

# ***Kombatt Kabarett at the Bar Jeder Vernunft***

by  
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Commissioned by UMKC Drama Department

The Kombatt Kabarett is a cabaret act in the style of a the German cabarets of the WWI era.

Kabarett material by from pre-1919 primary sources: Bertolt Brecht, O.A. Alberts/Rudolf Nelson, Kurt Tucholsky, Hermann Kester, and anonymous German, British and American military personnel plus, with permission, Charles L. Mee.

Jokes drawn from military websites and the following publications: *Yank Talk*, *Khaki Komedy*, *Original Army and Navy Joke Book*, and *Anecdotes, Fun and Jokes by the AEF in France and At Home*.

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*A young man with a horrific war wound winds his way through the audience shyly and writes in chalk on the set or a wall:*

On the wall it said in chalk  
They want war.  
He who wrote it  
Is already fallen.  
—bb

*...then scuttles off to hide when EMCEE struts in. He keeps drawing in a notebook, though wary of the Emcee, as KABARETTES filter in, improv with audience, greeting them as they choose. Preshow music comes to an end as EMCEE comes to center.*

EMCEE

Willkommen! Welcome to the Bar Jeder Vernunft, the Bar of All Reason—or, Barring All Reason, depending on your translation... and your point of view. Tonight, we find ourselves in a militant mood as we present the Kombat Kabarett, where the war rages without but there is no proximate danger within, where soldiers can always be at ease, where it's 1919 and 2013, Germany and America all at once.

Why Germany? Because for all America has to offer, your theater still can't match our kabarett for fun and, let's be honest, when the world thinks of war, they still think of Germany first. Maybe not for long, America, so watch yourself... But hey, we've earned it. How many countries have declared war on all their closest neighbors... twice? (*KABARETTES chime in with the Fawltly Towers "Who started the war?" bit*) When America declares war, it has the sense not to do it in its own backyard. Or it would, if America did still "declare war"—now you just seem to find yourself there. "I don't know how it happened!" It's hard to give up being the hero, I know.

And how many countries have been bombed back into the previous century not once, but twice like Germany has? No no, in America you bomb everybody else into the last century. At least you're on the winning side, eh? So you're doing something right. And you're doing your part in the War on Terrorism—after all, Osama is dead. Or at least we think he is—I hear Donald Trump is asking to see the long-form death certificate.

But we are here tonight on behalf of the "Great" War—so named because it was much more wonderful than any before it. No, but seriously, it was such a big and devastating war—"the war to end war"—well that turned out to be wishful thinking, but we did all do a lot of thinking about that war. The Americans did their thinking before entering the war, the French during the war, the Germans... afterwards. Unfortunately. Of course you Americans had already had your Revolution. The French had had their Revolution. During the "Great" War, the Russians had their Revolution, the Irish had a revolution soon after, and the Germans, well, we tried. Just at the end of the war, we experienced many uprisings, but, well, let's just say that, due to inclement weather, the German Revolution took place in music. Therefore tonight you will hear lots and lots of music. May it bring out the very best kind of revolutionary in you.

In a few minutes, our friends will be performing an old play by Bertolt Brecht which takes place during one such popular uprising we had following a certain war we couldn't win, when our economy was shaky and our country was divided between the haves and the have nots, those who fought in the war and those who profited by it, the right-wing and the left. Good thing your country has left those kinds of divisions behind, eh? Although I hear your President Obama is both a fascist and a communist—so American of him, trying to have it both ways! Ah, but it's very dangerous to be in politics, very, very dangerous. Once I was in a limo with 6 politicians—we were all driving to the City Hall—and the limo toppled over because they were all wobbling so hard from the left to the right. Left, right, left, right, CENTER CENTER, TACK TO THE CENTER!!! Whew!

So let's avoid this kind of wobbling tonight. You—(*to the audience on your right*)—who are to the Right of me, and you (*to the audience on your left*) to the Left of me, let's declare for this evening our own Armistice. (That means we will observe a dress code—no one will bare arms.) (*rim shot*) When a nation has reason for a hangover mood, a satirist from any side becomes a patriot, so let us entertain you patriotically with some Trench-ant songs and little skits of no importance—think of them as *les amuses-“Boches.”* And your job tonight? We beg of you not to be All Quiet on the Midwestern Front, but to laugh, clap, sing along if you like—no really, if you know the songs, do join us, because everyone should have the chance to sing Weill, even if you don't sing (*with a German “v” sound*) “*Well*”—and for this night, no matter where we stand, let's be Allies in the trenches of this little theater and observe a tiny truce until *We're-done* (Verdun). Ladies!

*All the KABARETTES come forward and stand to attention.*

### **Spartacus Shadow Play**

ANNA:

The Spartacist Uprising as written in the style of Josef C̆apek's *Insect Comedy*.

YASMEEN:

Once upon a time, there was a Butterfly who ruled over an Insect Kingdom, which was surrounded by other neighboring kingdoms run by the cousins, aunts and uncles of the Butterfly. Unfortunately, all families have their squabbles, but when you are a Monarch, you can send others to fight for you!

[*Butterfly gets in fight with family, each family sends others to fight, all the fighters die*]  
Meanwhile back at home...

Everybuggy's starving and the industrialist dung beetles work everyone till they drop

[*Beetle: “Roll that Dung!” Butterfly: “Keep on fighting!”*]

All of a sudden, one little worker ant, Rosa Luxembug, put her tiny tarsus down. “No,” she said. “No way, no day.”

[*Butterfly and Rosa argue: “Uh huh!” “Uh uh!” “Uh huh!” “Uh uh!” “Uh huh!”—“Uh huh!” “Uh uh! D'oh!”*]

“We want to be free! Free! Free! Down with the Monarch!”

What do we want? Democracy! When do we want it? In the next few minutes or so because we only live a few weeks.

Stop the War on Workers

Peace and Bread

One person, one vote...

We are the 99%

I am Spartacus! I am Spartacus!

And then the Flycorps killed them (*A big shoe stomps them.*)

The End.

### **The Gas Masque**

*ANNA, CHELSEY and NICKY perform a synchronized dance routine based on gas mask drills.*

*There is no "meaning" and no words; the soundtrack is all war sounds.*

ANNA:

"And now, a BurgoMask!" (*begins an overly Germanic dance*)

EMCEE:

"Nein!!!"

*The dancers retreat. MEGAN steps forward, dressed as the Red Baron.*

YASMEEN:

Baron von Richthofen, Drone Pilot: Part 1

MEGAN:

"One can become enthusiastic over anything. For a time I was delighted with bomb throwing. It gave me a tremendous pleasure to bomb those fellows from above."

*She sits down, as at a desk, looking intently at a screen. Sits. Scans. Sits. Nothing happens. After a time, she looks at her watch, clears throat, gets up and leaves.*

CHELSEY:

Back in the war, the situation was really tough. The Germans had a very strong air force. I remember one day I was protecting the bombers and suddenly, out of the clouds, these Fokkers appeared. I looked up, and right above me was one of them. I aimed at him and shot him down. They were swarming. I immediately realized that there was another Fokker behind me.

EMCEE:

I think I should mention that "Fokker" was the name of the German aircraft company"

CHELSEY:

That's true, but these Fokkers were flying Albatroses.

YASMEEN:

Baron von Richthofen, Drone Pilot: Part 2

MEGAN:

"Of course, with the increasing number of aeroplanes one gains increased opportunities for shooting down one's enemies, but at the same time, the possibility of being shot down one's self increases."

*She laughs ironically and wistfully, since she is in no proximate danger. Sits down, as at a desk, looking intently at a screen. Sits. Scans. Sits. Nothing happens. After a time, she sips at some coffee, wipes at or rubs her eyes as if to see more clearly, then gets up and leaves.*

ANNA and NICKY (*split up lines as makes sense*):

A Report from the Front

Summary of Unintelligence

CONFIDENTIAL AND SECRET

For distribution by aeroplane

Summary of Unintelligence

- I. General Impressions of the Day (*One thumbs up, one thumbs down. Disagreement ensues*)
- II. Enemy Front Line—too close for comfort, but too far to see the whites of their eyes
- III. Enemy Disorder of Battle
  - (a) Identifications
    - 12<sup>th</sup> Meulskinnern—A prisoner of the 12<sup>th</sup> Meulskinnern recently captured confirms the belief that this is not the 12<sup>th</sup> Meulskinnern at all but the 115<sup>th</sup> Schutzenfests. Order of battle confirmed.
    - 11<sup>th</sup> Jaeger Fellens—A prisoner for this division recently captured states that this regiment was recently disbanded and transformed into the 10<sup>th</sup> Schadenfreude Battalion. Order of battle confirmed.
    - 944<sup>th</sup> Butterbrots—The 944<sup>th</sup> Butterbrots have been identified as the 449<sup>th</sup> Gesundheits. They recently came from the Uskub front. Order of battle confirmed.
  - (b) Comment on Enemy Units
    - 42<sup>nd</sup> Landwehr Balloon Kompanie—A prisoner from the Kompanie states that when our attack started they were 40 K to the North. When the news of the attack reached them, however, they came down immediately.
  - (c) Enemy Intentions

That there is great indecision on the part of the German General Staff as to the point to which the line will be withdrawn is indicated by the statement of a prisoner of the 77<sup>th</sup> Krepshooter Battalion. When questioned on this point he replied significantly, “I don’t know.”
- IV. Enemy Movements
  - Visibility: Poor and intermittent during the night.
  - Railways: No unusual activity observed. Most of the railroads seemed to remain in the same place during the day.
  - Roads: An old man in a wheelchair going from Bar-devant-Meuse to Bar-derriere-Meuse tends to confirm the belief that the enemy is retreating.
- V. Our Aerial Activity

The dampness made the day impossible for flying. In spite of this, our planes were up in great numbers destroying numerous enemy planes and taking dozens of photographs even though the dense fog rendered visibility impossible.

Our scout patrol of 3 planes met 20 Fokkers. The Fokkers immediately burst into flames and crashed.

Lt. Brown destroyed three enemy balloons in their beds by descending upon them so suddenly that they became tangled in the bed clothes and were unable to escape.

Lt. Dunwiddy brought down a balloon at dawn. Owing to the darkness, Lt. Dunwiddy brought down one of our own balloons. Luckily it was an old one.

## VI. Order of Battle confirmed

YASMEEN:

Baron von Richthofen, Drone Pilot: Part 3

MEGAN:

“Now I am within thirty yards of him. He must fall. The gun pours out its stream of lead.” *She acts this out.* “Then it jams. Then it reopens fire. That jam almost saved his life. I honored the enemy by placing a stone on his beautiful grave.” *She acts this out, then is apparently seen by someone.* “My dear Excellency! I have not gone to war to collect cheese and eggs, but for another purpose.” *She sits down at the desk resignedly and stares at the screen.*

EMCEE:

How’s the view from your seat of privilege over there? Good? Yours? Nothing obstructing your vision at all? No blind spots? Good. Now that you’re all settled in, let’s see who’s here. How many students do we have here tonight? Thought you were escaping your homework by going to a little theater, didn’t you? And then it turns out it’s *political*. Agggghh. But of course politics really is the big theater, am I right? Well, if you want this to count as homework, you will have to make sure you do not have any fun at all. Do not laugh. No. Fun. At All. Or you get an F. If you’ve already laughed once tonight? F. You? You are definitely getting an F tonight. You are a very bad little boy (*or girl, depending on which the person is*). I will punish you later in private. Any professors? Oh, my condolences. I am so sorry that after all your years of education you are still just a bourgeois wage-slave. But I understand you do have the important job of indoctrinating all students. Someone has to do it, and it can’t be the artists, as we are too busy being harmless. So, good work. Keep it up. Anyone from the military? We have some soldiers here tonight? Were you in the war? Were you in the war? Wonderful! Would you like to stand? What? You’d like to do a little something with us tonight? Please, be our guest. [*She guides one soldier out of his seat.*]

MICHAEL:

Hey, why is a dead German like a pig’s tail? It’s the end of the swine!! Hahahahaha!

EMCEE (*giving them the stink-eye like Marlene Dietrich*):

The Danes are stingier than the Italians. Spanish women indulge in illicit love more readily than German women. All Latvians are thieves. Bulgarians stink. Rumanians are braver than

Frenchmen. Americans love money more than sex. Russians embezzle. And all soldiers are swine. None of this may be true—but you will see it all in print in the next war.

*PETEY breaks from the group and speaks as CONSTANTINE (Big Love, by Charles L. Mee):*

People think  
it's hard to be a woman;  
but it's not easy  
to be a man,  
the expectations people have  
that a man should be a civilized person  
of course I think everyone should be civilized  
men and women both  
but when push comes to shove  
say you have some bad people  
who are invading your country  
raping your own wives and daughters  
and now we see:  
this happens all the time  
all around the world  
and then a person wants a man  
who can defend his home  
you can say, yes, it was men who started this  
there's no such thing as good guys and bad guys  
only guys  
and they kill people  
but if you are a man who doesn't want to be a bad guy  
and you try not to be a bad guy  
it doesn't matter  
because even if it is possible to be good  
and you are good  
when push comes to shove  
and people need defending  
then no one wants a good guy any more  
then they want a man who can fuck someone up  
who can go to his target like a bullet  
burst all bonds  
his blood hot  
howling up the bank  
rage in his heart  
screaming  
with every urge to vomit  
the ground moving beneath his feet  
the earth alive with pounding  
the cry hammering in his heart  
like tanked up motors turned loose  
with no brakes to hold them  
this noxious world  
and then when it's over  
suddenly  
when this impulse isn't called for any longer  
a man is expected to put it away  
carry on with life  
as though he didn't have such impulses  
or to know that, if he does  
he is a despicable person

and so it may be that when a man turns this violence  
on a woman  
in her bedroom  
or in the midst of war  
slamming her down, hitting her,  
he should be esteemed for this  
for informing her  
about what it is that civilization really contains  
the impulse to hurt side by side with the gentleness  
the use of force as well as tenderness  
the presence of coercion and necessity  
because it has just been a luxury for her really  
not to have to act on this impulse or even feel it  
to let a man do it for her  
so that she can stand aside and deplore it  
whereas in reality  
it is an inextricable part of the civilization in which  
she lives  
on which she depends  
that provides her a long life, longer usually than her  
husband,  
and food and clothes  
dining out in restaurants  
sitting in a cabaret  
and going on vacations to the oceanside  
so that when a man turns it against her  
he is showing her a different sort of civilized  
behavior really  
that she should know and feel intimately  
as he does  
to know the truth of how it is to live on earth  
to know this is part not just of him  
but also of her life  
not go through life denying it  
pretending it belongs to another  
rather knowing it as her own  
feeling it as her own  
feeling it as a part of life as intense as love  
as lovely in its way as kindness  
because to know this pain  
is to know the whole of life  
before we die  
and not just some pretty piece of it  
to know who we are  
both of us together  
this is a gift that a man can give a woman.

**Kabarett continues...**