

Harmony-filled holiday sequel presented at Pheasant Run

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By **RANDALL G. MIELKE** For Sun-Times Media

The musical "Plaid Tidings," which is being presented by the Noble Fool Theatricals at Pheasant Run Resort & Spa through Dec. 27, is the holiday sequel to "Forever Plaid." Both shows were written by Stuart Ross, and the holiday edition continues the story of the four singers who die in a car crash in the 1950s. In the original story, the foursome returns to earth for one last chance to present their big concert.

In staging the sequel, director and choreographer Bob Kiser faced the challenge of presenting the sequel as too similar to the original versus being too different from the predecessor.

"It is a balancing act," Kiser said. "The show 'Forever Plaid' works so well that you have to keep the relationship of the guys. The show starts with the "Forever Plaid" set, but then we add to it with Christmas things. This show has the same kind of structure. The similar numbers are in there, but the song "Twas the Night Before," for example, is a rap and hip-hop number. It is not in 'Forever Plaid,' but it is in this show.

"With the choreography, there are hints of the original show," Kiser continued. In "Plaid Tidings," the four boys (Sparky, Smudge, Jinx and Frankie) are back from heaven to sing songs of the '30s, '40s, '50s and a "Plaid-erized" version of Christmas specials to fulfill their mission of creating a little harmony in a troubled world.

"Plaid Tidings" includes a tribute to "The Ed Sullivan Show Christmas" spectaculars featuring "the Rockettes," "the Chipmunks" and "The Vienna Boys Choir."

"Plaid Tidings' is Forever Plaid 'Christmas-ized,'" Kiser said. "It begins where 'Forever Plaid' left off. The boys have completed their mission and now are back on Earth to do a Christmas show."

The "Plaid Tidings" cast features (in alphabetical order): Sean Effinger-Dean, Robert Deason, David Meadows and Brad Simanski.

"First, they have to have great voices and be great musicians because of the four-part harmony," said Kiser of the casting requirements. "Also, it is four guys playing leads because each one has to take the spotlight with a song."

Kiser said that because the characters in "Plaid Tidings" are a bit confused and anxious at the start of the show, that sometimes delays audience member reactions.

"With each character at the start of the show they are scared because they are not sure what is happening," he said.

"And when the characters are scared, the audience cannot always relate to them; 'scared' kind of puts them off. So the characters start to connect with themselves and then the audience warms up."

"On opening night it is what I thought it would be, but then the scenic designer has added elements or the actors have put a spin on their characters and the whole show is even more amazing than I imagined."