



Come to the

CABARET

by EUGENE YIGA

Charl-Johan Lingenfelder, musical director of the recently concluded *Rocky Horror Show*, chats about making his return to the stage in the Fugard Theatre's production of *Cabaret*.

ERIC ABRAHAM
AND
THE FUGARD THEATRE
PRESENT

EBB AND MASTEROFF'S SHIT MUSICAL

Where did your love for music begin?

I guess my love started with my love for performance. My sister was an amazing pianist and used to play for ballet class in our town and I would hang around in the back of the class and pretend to do all the dance steps. And after ballet I would sit at the piano and pretend to play what she had been playing. I was about four at the time.

Is this what you always wanted to do with your life or did you have other plans?

For a long time I wanted to be a vet. Growing up in a small town, I was always surrounded by animals and was obsessed with the James Herriot books. Hence my passion to want to work with animals. Then I threatened to run away with the circus. And by puberty that had somehow translated to me wanting to be a fashion designer. I quite accidentally ended up doing what I do, I suppose.

Can you still remember what it was like the first time you performed on stage?

I was always a very nervous performer. The possibility of failure was never an option and always a massive obstacle and probably one of the reasons I stopped performing. I remember performing a Dutch national dance at my school prize giving at age seven and wetting my pants before I had to go on. Mortifying! But I kept going back for more punishment.

Are there any major setbacks or disappointments from your past?

Not really setbacks or disappointments, but after I reached relatively quick "fame" with my disposable mini-musicals *Almost The Sound of Music* and *Follies 3:16* in the 90s, I first had *Almost The Sound Of Music* banned by 20th Century Fox and *Follies 3:16* panned by the Afrikaans media as being blasphemous and me being an example of the traitor in the Afrikaner community. I absolute had no life-skills to deal with these incidents and this caused me to stop creating my own work. I didn't realise that the arts could be this harsh. It was a rude awakening.

How did you bounce back from these?

I stopped creating my own work and started focusing more on collaboration. I guess I had to confront my fear of failure and look at what I do from a different perspective. Fear of failure has now become an obsession with pushing boundaries and trying new things and challenging all my comfort zones on a daily basis. I also don't read reviews.

And what did the experiences teach you?

The universe is governed by change; we need to embrace it. Failure is as undesirable as ever but a very real possibility. I'm not scared of failure anymore. It's awful but an opportunity for growth. When I work with musicians I have a motto: "Wrong but Strong", which encourages them to make honest

CARET

ERIC AR
OF
THE FUGA
PRO

KANDER, EBB AND SMASH HIT

mistakes in the rehearsal process. An honest mistake is one you make in an attempt at doing something outside of your comfort zone. It pushes your abilities and makes you become better at what you do. And if it's spectacularly funny... bonus!

What's been your biggest professional highlight so far?

There have been many highlights, but if I have to single out an experience it would be working as a composer and musical director with Eve Ensler on *Emotional Creature* in South Africa, Paris, San Francisco and New York. As South Africans, we are so used to undervaluing when comparing ourselves with international counterparts. Working with Eve and director Jo Bonney proved that talent is one thing; being willing to work hard and push to become the best you possibly could be is a different thing. We need to believe more in ourselves and then understand that once we take up the challenge of an undertaking, we also take on the responsibility of striving to be exceptional. We won't always achieve it, but we should always strive for it.

Without giving too much away, what is *Cabaret* about?

Cabaret is set in Berlin in 1929 at a time when the post-World War One decadence of the Weimar Republic was about to be upended by the rising Nazi movement. It revolves around the young English cabaret performer Sally Bowles and her exploits in and around the seedy Kit Kat Klub. The club serves as metaphor for the political developments of the time.

Could you tell us more about your character?

I play the Master of Ceremonies – or Emcee as he is called in the play – the host at the Kit Kat Klub. He is a questionable character that entices the audiences with decadence and doesn't shy away from holding up a mirror to show them their own true selves.

And how are you preparing for the role?

Thoroughly, I hope!

How do you feel about being back on stage after all the time you've spent 'behind the scenes'?

Of course I'm terrified! I would've been worried if I wasn't. But I'm ready. I think I'm doing this for a whole new set of reasons to when I was performing initially and that prospect excites me.

Do you prefer one aspect (behind the scenes or on stage) over the other?

Absolutely not. I've been extremely lucky in that I've had the most varied career anyone could wish for. And I hardly ever have to repeat myself. Although all the work I've been doing over the last few years has been behind the scenes, it has been incredibly varied. I've worked as a composer,

CABARET



arranger, musical director, producer, writer, designer, DJ, photographer – hell, I've even been the back end of the Parmalat cow. But I've loved every experience. (Maybe not the cow that much.)

And what's it been like working together with director Matthew Wild and the rest of the team?

I'm very lucky that I've worked with Matthew, Louisa [Louisa Talbot, choreographer] and the rest of the incredible Fugard team on *Rocky Horror Show*, because I now have an "in" as to how they think and operate. We've been having discussions about this production for months, so I think we are all sort of on the same page. It is a daunting process trusting a director as a performer and letting your guard down, but I feel very safe in their capable hands.

What's next for you once the run ends?

I'll be working on the Fugard Theatre's production of *West Side Story* and collaborating with Young Artist Award-Winner Christiaan Olwagen on a new project. We're also trying to get an African tour of *Emotional Creature* off the ground.

And what are your broader professional goals for 2015 and beyond?

As I mentioned before, I have been collaborating a lot with some extraordinary artists and hopefully I will continue to do so, but also return to doing my own work. The first step is me finishing off my first album which is a massive Afrikaans concept project called *Hommelby Genesis*. Hopefully it will be done by the end of the year or beginning next year. **G**

Cabaret is at Cape Town's Fugard Theatre from 10 March to 30 April. Book at Computicket

