

Area stages feature funny, musical holiday fare



Entertainment

WRITTEN BY RUSS SIMMONS, THEATER REVIEWER

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A SPECTACULAR CHRISTMAS

Nostalgic for the old TV Christmas specials that once dominated the airwaves? You're in luck. Musical Theatre Heritage presents a wildly entertaining throwback that hits all the right notes.

"A Spectacular Christmas," written by George Harter and directed by Sarah Crawford, is a lively and cheerful revue of holiday music, both familiar and novel.

The first act plays just like one of those old "welcome to my home" holiday shows. Harter portrays a Christmas tree salesman pitching his product from a seedy West Bottoms lot under the 12th Street Bridge.

Nathan Granner, Lauren Braton, Sarah Kleeman, Tom Lancaster, Chad Gerlt, Jeremy Watson (who doubles on piano) and Malena Marcuse play the varied city folks who wander onto the scene. They chitchat and warble some slickly produced seasonal numbers.

In a moment of inspiration that could have come from an old Judy Garland-Mickey Rooney movie, they decide to put on a show right on the spot.

Act two is the concert they've devised, complete with music stands, microphones and formal attire.

Standards such as "White Christmas" and "O Holy Night" are in the mix, as well as melancholy tunes including "A Place Called Home" and "We Are Not Alone."

While all of the singers are first-rate, Granner stands out, putting his soaring tenor to good use on "The Christmas Song." Kleeman shows equally impressive versatility on "All I Want For Christmas."

Lancaster demonstrates sharp comic timing, lamenting the lot of a Jew during the holidays with a tune called "Christmas Envy."

Finding a more satisfying distraction this yuletide season might prove to be a bigger challenge than organizing your gift list.

"A Spectacular Christmas" runs through Dec. 19 at the Off Center Theatre in Crown Center, 2450 Grand Blvd., Kansas City, Mo. For tickets, call (816) 842-9999 or visit www.musicaltheatreheritage.com.