

In the Rubble of Paradise

A one-act play with song and dance

by

James Chalmers

Copyright © December 2019 James Chalmers and Off The Wall Play Publishers

This script is provided for reading purposes only. Professionals and amateurs are hereby advised that it is subject to royalty. It is fully protected under the laws of the United States of America, the British Empire, including the Dominion of Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including but not limited to professional, amateur, film, radio, and all other media (including use on the worldwide web) and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved; and any unauthorized use of the material may subject the user to any and all applicable civil and criminal penalties. For any information about royalties or to apply for a performance license please click the following link:

<https://offthewallplays.com/royalties-and-licensing-of-plays-sold-by-off-the-wall-plays/>

In the Rubble of Paradise

A one-act play with song and dance

by

James Chalmers

Playing Time 35 - 40 minutes

Cast Requirements (minimum)

MALE	WILHELM	speaking/singing part
	HARLAN	speaking/singing part
	BLUCHER	speaking part
FEMALE	DORA	speaking/singing/dancing part
	MARLENE	speaking part
	CLAIRE	dancing/singing/minor speaking part
	GABRIELLE	dancing/singing/minor speaking part
	CLAUDIA	dancing/singing/minor speaking part

Note – additional dancers/singers (non speaking parts) may be added - as appropriate to the playing space

Introduction

In the Rubble of Paradise - is the title of a 1920s German film. The star of this film was the Jewish cabaret performer Dora Gerson. This play is loosely based on a small part of Dora's ill-fated life. Set in the 1930s, in a fictitious Cabaret Club in the German city of Koblenz, the play tells the story of people caught up in the rising tide of evil political dogma. Did they have any choice but to go along with what they were being ordered to do? Were the decadent performances at the cabaret clubs any worse from a moral point of view, than the political violence of the Nazis? As well as exploring these questions, the play also sets out to entertain with five song and dance numbers.

Character List

WILHELM

Master of Ceremonies at the Cabaret Club. Not interested in politics. Not afraid to voice his opinion. Sarcastic sense of humour. (Actor needs to be a singer. Option to dance)

DORA

The star of the cabaret. (Think Marlene Dietrich in the film *The Blue Angel*) Not interested in politics. Jewish but not a practising Jew. (Actor needs to be a singer - and be able to join in the dances)

BLUCHER

The German equivalent of a civil servant. Was a cavalry officers in WW1. A frequent visitor to the cabaret club. Pays for sexual favours from the dancers. His current liaison is with the dancer CLAIRE.

HARLAN

A film director/producer. Nervy and always near the edge. Unable to stand up against the demands of the Nazi party. Scripted to sing song No 3 "The Movie Song". But if the actor cast for this part isn't a singer - then the song may be performed by the cabaret club DANCERS.

MARLENE

A former performer at the cabaret club - but now well past her best. Employed to collect and wash glasses. Had a fling with BLUCHER in the past. She is embittered and has no redeeming features.

GABRIELLE

A singer/dancer

CLAUDIA

A singer/dancer

CLAIRE

A singer/dancer. In a liaison with BLUCHER

NOTE – GABRIELLE, CLAUDIA and CLAIRE, plus any additional singers/dancers as a group are referred to in the stage directions as the DANCERS.

Synopsis

The story unfolds against the backdrop of the Nazi party taking power in Germany and Adolf Hitler becoming the Chancellor. Veit Harlan a famous German film producer comes to the cabaret club to persuade Dora to star in his next film. Wilhelm, the proprietor of the club, agrees that shooting the film can take place during the day and Dora will be able to continue her performances at the cabaret club in the evening. During the discussions it is revealed that Dora is Jewish.

Marlene, an embittered former performer at the cabaret, is now reduced to collecting and washing glasses. Marlene joins the Nazi party. She has a hatred of almost everything including the Jews. Herr Blucher is a regular customer at the cabaret club. Because of his position as a civil servant, he has no option but to join the Nazi party. The Nazis are now starting to round up the Jews and send them to concentration camps. Dora is forced to leave the club and go into hiding. There is also a crackdown on decadent behaviour and the dancers are told to cover up naked flesh. Wilhelm sacks Marlene and tells her never to come back to the cabaret club again.

Harlan is ordered to make a propaganda film, to show how decadent things were in a typical cabaret club before the Nazis came to power. And to imply that the performers were all Jewish. Dora is brought back to star in the film. Blucher gives his word that she won't be taken away by the Gestapo while the film is being made. Marlene has different ideas. The day after the film is finished, she brings the Police to the club to arrest Dora. Marlene has also found out the Wilhelm had a Jewish grandmother, so she seizes her chance to take revenge on Wilhelm, and he is to be arrested too.

Blucher intervenes and sends the police away, giving Dora and Wilhelm enough time to get to the railway station. Their plan is to catch a train to France and then travel to Switzerland, but they realise without the necessary papers they're going to get caught. They choose suicide rather than fall into the Gestapo's hands, jumping off the platform in front of a train.

The Stage Set

All the scenes, except for the final scene, are set in the cabaret club. The final scene is at a railway station. This scene change can be achieved by a lighting change, moving the two characters to a different part of the stage, closing the main curtains, or a combination of these. The cabaret club scene can be achieved with a few tables and chairs, although the *Company* may choose to have a more elaborate set. The song and dance interludes are there to enhance the story, as well as to entertain the theatre audience. For this reason the theatre audience should be made to feel they are in the cabaret club. Suggestions that will help to achieve this are - start with the curtains open, give the set prominence at the front of the stage or playing area, and have the characters, especially Wilhelm, speak directly to the audience.

Costume

Costume changes are indicated in the script. There must be a significant change to the dancers' costumes, to mark the point in the story when the Nazis order the cleaning up of cabaret acts. The costumes changing from revealing, to being dull with arms and legs covered.

The Songs and Music

There are no notes in the script re choreography. It is left entirely to the Company to choreograph the dance to accompany the songs.

Associated with the script are-

- The music scores
- Guide vocal tracks as downloadable audio files
- Backing Tracks as downloadable audio files

The guide vocal tracks were recorded by the cast involved the first production run of this play. These tracks will be helpful for those who aren't able to read a music score. The *Company* performing this play are welcome to use the backing tracks as an alternative to producing their own, or having a live backing with a piano or other instruments.

The intention is that the songs are sung live on stage. However the *Company* may wish to consider pre-recording the parts sung by the cabaret dancers. They will still sing live on stage, but their singing will be boosted by the pre-recorded vocals.

Additional Information for the Director

There are two EXITS/ENTRANCES. One leads to the dressing rooms, kitchen, etc. The other leads to the street.

The intention is that the play opens as being light hearted and humorous. But the tone then becomes much darker as the story unfolds.

SCENE 1

Stage area in darkness. Sitting at tables are BLUCHER, GABRIEL, CLAUDIA, CLAIRE. (Claire is with Blucher.) (Other DANCERS across the set - sitting and/or standing as appropriate.) The DANCERS are in pre-crackdown revealing costumes. Standing upstage behind one of the tables - MARLENE. Standing downstage to left or right - WILHELM. The whole scene is frozen. Standing downstage on the opposite side to WILHELM is HARLAN. DORA is off stage.

MUSIC to open the play? Suggest a vintage 1930s piece of German music - from a scratchy 78.

LIGHTS - SPOT LIGHT ON HARLAN - UP

HARLAN *(To Audience)*

Every one of you would have done the same had you been in my shoes. I made a film - that was all. A film that was supposed to show how decadent things were before the Nazis came to power. Interesting word - decadent. It has the same spelling in German as it has in English.

LIGHTS - SPOT LIGHT ON HARLAN - DOWN

LIGHTS - MAIN STAGE LIGHTS - UP - to illuminate Cabaret Set

EXIT - HARLAN

SCENE 2

Lights Up Main Stage is the cue for those at the cabaret to come to life

WILHELM *(To Audience)*

And what's wrong with decadence if it makes us all happy? I'll tell you what's wrong with it - nothing. And if nothing is wrong with something - then you leave it alone. I am Wilhelm. Welcome to the city of Koblenz. And welcome to my cabaret.

SONG 1

During intro bars - the DANCERS take up position for Song 1.

During the Song - MARLENE carries on with her work of clearing glasses from the tables - body language to indicate she's not interested in the girls' performance - in fact disdainful of it.

DANCERS Cabaret, cabaret - come on down
 Into town - to the cabaret
 Cabaret, cabaret - C-A-B-A-R-E-T
 This is cabaret

WILHELM It's sexy and it's happy
 Ignore the grey and rain
 It's decadent and sassy
 And you'll feel good again

ALL Cabaret, cabaret - C-A-B-A-R-E-T
 This is cabaret

INSTRUMENTAL BREAK - FOR DANCE

WILHELM These girls are here for pleasure
 Their attributes they flaunt
 Just ask them for a favour
 And they'll give you what they want

ALL Cabaret, cabaret - C-A-B-A-R-E-T
 This is cabaret

At end of song - girls go back to their positions as at beginning of Scene 2.

WILHELM goes over to BLUCHER. BLUCHER isn't cheerful despite the attention from CLAIRE.

WILHELM
 Good evening Herr Blucher. You don't look very happy? Still upset about losing the war? If my cabaret club isn't good enough to cheer you up – then why not use your influence with the government in Berlin to start a new war? Who knows - next time Germany might win?

DANCERS laugh (except CLAIRE)

WILHELM *(To Audience)*
 And they say Germans don't have a sense of humour.

ENTER - HARLAN

WILHELM
 Ah we have a visitor. I don't know who you are sir - but you're very welcome. I am Wilhelm - proprietor of this cabaret club. By far the best in Koblenz.

WILHELM and HARLAN shake hands

HARLAN

My name is Veit Harlan. You may have heard of me?

WILHELM

Of course - Germany's foremost film producer - this is an honour.

Dancers react with positive body language

CLAUDIA *(Throwing herself at Harlan)*

I've always wanted to be in the movies. I'm not just a dancer, Herr Harlan. I can act. Would you like to see my death of Cleopatra?

WILHELM pulls CLAUDIA away from HARLAN

WILHELM

I'm sure Herr Harlan isn't here on business. He's here to enjoy himself.

WILHELM ushers a DANCER(S) away to clear a chair for HARLAN. HARLAN sits down.

WILHELM pours HARLAN a glass of wine.

HARLAN

I am here on business. I'm looking for the star of my next film.

WILHELM

Well I hope it isn't me you've come to see Herr Harlan. I couldn't act my way out of a paper bag.

HARLAN

Don't worry – the leading role is female.

WILHELM *(To Claudia)*

Claudia - show Herr Harlan your death of Cleopatra.

HARLAN

That won't be necessary.

WILHELM *(Goes to Gabrielle)*

Well how about Gabrielle? She has lots of charm.

HARLAN shakes his head.

WILHELM *(Goes to Claire)*

Well perhaps Claire is the one you're looking for. I'm sure Herr Blucher would provide you with a reference. He is intimately acquainted with this young lady.

MARLENE who has been hovering around in the background moves into the conversation

MARLENE

Herr Blucher used to be intimately acquainted with me.

WILHELM

Marlene - there's a sink full of dirty glasses in the kitchen.

MARLENE

Marlene - there's a sink full of dirty glasses in the kitchen. That's all I ever hear these days. What happened to - Marlene - here's some money - go and buy yourself a nice dress? I tell you what happened to that. It's what happens to every woman on this earth.

(to the Dancers)

Look at me. This is your future. Thrown into the gutter with the garbage.

EXIT - MARLENE**WILHELM**

The staff these days! Now what were you saying Herr Harlan?

HARLAN

I'll come straight to the point - I want Dora to star in my film. Her reputation has reached as far as Berlin. She is someone who is very special.

SONG 2

ENTER *(During four bar intro)* - DORA

DORA There's a rumour going round - you know
The kind of thing I like to hear
They say that I'm a special girl
Well - I'm in favour of that idea

DORA Librarians and teachers may - it's true
Have very satisfying careers
But I get my thrills in other ways
Yes - I'm in favour of that idea

**DANCERS &
WILHELM** She emulates the way a siren taunts
She's got all the things she knows that men want
She's a very special girl that is clear
And yes - she's in favour of that idea

DORA I love my role as a femme fatale
And I'm not a girl who often sheds a tear
When I break men's hearts it's remorselessly
That's right - I'm in favour of that idea (repeat)

On Stage applause

When song finishes - DANCERS stand around untidily rather than go back to their places - except for CLAIRE who returns to BLUCHER.

WILHELM *(To the Dancers)*

Girls - you've finished for the evening. You may go.

WILHELM ushers DANCERS away. As they EXIT they proffer themselves to HARLAN.

CLAIRE gives BLUCHER a parting kiss.

EXIT - THE DANCERS

BLUCHER (*Getting up from the table*)

I must go too. Goodnight - Wilhelm, Herr Harlan, Dora.

EXIT - BLUCHER

WILHELM (*To Audience*)

Herr Blucher's wife thinks he goes to a poetry reading class.

WILHELM leads DORA over to HARLAN. HARLAN politely stands up while DORA sits down.

HARLAN sits down.

WILHELM

Dora this is Veit Harlan - the famous film producer from Berlin.

DORA extends her hand to HARLAN

DORA

Pleased to meet you Herr Harlan. I've heard a lot about you.

WILHELM sits down at the table.

HARLAN

And I've heard a lot about you. That's why I'm here. To offer you the leading part in my latest film.

ENTER - MARLENE

Marlene moves things around on the tables - moves chairs etc - for no real purpose than wishing to listen in on the conversation.

WILHELM

Herr Harlan - Dora has a contract to perform in this club – and nowhere else. I don't see how she can be in your film?

HARLAN

I can make the film here. Turn the club into a studio during the day. Then in the evening - everything can be returned to normal.

WILHELM (to Marlene)

Marlene - a bottle of wine and three glasses.

EXIT - MARLENE

WILHELM

Hiring this club to use as a film studio wouldn't come cheap.

HARLAN

Just name your price. All that matters is that Dora has the leading part.

DORA

I'm very flattered Herr Harlan. But why me?

HARLAN

Most of the actors who audition for parts these days have come from silent movies. They have terrible voices. They stammer - or have accents no one can understand. Not only is your voice perfect for the part - you'll look stunning on film.

DORA

That's very kind of you to say that Herr Harlan. So what's the film about?

HARLAN

It's a tale of passion and betrayal set in ancient Arabia. And you will play the part of an Arabian Princess.

WILHELM (*Looking around the cabaret club*)

This doesn't look much like Arabia.

HARLAN

You will be surprised what can be achieved with a false backdrop. Especially when it's out of focus. And we'll add a few props - palm trees - that sort of thing. And there will be powerful lights so it looks like we're shooting outside. Well what do you say?

ENTER - MARLENE - *with a bottle of wine and three glasses*

DORA

I do it Herr Harlan. And I can work every day except Sundays.

MARLENE brings the bottle and glasses to the table. She pours the wine out slowly - interested in the conversation

HARLAN

Do you go to church on a Sunday?

DORA

No - I'm Jewish.

MARLENE

I'm not surprised. The Jews are everywhere.

WILHELM (*Sternly*)

Marlene - go away.

MARLENE turns to go

MARLENE

I'm looking forward to the day when the National Socialist Party comes to power. They have pledged to get rid of all that's rotten in Germany.

EXIT - MARLENE

WILHELM

She used to be a cabaret star. But she's well past it now. And that's nothing to do with Jews or anyone else.

HARLAN

She must have been listening to Adolf Hitler. God forbid if he ever gets into power.

DORA

I'm not interested in any of this. I just want to perform.

HARLAN

You didn't explain what the problem is with Sundays?

DORA

Saturday night cabaret doesn't finish till four in the morning. I need Sunday to catch up on my sleep.

NOTES ON TRANSITION TO SCENE 3

This can be through lighting changes, closing the main curtains, rearranging the cabaret props, bringing on props relevant to Scene 3, etc.. The transition is intended to be accompanied by Song 3. As soon as the opening bars of music begin HARLAN moves to front of stage.

EXIT - WILHELM and DORA

*Off stage - WILHELM and DORA change into **ARABIAN** costumes*

SCENE 3

SONG 3

HARLAN sings the song downstage to left or right. (Alternatively this can be sung by the DANCERS - while HARLAN looks on or takes part in the setting up for the film shoot)

The DANCERS set up the scene and the film equipment - the most important piece being an old fashioned looking movie camera on a tripod. The setting up can almost be a Keystone Cops style or Laurel and Hardy. The Company might also consider performing this part with the stage lights down and a strobe light at side stage.

HARLAN

Lights, camera and action
A movie star is what you want to be
Lights, camera and action
Step out of life and into fantasy

Everyone they want to be a movie star it seems
To woo the crowd, be idolised, upon the silver screen
Immortalised on celluloid - the whole world it must see
A movie star, a movie star, is what you want to be

INSTRUMENTAL BREAK

HARLAN

Lights, camera and action
A movie star is what you want to be
Lights, camera and action
Step out of life and into fantasy

EXIT - DANCERS (*During closing music bars of song 3*) *excepting one or two to be the film crew.*

ENTER - DORA and WILHELM (*In ARABIAN COSTUME*)

LIGHTS – TO SUIT THE NEXT PART OF THE SCENE

NOTE to Director – Dora’s acting (as the Arabian Princess) can be hammy.

WILHELM

Why am I dressed like this? I wasn’t supposed to be in the movie.

DORA

You’ll be fine Wilhelm - don’t worry.

WILHELM

What happened to the proper actor?

HARLAN

He’s in hospital. He was beaten up at a political rally. I warned him to keep away from things like that.

WILHELM

But I don’t know my lines.

HARLAN

You don’t have any lines.

WILHELM

Then would you please tell me what I'm supposed to be doing?

HARLAN

This is the final scene of the film. The climax of the story. You are Salim - an Arabian prince. You are claiming your prize - the daughter of the King you have just killed in battle - a beautiful princess.

DORA

I'm the beautiful princess, Wilhelm.

HARLAN

Ok let's shoot the scene.

WILHELM

No wait - I still don't know what I'm supposed to be doing.

HARLAN

Just act as if you're about to ravish the Princess. That's not difficult to imagine is it?

WILHELM

I'll do my best.

HARLAN

OK - camera - roll - action.

Clapper board - sounded by one of the crew

DORA (As the PRINCESS)

Take a look around you Salim. All this used to be a paradise on earth. But the war has reduced it to rubble. And now you think you can have me as your prize.

(DORA takes out a bottle of poison)

But I'd rather die than let you have what you want.

DORA drinks the poison and dies for the camera

LIGHTS – DOWN

EXIT - ALL

NOTES ON TRANSITION TO SCENE 4

The "film set" is removed and the cabaret club returned to normal. If the stage has curtains - then these can be closed - and the opening part of Scene 4 played in front of the curtains. For an open performance area - DORA, WILHELM and HARLAN should EXIT - and the DANCERS who have been playing the parts of the film crew can carry off the film props. This could be accompanied by the playing part of the backing track of the Movie Song (SONG 3).

SCENE 4

ENTER (or already on stage) **CLAIR & CLAUDIA** (In pre-crackdown revealing costumes)

LIGHTS - UP

CLAIRE

Do you still want to get into the movies?

CLAUDIA

Of course I do. I'm fed up with being a dancer. I want to be a film star like Dora.

CLAIRE

She was only in one film - and that was three years ago.

CLAUDIA

But she was offered work in Hollywood. She was mad to turn that down. If it had been me I'd have been on the next train out of here.

CLAIRE

Well like it here. I make lots of money.

CLAUDIA

But look what you have to do for it. How can you let a dirty old man like Blucher anywhere near you?

CLAIRE

By keeping my eyes shut and thinking about the money. Anyway I'm not sleeping with him now.

CLAUDIA

Oh yes - you have a new man - Kruger.

CLAIRE

Hans is much younger than Blucher. And he's good looking. You're not jealous are you?

CLAUDIA

Hans Kruger is in the Gestapo. He scares me. They all do. I wish I could get out of Germany. Go to Hollywood. I don't have to be a film star. I'd be happy to work in make up. Or be an extra.

ENTER - WILHELM (*In his Cabaret costume*)

WILHELM

Have you heard the news? The Nazi Party has gained the majority in the Reichstag.

CLAUDIA

What's the Reichstag?

WILHELM

Do you know who Adolf Hitler is?

CLAUDIA (*Not very confidently*)

Yes - but what about him?

WILHELM

He'll be the new Chancellor. And God knows what he's got planned.

ENTER - BLUCHER (*Wearing a swastika armband over his coat*)

WILHELM (*Touching Blucher's armband - or pointing to it*)

Ah Herr Blucher. We haven't seen you for a while. What have you been up to - apart from joining the Nazi party?

BLUCHER

I'm here on official business.

WILHELM

Can I get you a drink?

ENTER – MARLENE

MARLENE stays in the background listening to the conversation

BLUCHER

No. Now listen carefully to what I have to say. The government has ordered a crackdown on indecent stage performances.

WILHELM

What's that got to do with me?

BLUCHER

The girls are too scantily dressed. You must tone things down if you want to stay in business

WILHELM

What do you suggest they wear - table cloths?

BLUCHER

This isn't a laughing matter. You must make sure there's very little naked flesh on show. If you don't comply – then this cabaret club will be closed down.

BLUCHER turns to go - then hesitates and turns back to face WILHELM

BLUCHER (with difficulty)

One more thing - Jews are not permitted to perform in front of German audiences.

WILHELM

That's ridiculous. We're all German - whatever our religion.

BLUCHER

That may be true - but to survive orders must be obeyed. Be careful Wilhelm - we are now living in much more dangerous times.

EXIT - BLUCHER**WILHELM** (to CLAUDIA AND CLAIRE)

Girls - you heard what Herr Blucher said. These costumes are too revealing. Have a look through the costume store. Find something that's dull and boring.

CLAUDIA

But I enjoy flaunting my body. That's what the audience is here to see.

WILHELM

I don't want a discussion about it. Just go and change these costumes for something less revealing. And quickly – the show will be starting soon.

EXIT - CLAIR AND CLAUDIA**MARLENE**

I'll gather up the costumes and burn them.

WILHELM

Who asked you to interfere?

MARLENE

You're not a member of the Nazi party yet - are you? I joined yesterday - when I heard the that the party had taken control of the Reichstag.

ENTER - DORA**DORA**

Why are the girls changing their costumes?

MARLENE (*Turning to Dora*)

It's for the good of the Fatherland. And as for you young lady - I wouldn't want to be in your shoes.

DORA

What does she mean?

MARLENE

Your job here is over. Tell her Wilhelm. You heard what Blucher said. It was clear enough.

WILHELM hesitates

MARLENE

If you won't tell her – then I will.

WILHELM

Your job here is to wash glasses. Get on with your work.

MARLENE

That may be my job - but I have an overriding duty to the Fatherland.