



Emily Fishbaine/Yale Summer Cabaret

Yale Cabaret's menu is heavy but quite digestible

By Donna Doherty
Register Arts Editor

NEW HAVEN — You feel a kind of furtiveness when you walk down the alley to the entrance of the Yale Cabaret on Park Street. There's just a tad of

The Yale Summer Cabaret offers a challenging lineup with touches of humor and modern technical enhancements. Here is the season-opening "Woyzeck" with Jessi Hill and Gilbert Owuor.

IF YOU GO

- **Event:** Yale Summer Cabaret
- **When:** "Piano Plays/Self-Accusation," 8 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, July 5-9; "Preparadise, Sorry Now," 8 p.m. July 13-16, 19-23; "Baal," 8 p.m. July 27-30, Aug. 2-6
- **Where:** Yale Summer Cabaret, 217 Park St., New Haven
- **Tickets:** \$22, \$18.50 seniors, \$15 students
- **Info:** (203) 432-1567

seediness to the alley, which this sunny morning was being emptied of its trash.

While it looks like every other Gothic building at Yale on first glance, when you see the

"permittee" sign at the door, there is a slight psychic jolt, the first inkling that things are different behind these doors.

For 31 years, the Yale Summer Cabaret has been the antidote to

popcorn movies and mainstream summer theater. In fact, though it would eschew being labeled, there is no question that it is alternative theater, be it avant-garde, epic theater or environmental theater, with ambitious, challenging repertoires.

This season is no exception. The menu is a heavy one — no surprise there, considering that it is a paean to an Austrian and four German playwrights, some

See YSC, E5

YSC: Have a beer with your Brecht

Continued from E1

of whom had a love/hate relationship with their countries, and at times, with fellow human beings and themselves.

Juxtaposed with the daring lineup, which includes Bertold Brecht's first play, "Baal," is the ambiance of the cabaret itself, which attracts a cult following of mixed demographics.

Where else can one drink their edginess down with a glass of wine or a beer with a fine catered meal that's left up to the whims of chef Anna Belcher, who likes to "theme" her menu to the repertoire?

Artistic Director Kristina Mendicino assures that there are many moments of humor, both dark and otherwise.

If there's one common thread among the season's selections, she says, it's an examination of current social, political and economic conditions, including the cult of celebrity that so fascinates our dumbed-down society.

Ironically, the latter was also at times a fascination of these very playwrights, many of whom were screenwriters. But there will be no dumbing down in these productions, just a bit of modern video and technical enhancements by video artist Eve Simic of the Yale School of Art.

Though most of the plays were written decades ago, Mendicino finds they are "very modern and speak to contemporary situations, such as the present regime."

They are connected by form as well as language, which at times, is fragmentary.

"That is also reflective of the modern condition of getting pieces of information from all different sources, even a bird's-eye view and then processing from that," she says.

The plays also give Mendicino's collaborator, Resident Artistic Director Tea Alagic, a Bosnian student of directing at the Yale School of Drama, a chance to use the aesthetic of the physical theater as opposed to psychological acting techniques — "a lot more physical movement work, which

the lead character," but Mendicino will not give away any of what she calls "surprises."

Take what you want from the fact that she had the cast watch a video of The Material Girl's "Truth or Dare" documentary and Andy Warhol's "Ciao, Manhattan."

She only says, "We took some liberties that will make it obvious to the audience," noting that video enhancement will be one of the surprises.

"The locale and time could be any period. It could be very contemporary if taken in relation to the recording industry: a cabaret singer dreaming of fame and seeking the love of her life, and it all falls apart."

Handke's "Self-Accusation" has a text that Mendicino calls "almost like music ... almost a riff. The repetitive text questions the way we fall into our routines and how they trip us up."

Fassbinder was a no-brainer to include since he has an extensive filmography with which many Americans are familiar, and his play is based on that most enduring of plotlines, a murder trial.

In "Preparadise," it's a real one involving British serial murderers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, but Fassbinder uses that story as the basis for another polemic on post-war German corruption.

"It examines how opposite aesthetics are embedded in the current mainstream and affect individuals — the way they did with the gangsters and the Wild West plays and movies — two individuals ganging up on one," says Mendicino.

"Baal" is another expository about celebrity — written in 1918 — many years before Brecht moved to Santa Monica, Calif., for a time to try a filmwriting career.

It's a varied menu, with a cabaret movement influence that makes it perfect for Park Street.

Donna Doherty may be reached at (203) 789-5672 or ddoherty@nhregister.com.