Written by Thom White
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I’ve never seen a production of *Forever Plaid,* but that didn’t seem to affect my enjoyment of the Circa ’21 Dinner Playhouse’s production of the musical’s sequel,
Plaid Tidings
. Thanks to a quick recap of the events from its predecessor, it was immediately clear that this show would concern a 1950s vocal quartet that had died, but was sent back to Earth to perform a Christmas show in order to prove their Plaid-itude. Or something like that.

Yet with the four singers bumbling their way through a holiday concert, *Plaid Tidings*’ shallow premise hardly matters, since it’s the tight harmonies that make the show worth catching. Director Dimitri Toscas seems well aware of that, and he also avoids camp by not allowing his actors to play things over the top. There’s a sincerity throughout the performance that’s not overpowered by the actors delivering their jokes as if yukking them up specifically for laughs. Sure, Scott Stratton (Smudge), Marty McNamee (Frankie), Don Denton (Jinx), and Danny White (Sparky) bring the appropriate buffoonery to their characters, but they do so in a way that’s charming and almost coy. Through the cast’s simple deliveries, even the musical’s groaners are chuckle-worthy, because the boys themselves are so likable, so sweet. It’s easy to root for the Plaids and laugh with them, even if their jokes are sometimes not all that funny.

It's even easier to listen to the Plaids sing, with their tight harmonies offering a blend of individually beautiful voices. And sing they do. A lot. While there is a rough narrative to the proceedings, the show is pretty much a series of songs – most of them Christmas tunes, with some classics such as "Strangers in Paradise," "Sha-Boom (Life Could Be a Dream)" and "Mambo Italiano" mixed into the bunch. (My absolute favorite part of Wednesday night's show involved the boys' attempts to turn several songs into holiday songs simply by adding to them the word "Christmas.")

It was interesting to see Denton here as the nervous, shy, awkward Jinx, considering the actor's characters in Circa '21's *The Full Monty* in 2008 and *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* earlier this year, neither of whom were at *all* shy. Denton, though, is convincing in Jinx's tensely timid stance and high-pitched, shaky voice. It was also nice to see Danny White in a lead after admiring his supporting work in the Harrison Hilltop Theatre's *Dog Sees God* this past summer. As the prankster Sparky, White lets loose an adorable giggle that's completely endearing.

Scott Stratton is truly engaging in his sincerity; his task to tell the audience about the group's Christmas-show dream, which he does with a passion that's utterly believable and moving in its tender charm. And Marty McNamee, with his boy-next-door good looks, manages to pull off playing the "leading man" type with just a touch of delightful dorkiness.

For me, *Plaid Tidings* is the perfect holiday show. It's jolly, sweet, and not at all preachy. And, thanks to the talents of Stratton, McNamee, Denton, and White, Circa '21's production itself is altogether enjoyable.

For tickets and information, call (309)786-7733 extension 2, or visit Circa21.com .