

Hallo liebchen, und willkommen au Berlin!

In the tenuous but democratic Weimar Republic established in 1918, parliaments changed nearly monthly, currency inflated and deflated like a balloon animal, and political mobsters patrolled the city's alleys by night. But young Berliners escaped this maelstrom in the artistic underground, where jazz, foxtrot, tango, and cigarette smoke permeated the numerous clubs and kabarets. Boys in dresses kissed boys in makeup, and leggy women clad in tuxedos played the saxophone.

To score the scene, audacious young songwriters penned equally sexy, provocative songs. Friedrich Holländer wrote gutsy women embittered by men "blinded by their vanity;" Walter Juhmann, Bronislaw Kaper, and Fritz Rotter satirized effete politicians as gorillas in the zoo; Mischa Spoliansky and Kurt Schwabach melodized a queer manifesto, arguably the first LGBTQ anthem; and Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht warned of American capitalism's glitzy but ultimately hollow lures.

Their heyday flourished an ephemeral 15 years, until the Nazi party secured a parliamentary majority in 1933. No sooner did the Third Reich famously dub this rich music "degenerate," and forced its glittering composers to flee Germany. But they shone brilliantly in exile, Holländer and Juhmann writing film songs in Hollywood, Spoliansky in Britain, and Broadway's lights wholeheartedly adopting Weill in New York.

Tonight's entertainment presents just a smattering of this timely, timeless music whose century-old lyrics strike as fresh—and dire—as ever. It also interpolates a few "Weimar-ified" contemporary songs by women and queer artists St. Vincent, MUNA, the Dresden Dolls, and an original by Benny and I. The two musics resound harmoniously aside each other, and counter the misconception that the world grows steadily more progressive. Rather, liberal waves periodically engulf the zeitgeist, which conservative governments muffle in fear of equity and change. If history indeed repeats itself, then now more than ever we must invigorate the arts to galvanize and unite those striving towards a more just, compassionate world.

We especially thank Michael Miller, who magnanimously located the sheet music to many of the rarities you hear tonight, as well as Julia Ward, who coordinated this presentation. We hope the musik, fantasie, und revolution beguile you as mightily as it has us while we've assembled this program the past several months. Danke schön, und gute nacht.

Jack Lipson,

Co-creative director