

# WILLKOMMEN

Francis Fee is  
marvellous as the  
Cabaret MC

Last night, I was transported back to 1930s Berlin to spend an evening at the risqué Kit Kat Club. As I entered what used to be the Playhouse Theatre in London, I was greeted by gyrating dancers hanging from balconies in the bar, before being escorted to my seat at a table complete with vintage telephone and a ringside view of the stage. As the house lights went down, the MC welcomed us in a variety of languages. **“Leave your troubles outside!” he commanded.**

Having spent a small fortune on tickets (a birthday treat for my 89-year-old dad) I was determined to leave everything outside and enjoy the immersive experience of this new production of *Cabaret*. I have seen the film many times. Growing up, Liza Minnelli was a favourite in our house (superseded only by Barbra Streisand). My parents took me to see her show when I was a barely a teenager. My sister and I would make up dances to the *Cabaret* soundtrack. My memories connected to the film are joyful and uplifting.

My mother was a survivor. A hidden child who lost most of her family. A young girl, just six years old when her twin sister was deported to Auschwitz and straight to her death, leaving Mum alone. Hardly surprising, the Holocaust was a subject never mentioned in our house, and that included watching films about Nazis. Except for *Cabaret*. That was allowed, encouraged even. Why? Because Liza Minnelli was simply fabulous as Sally Bowles, the English lead character.

It was a pity to have missed the original cast of Jessie Buckley and Eddie Redmayne, but Amy Lennox as Sally and Fra (short for Francis) Fee as the MC were marvellous, as were the rest of the



ensemble. The first half was over far too soon in a blur of Kit Kat Club decadence. The endearing friendship of hedonist Sally with struggling American novelist Cliff, and the gentle humour of Jewish fruit-seller Herr Schultz wooing his landlady, Fraulein Schneider, with all manner of imported fruit before finally conquering her, not with a diamond but with a pineapple – from California *noch* – were a delight to watch. It ended with a moving performance of *Tomorrow Belongs To Me*, a rousing number sung at first by one Nazi Youth, slowly joined by more voices one-by-one until the whole chorus is singing. A prophetic symbol of the rise of the Nazis. According to film trivia database, IMDb, “it has often been mistaken for a genuine Nazi anthem and led to the songwriters, Kander and Ebb, being accused of antisemitism, despite the fact both were Jewish.”

The second act turned even darker, much like the era of Weimar-Germany portrayed. Kristallnacht was symbolised by the breaking of glass under the chuppah, an almighty bang and falling tickertape. Oh, how I wished to return to the carefree days before I had the knowledge I have now, of what happened in 1930s Germany. I felt as if I were the only person in the theatre who understood what this was meant to represent. When Herr Schultz naively declares “I’m Jewish, yes. But I’m German first,” I could have been listening to one of the many AJR members who have told

me that their parents said and thought the same at that time. I looked to my dad and sister sitting next to me who, like almost everyone else in the audience, were oblivious to the symbolism. “Kristallnacht!” whispered the woman sitting behind me to her companion. “Oh, thank god,” I thought. I’m not the only one.”

Fraulein Schneider breaks off her engagement to her Jewish beau after a warning from a Nazi friend. The MC makes antisemitic comments at the end of *If You Could See Her Through My Eyes*. Life is changing for everyone. Sally leaves her heart and soul in the theatre with a haunting rendition of the title song, and I was left devastated. Devastated that the show had ended and I would be unlikely to be able to afford to watch it again, at least not this production. And also, guilty that I loved it so much when it is such an ugly story. Most of all, I wanted to gather the cast around me to tell them more about what happened next. Do they realise the cruelty and enormity of what followed?

I loved it, I hated what it portrayed. If someone offered me a ticket I would go back in a heartbeat.

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