

## Musical Theater Heritage Brings Spectacular Christmas to Kansas City

Posted on [December 7, 2011](#) by [Kellie Houx](#)



Is anyone seeking a dazzling time off from the hustle and bustle of the Christmas rush that rivals the lights on the Country Club Plaza? I have a suggestion — make a trip to the Off Center Theatre in Crown Center for a couple of hours to escape with Musical Theater Heritage's *A Spectacular Christmas in Concert*.

Performances are 7 p.m. Dec. 8 and 15 (Thursdays); 8 p.m. Dec. 9 and 16 (Fridays); 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Dec. 10 and 17 (Saturdays);

and 2 p.m. Dec. 11 and 18 (Sundays).

I had the good fortune of taking my dad, husband, daughter and a dear friend to see Friday night's performance. My father commented to Chad Gerlt, the producing and marketing director, if Musical Theater Heritage has never put together a poor show. In the few years since we have been attending MTH shows, we really have yet to see a meager performance. I liked last year's Christmas show, but the retooling of *A Spectacular Christmas* has just made this year's show stronger. Sarah Crawford again directs.

The show has the history of modern Christmas woven around songs that are familiar and lovely. Of course, the four singers for this show had a harmony to rival Manhattan Transfer. Does anyone out there remember Manhattan Transfer? Well, they should step aside for Lauren Braton, Grant Golson, Samantha Barboza and Richard Gibson.



First, let me say how much I enjoy Braton's voice. I met her when she played Mabel in Gladstone Theatre in the Park's *Pirates of Penzance* in 2002. It was one of those moments where you know you are meeting someone who is going to make it big and Braton has. In those few short years, she has been all over the metropolitan area, singing her heart out. It is always a rare treat to hear her soprano.

Barboza is a little like sugar to Braton's cream. She has that alto voice that is simply divine. She and Braton sing well together. For those who like the movie *White Christmas*, there is very much a feel of Rosemary Clooney and Vera Ellen playing the Haynes Sisters. They even get to do the song *Snow* from the movie with Golson and Gibson. Both men ooze charm and are quite funny. They are also nice-looking men. Golson, a baritone, and Gibson, a bass, met the strength of the women's voices and helped round out that harmony that this show thrives on.

While the first half blossoms with the sweetness of Christmas, the second half flowers with heartfelt sentiment that includes three letters from



veterans, including one from Gibson, who served in Iraq in 2003 with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Marines. I suppose seeing the show just a few days before Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day didn't hurt in stirring up the emotions about soldiers of yesterday and today.

OK, I have to give Jeremy Watson a written hug, if that's possible. We have instilled the love

of Charlie Brown and the holiday specials, especially the Christmas show, in our daughter Maddie. So when Watson played *Christmas Time is Here*, she turned to me with the biggest grin plastered on her face. She then had me lean in and told me that Watson did a great impression of Schroeder. I sure hope Watson is OK with that comparison. Maddie is not that familiar with other pianists. Schroeder at least introduces children to Beethoven. Anyway, Watson really shows off his chops with this show. He might also surprise more than a few folks with his great voice.

The other joy came in the five young people who provided children's joy and wide-eyed enthusiasm. Malena Marcase is the oldest of the five and has been in two other MTH performances. She sang with Braton and Barboza and her voice matches well. She also led *We Are Not Alone*, a modern a cappella tune that really touched my heart. Brendan Hulla also sang a rarely heard song called *Walking in the Air*. It's always a treat to hear the familiar tunes, but also to hear new songs that help broaden that musical palate. The Walberg children – Alex, Willa and Wyatt – rounded out the children's quintet. They add such an authentic sibling take on *I'm Getting Nothing for Christmas* as part of the children's medley.

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Anyway, just head to Crown Center and find some enjoyment in the experience of Christmas in music.