

Out of Bapsfontein

IS THERE some sort of parallel to be drawn between contemporary Afrikaans cabaret and pre-war Berlin? Is there not a new surge of sophisticated entertainment in a time of political turmoil? Are we, like the Berliners on the eve of 1939, dancing on broken glass?

The show about to open at No 58 in Hillbrow, featuring Laurika Rauch and Jannie du Toit with direction by the prolific Stephan Bouwer, would appear to prove the point. It is titled "Van Berlyn tot Bapsfontein" and includes Brecht/Weil songs from "The Threepenny Opera" which was written in 1928 and underlined the dizzy decadence of a central Europe heading for disaster.

Another item in the show is an anti-war song entitled "Die Lewe is 'n Grenshotel" with lyrics that speak of cannon fodder. It is juxtaposed with whimsical love songs by Jacques Brel.

Director Bouwer, however, deftly side-steps any suggestion of musical history repeating itself.

"The cabaret is a combination of satire and protest with a couple of ordinary love songs thrown in. Since cabaret began round about the turn of the century people have sung about any subject, including protest. Hennie Aucamp (who translated some of the songs into Afrikaans) has written papers on cabaret and he calls it 'civilized protest'."

Bouwer is obviously very reluctant to drag politics into publicity.

"Cabaret in general has always had a political flavour but, frankly, we are trying to underplay that aspect. We don't want the public to think this is another theatrical protest exercise to depress people."

"Anyway, most of the bookings have been names like Oosthuizen, De Bruin and De Wet and we don't want to discourage them — though it would be nice if they were entertained and went home with something to think about."

Yes, but what about the Berlin parallel?

There's a long and serious look from Bouwer, somewhat exasperated.

"No, we are not dancing on broken glass. We sing about the human condition in certain songs, yes, but the material is not explosive."

The boss has spoken and no amount of wheedling is

CABARET/ Stephan Bouwer is bringing Berlin to 'Bapsfontein' (aka No 58 in Hillbrow). JOHN MICHELL discussed the show with him

going to link 1988 with 1938. But the fact remains that somewhere between the stylish sleaze of cabaret venues like the Black Sun and the slightly more sophisticated impression of decadence at No 58, not to mention very contemporary stuff at the Market, performers are reflecting a volatile society that is heading for some sort of catharsis.

Bouwer concedes that the show has political undertones, however. An emphatically Afrikaans cabaret featuring songs from "The Threepenny Opera", which was banned soon after its first performance for its subtle criticism of the Weimar Coalition, cannot escape socio-political connotations. It could be that artists, so embroiled in reflecting whatever truths they experience, do not have the perspective their audiences enjoy.

What Bouwer does want to emphasise, incidentally, is his tribute to Afrikaans. The programme includes even Langenhoven's "Lamtieltjie-damtieltjie", and Bouwer wants to show that this expressive and growing language "can sound good when sung".

Sure it can — especially with the chansonneuse qualities of Laurika Rauch.

Bouwer calls her "the most exciting voice in Afrikaans". Or did he say Africa? Either way, he is not far



□ BOUWER



□ RAUCH

off the mark because her deeply expressive voice, known nationwide from her early pop hit "Kinders Van Die Wind", deserves to be monumentalised like Blood River.

"Van Berlyn tot Bapsfontein" is certainly a combination of material and talent to look forward to. If nothing else, it will be an ideal opportunity to forget all about current affairs, boys on the border and the voice of intellectual Afrikaners who have something very important to say.