

Review of "Plaid Tidings"
By Julie McHale

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If you've ever seen "Forever Plaid," you're in for a bigger treat with the opening of "Plaid Tidings" at Skylight Theater. However, you don't have to have seen the former to thoroughly enjoy the latter. It's a show brimming with melodic treats, clever choreography, abundant humor, and seasonal appeal.

The legend goes that four singers whose lives were cut short as they were traveling to a gig have been given the privilege of returning to earth for one day to fulfill their dream of having their own Christmas show. In the process we are treated to many other tunes and we get to know the singers individually as well. Jinx has nosebleeds, Frankie has asthma attacks, Sparky likes to goof off, and Smudge is a worry wart. But when the pressure's on, they can sing beautifully together and usually synch the choreography. Each singer has some memorable solos, but together they really glow.

Along the way, they do a parody of Ed Sullivan, sing along with Perry Como, and channel Rosemary Clooney for song suggestions. Pop songs from the Fifties, such as "Strangers in Paradise," "Sh-Boom," "Besame Moocho," and "Hey There" are rendered with new arrangements. Many times the singers glide from one song into another, surprising us with unusual transitions and amazing harmonies.

The four lively actors/vocalists work very well together, but each stood out as well in certain pieces. Paul Helm was especially entertaining in his "Besame" number, Joe Fransee soothed us with his smooth reprisal of "Hey, There," Marty McNamee's take-off on the lyrics of "Rudolph" and "Frosty the Snowman" was hilarious, and Scott Stratton proved that he is quite adept at both clumsy and graceful. There were so many wondrous moments in the show that it's hard to include them all.

The musical direction under James Valcq, who also provided piano accompaniment along with Tom McGirr on bass and Michael Lorenz on drums, was flawless. Bill Theisen gets the honors for overall direction and choreography. Both deserve a lot of credit for making this very complicated package look easy.

There are a wealth of good Christmas shows in town this month – "Nutcracker," "A Christmas Carol," "Scrooge Rouge," and "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever," to name a few, but this is the newest and one you should not miss. There were a lot of laughs, vigorous applause, and everyone was smiling as they left the theater. As Bill Theisen said, "We're here to celebrate the joy of innocence and harmony. . . trying to keep our balance in this chaotic world."

The show runs through January 3, and among other things, would make a wonderful Christmas gift. Call 414-291-7800 for times and tickets.