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Review: The Skylight's Plaid Tidings |

November 28th, 2009 | **By Tom Strini**

Posted in: [Arts & Culture 1](#), [Culture Desk](#), [Music](#), [TCD Feature 1](#), [Theater](#)

Remember how corny the Skylight's *White Christmas* was in December of '08? *Plaid Tidings*, which the Skylight opened Friday, makes *White Christmas* look like *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

Not that there's anything wrong with that, even if the corn is Kandy Korn, sweet and silly. *Plaid Tidings*, is a Christmas stocking full of it and impossible to resist.

The conceit of the show, created by Stuart Ross in 2003 as a sequel to his 1990 *Forever Plaid*, is this: Four nerdy guys who loved to harmonize died in a car wreck in the early 1960s, before their careers could blossom (or wither and die under the onslaught of the British Invasion). Their idol is Perry Como. In *Plaid Tidings*, they are returned to earth to sing the Christmas TV Special they always hoped to do.

Marty McNamee, Paul Helm, Scott Stratton and Joe Fransee play four earnest, virginal fellows who love to sing and make people happy. They're characters out of *Archie & Jughead* comics, but stripped of their cartoonish teen rivalries. They're nice boys, but awkward and naive — until they get their vocal cords warm.

These multi-talented fellows — all of them local — drew their characters sharply and broadly, as befits the style of this thinly plotted revue. They move beautifully through the guy-group choreography devised by director Bill Theisen. By "beautifully," I mean they blend just enough skill and intentional klutziness required to make the dance moves hilarious. They nail the very complicated and often exhilarating musical arrangements, which generally mimic the jazzy, close-harmony style of the 1940s and 1950s.



From left, Marty McNamee, Paul Helm, Scott Stratton and Joe Fransee, as the Four Plaids channeling Alvin and the Chipmunks. That's music director James Valcq at the piano. Skylight Opera Theatre photo.

Plaid Tidings is a very funny show. The dialogue and lyrics abound with the sort of groaner that Theisen adores and knows how to frame and time, and the guys deliver them in style. The visual humor rises mainly from the choreography, except for the prop humor in the frenetic, screamingly funny three-minute version of an Ed Sullivan Show, complete with the Vienna Boys Choir and The Rockettes.

The overall pace is brisk, even with the occasional time-out for metaphysical explanations of why they've been sent back from heaven. The show stops for McNamee to deliver a heartfelt treatise about the moral implications of Rudolf, the Red-Nosed Reindeer, which sounds like it should be funny but is really rather touching.

It's not touching because of Rudolf's tribulations, but because McNamee's character could show such concern for them. The Plaids believed in the Perry Como Christmas Specials, they thought life could and should be that way. They died before they could become cynical about such shows, before they understood how corny it they were. They still believe, and you have to love them for it.

Plaid Tidings is 95% silly fun, but 5% heart. At Christmas time, especially, you gotta have heart.

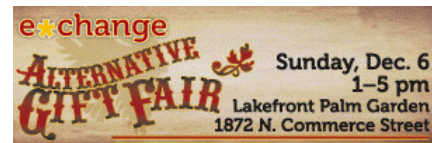
The *Skylight Opera Theatre's Plaid Tidings* runs at the Broadway Theatre Center, 158 N. Broadway, through Jan. 3. [Click on the link for tickets and schedules](#), or call the BTC box office, 414 291-7800.

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