is like Mephistopheles or the Joker or Mr. Dark or Loki (the one from Norse myth, not the one from the superhero-movies). Mercurial, charming, **cynical** and wry, the Emcee represents the seductive oblivion of hopeless, hedonistic despair. The Emcee knows how this story plays out and that humans will choose the quick hedonistic fix rather than make the effort to fight true evil. Perhaps, secretly, the Emcee wishes humanity would make the better choice, despite the knowledge that they never will. He does not change or grow throughout the course of the show.

#### **Cliff:**

~male presenting/20s-30s/any ethnicity

~strong singer

~there might be a romantic kiss

A **nervous**, sensitive writer trying to find himself. Mostly gay (with some bi leanings) he is closeted and fascinated with the liberality present in Berlin. Despite this fascination, he is still trying to pass. He is drawn to Sally not only because she can be a beard, but because her aggressive individualism is what he wishes he was brave enough to have. He is a fundamentally **kind** and good person. He starts the show as a hopeful, naïve person focused on finding the courage to be himself. He ends the show as a wiser, sadder person.

**Sally:**

~Female presenting/20s/any ethnicity

~Strong singer/dancer

~British dialect

~sexual content/dancing, lewd behavior. there might be a romantic kiss

Sally is, on the surface, a mischievous, charming, gloriously self-indulgent individualist who loves being in the spotlight of notoriety. This masks a deep-seated **desperation**. She is afraid to be herself (there is perhaps an element of self-loathing there), hiding behind the “character” of the fun-loving, scandalous party girl. She is **avoidant** and doesn’t want to look at hard or ugly things. She lacks resilience, and if things get “too real” she dives into alcohol and drugs. Reality takes too much effort...it hurts and is boring and requires commitment and responsibility. That is not the story in which Sally wants to live, so she does all she can to stay in the boozy, glitzy, sensationalized world of the Cabaret in which she can avoid looking at anything too real or too hard. She starts the show on a rather manic high. There is a period in the middle of the show where she considers “growing up” and making a family with the sweet, sincere Cliff (because in this time period that’s what growing up meant), but ultimately she runs back to the easy oblivion of the Cabaret. She ends the show full of defiant, exhausted despair.

**F. Schneider:**

~Female presenting/50s-60s/any ethnicity

~Strong singer

~German Dialect

~There may be a kiss. Super romantic.

F. Schneider is a **survivor**. It’s not that she doesn’t have romance - she does. But she has lived enough to know that “winter always comes” so she shouldn’t place too much faith in spring. She is not at all unkind, nor is she cold. She is realistic and she knows that love does not, in fact, make the world go round. She is in love with Shultz, but she is not giddy (well, maybe he makes her a little giddy, but that’s uncharacteristic for her). She appreciates every good thing while knowing that no good thing will last. She begins the play pragmatic. The middle of the play finds her full of hope for her future with Schultz. She ends the play sad, unsurprised, and steadfast in her commitment to survival.

**Herr Schultz:**

~Male presenting/50s-60s/any ethnicity. Individuals with connections to Judaism (by heritage, faith, or culture) strongly encouraged to audition for this character.

~German dialect

~There may be a kiss. Super romantic.

Herr Schultz is a healer and a **nurturer**. He is **kind**, down to the core of his being. He appreciates the beauty in small things. He does not judge others. He believes the best of people, not because he is silly or naïve, but because he has worked hard to *choose* belief in their goodness. He begins the play happy and in love, and ends the play desperately clinging to his belief that people will do the right thing.

### **F. Kost:**

~female presenting/30s-40s/any ethnicity

~German dialect

~rather comical smoochy stuff. There might be an exaggerated kiss.

F. Kost is an **earthy** woman who has a sense of humor about life. She isn't afraid of the dirty work of survival and will side with whoever is most powerful in order to get along in life. She is a **business woman**, who first sells her body for survival (frankly, with good humor and without shame), and then sells her conscience. She is unconcerned with questions of morality or ethics- she just does what she needs to do without thinking too much about what is happening to other people. She starts the play as a bit of a comic figure, sneaking her lovers into her room and bantering with F. Schneider. She ends the play as a Nazi sympathizer not because she believes in their agenda, but because they seem to be the "winning team" of the moment. She will change her loyalties at the drop of a hat if needed. She is not consciously malevolent or rancorous, she is just only concerned with her own needs and what is right in front of her. She is passively **complicit** in great evil without giving it much thought.

### **Ernst:**

~Male presenting/20s-40s/preferably will pass as ethnically German

~German Dialect

~He is a Nazi who says hateful things.

Ernst has "drunk the Kool-Aid" of the Nazi party and is fully committed to their hateful agenda. Perhaps this is because he really suffered during WWI and has lost his sense of self. Perhaps it is because he was starving until the Nazis promised him prosperity and he was hungry enough to sell his soul. Whatever the reasons, Ernst must be played as a human being, not a monster. It is not imaginary monsters who commit genocide, it is people. The message of the play is lost if this is not clear. People create evil and it is only other people who can stop it.

The audience should really like Ernst at first. He has an **agreeable** demeanor and seems very benign. This makes his horrible beliefs all the more upsetting when they are revealed. He begins the play as an affable character and he keeps his Nazi beliefs secret. He becomes more and more brazen, aggressive, and frightening as the play progresses.

### **The Kit Kat Dancers (Helga, Rosie, Lulu, Texas, Fritzie, Frenchie, Victor, Bobby)**

~Any gender/age/ethnicity

~Extremely strong dancers

~lots and lots of sexual content. mimed sexual acts with other performers in an exaggerated burlesque style.

Lewd behavior and vulgarity.

The Kit Kat Dancers are burlesque, erotic dancers/sex workers in a desperate, impoverished Berlin. They are tools the Emcee uses to distract citizens from the growing Nazi threat. They represent the empty hedonism and apathy that comes from profound despair. They help people “forget their troubles” to the point that the troubles have no problems taking over. The Kit Kat Klub dancers tempt people to seek the opiate of easy gratification so they can’t engage in the sober and scary work of eliminating hate and violence from their country. An important note: The liberal sexuality of the Kit Kat Klub is not the problem here...social inaction and apathy are. Hopeless people who believe that nothing they do matters are self-indulgently drinking and romancing themselves stupid instead of doing everything they can to fight the Nazis. They do not change or grow throughout the course of the show (or maybe they do? Does the Emcee smoke them down to the filter and then abandon them to their fate?).

### **The Sailors (Otto, Boris, Karl):**

~male presenting/20s/any ethnicity

~strong dancers

~German dialects

The sailors are the German young men who get caught up in the Nazi movement. They start the play a little wild, fun-loving and naïve. They end the play as indoctrinated and aggressive soldiers for the Nazi regime.

### **The Patrons (Max the Customs Officer, Chanteuse Maria, Lonely Heidi, The Baroness)**

~Any gender/age/ethnicity

The Patrons are a general example of the people of Berlin. They begin the play as desperate and nihilistic revelers and end the play as Nazis.

### **First Thoughts, Anticipated Scenic Needs, Preliminary Staging Ideas, Concerns:**

~A challenge is to create the feel of intimacy on the Ted Paul. Lower the pit half way and put café tables in there? Make it feel like an extension of the audience? Then during the non-café scenes the performers sit down there, watching real life instead of being watched? Back and forth?

~Another challenge: IMPORTANT: The play can NOT come off as condemning liberal sexuality or homosexual love. The free and liberal sexuality of the club isn’t the problem here, the lack of concern for what is going on outside the club is. Make sure the production doesn’t accidentally suggest that sexuality (of any

flavor) is the “bad guy,” rather than **apathy** is. The sex isn’t the problem, the problem is the self-indulgent inattention to the world. The inaction that comes from a loss of hope.

~ There also needs to be a distinct “inside” and “outside.” Outside, the threat of the Nazis grows throughout the play, imposing more and more on the insular and self-indulgent world of the club. The Emcee needs to be able to “close off” the sounds of the coming nazis to continue to distract the people inside the club. Upstage windows with curtains to either bring in or out the increasing Nazi threat?

~ Two musicals: the real world and the “limbo” world of the club. Both need a different feel.

The musical styles are different. The way characters speak to each other is different. Don’t let actors outside the club play to the house. Keep them well within the world of the play. BUT the Emcee and dancers can play to the house all the time. Anything that takes place within the club can potentially break the fourth wall (be consistent with this). Nothing inside the boarding house or fruit shop can. The acting style in the boarding house and fruit shop should be more grounded than the acting style in the Club. This can extend to design approaches as well. The boarding house is in the world. The Club is more liminal.

~Scene changes need to be practically instantaneous and smoothly incorporated into the action. There should be no “staccato” scene breaks.

~I don’t need verisimilitude in any area of design. However, no area of design should be so concept-heavy that it confuses or otherwise distracts from the stated theme of our particular production. The spectacle in the show should come from the performers.

~thoughts on MC “I Don’t Care Much”

Otherworldly. Sinister. Perhaps stage it so a nazi is pushing around a Jewish man on one side of the club? The MC sings this in the other patron’s ears, telling them not to care much? Or is this revealing a secret part of the Emcee that is bitter about humans making the wrong choices again? Or is this to Sally, regarding her choice of whether or not to leave with Cliff?

~thoughts on Sally “Cabaret”

The club is all nazis now? Or Cliff has been beaten to the point that he hasn’t yet made it off the stage and she has to sing while she watches him suffer (if we go in this direction we will need blood effects stashed upstage for him to access during the combat)? Or perhaps this is her struggling to plug her ears as the reality of the outside world breaks in?

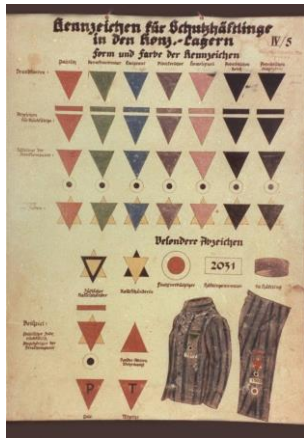
~thoughts on Shneider and Schultz “Pineapple”

The audience must fall in love with them falling in love. These two are not comic relief, they are the characters whose true heart and hope get destroyed and this must be devastating to the audience. This song must be sweet and sincere. It will absolutely be funny (“pineapples give him gas”) but must be the kind of funny that makes the audience feel close to them rather than the kind of funny that makes the audience mock them.

~thoughts on full company “Finale”

I want to keep the Emcee powerful and malevolent all the way to the end. I imagine him “snatching” the music and lights out of the air to end the show, forcing us to black. There is such a history with this character and I want to honor that while also making him our own. Rather than drawing from the (Brilliant) impish and somewhat omniscient Emcee of Joel Grey, the (brilliant) vulnerable and emotive Emcee of Allan Cumming, or the (brilliant) demonic marionette of Eddie Redmayne, I want our Emcee to tower and lurk over the action like a... (like a what? A gargoyle? A golem? I like the idea of golem because of its origin story but I don’t want the Emcee to be just a thoughtless machine)...like Poe’s pendulum, fascinating the audience with his increasingly dangerous proximity. He needs to actively “push” the world of the play forward towards the cliff. He knows what he is doing. He knows how society will react. He is calculating and cynically amused. He is always there in the shadows (both physically on the stage and metaphorically as the id made manifest).

The Emcee will remain powerful and malevolent during the finale, and not appear in concentration camp garb. Instead, **every single other character in the play** will appear onstage in the finale, all wearing different (and relevant to their character. See below.) concentration camp ID badges and with makeup effects to suggest suffering and abuse. The last moments of the play will consist of the Emcee advancing (charging?) menacingly towards the house. The idea I am going for is that “they come for everyone eventually.”



~Moving screens (boarded up windows?) reveal Emcee at top of show?

~Huge swastika on cyclorama gradually gets brighter until it oppresses the final number?

### Visual reference links to pass around:

~Anita Berber and Sebastian Droste on film:

[https://www.google.com/search?sca\\_esv=dbfe99b76a0ba531&sca\\_upv=1&q=anita+berber&tbm=vid&source=1nms&prmd=ivmtzbsn&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjWtJuH87WFAxWMkYkEHSKvBdoQ0pQJegQIDxAB&biw=824&bih=706&dpr=2#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:b3f30573,vid:3PejxewpJfM,st:0](https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=dbfe99b76a0ba531&sca_upv=1&q=anita+berber&tbm=vid&source=1nms&prmd=ivmtzbsn&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjWtJuH87WFAxWMkYkEHSKvBdoQ0pQJegQIDxAB&biw=824&bih=706&dpr=2#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:b3f30573,vid:3PejxewpJfM,st:0)

~1927 Berlin colorized footage with artificial sound: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nFupfJk4T8>

~1930s Berlin colorized footage with artificial sound:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdyWMggsWWE>

~1920s cabaret performers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pU5ARUb0AZU>

~Jewish Berlin Cabaret:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nctBxqaB13A>

~Dance scene from The Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0D4fHieW8o>

~1920s burlesque dancing

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_YxATEOOMo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_YxATEOOMo)

~1920s laughing records

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Un4hfBBiRuc>



~Queer History  
of Weimar  
Germany:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNGvga0QKZg&t=964s>

films to try to find and watch: Metropolis, Nosferatu, Waxworks, The Student of Prague, The Hands of Orlach, The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, the Man who Laughs, The Blue Angel, Different from the Others

Other things to research more before rehearsals begin

“WEIMAR REPUBLIC EXCESS”

CONRAD VEIGHT

FRITZ LANG

ANITA BERBER\* dances of vice horror and ecstasy



WERNER FINCK (a concerned individualist)

CLAIR WALDORFF

DR. MAGNUS HIRSCHFELD

GEORGE GROSS

Isherwood's favorite bar: The Cosy Corner

Starter Reference images from period and adjacent periods:



( I love this one of Anita Berber and Sebastian Droste. Sally and Emcee?)













1



Shirley Temple's father from *Kismet* (a *Kismet* 1955 film) (Hollywood film) by Dr. Robert West. Studio: Warner Bros. Stage: New York City.

One of 21 more world-class images from the National Film Archive of the United States. This image is available in Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license. It was obtained from the NFA's archive collection in May 2014 and it remains in the public domain by agreement with the NFA under a legal waiver. If you have any questions, please contact: [info@nfa.gov](mailto:info@nfa.gov). Photographs by the NFA from the last century of silent cinema you can donate here to the NFA: [www.nfa.gov](http://www.nfa.gov).











*"Kohala"  
Bar and  
Luncheon  
Room*



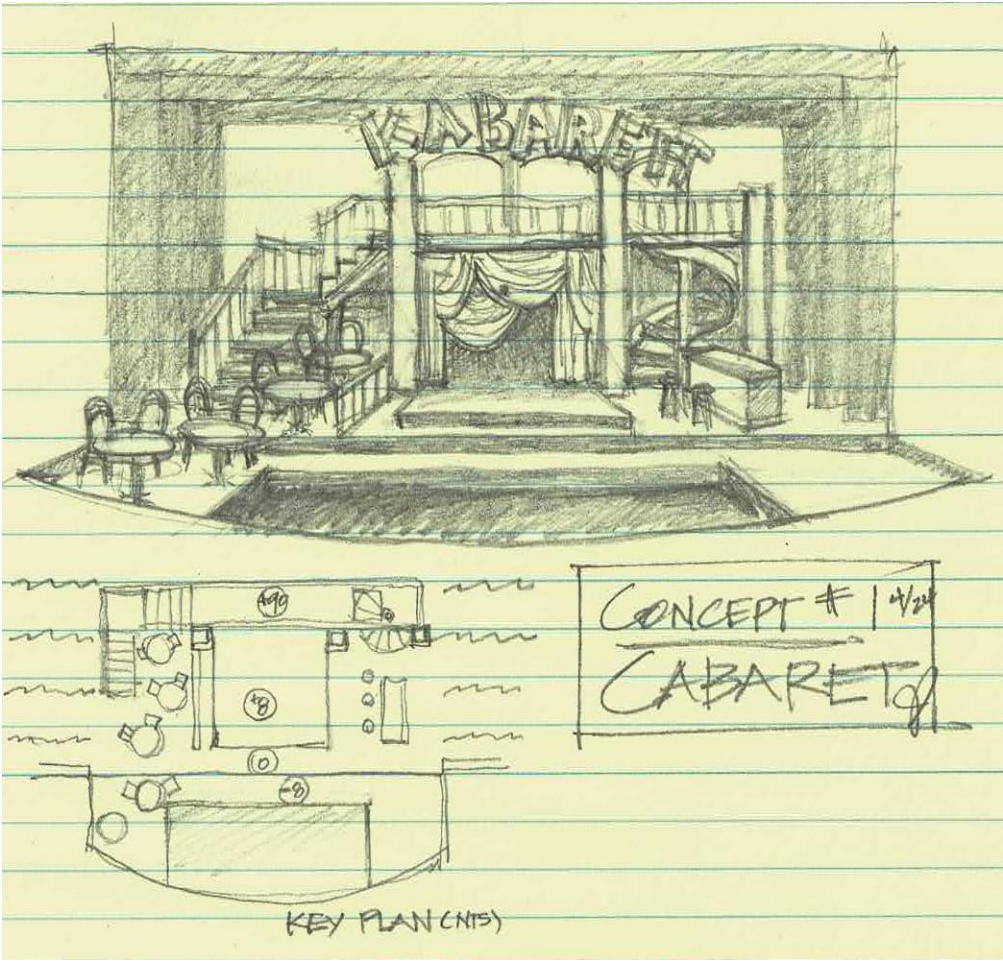




ZOOM







John David Paul, Scene Designer

Concept Sketch #1





John David Paul, Scene Designer

Model #9, Living Room



John David Paul, Scene Designer

Model #9