

## THEATER REVIEW

# 'Plaid' delivers laughter and tears

By KATIE HUGHES MCKEE

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They say good things come in small packages. "Plaid Tidings," the four-man musical revue that is the sequel to "Forever Plaid," bears witness to the truth of this adage.

The Plaids are a clean-cut guy group who were on their way to their big break concert in January of 1964 when their car was hit by a bus full of Catholic schoolgirls on their way to see the Beatles on "The Ed Sullivan Show." All the girls were unharmed. All the Plaids died, a metaphor for the demise of their brand of music at the hands of rock 'n' roll.

In "Forever Plaid," Cabrillo Stage's 2008 holiday offering, the Plaids were allowed to return to earth to fulfill their destiny of headlining a concert. In "Plaid Tidings" they are back, on a mysterious mission which takes them all of Act I to figure out, and all of Act II to carry out, with a little celestial aid from Rosemary Clooney.

As the first act unfolds, the Plaids are bewildered by their return to earth. Their distinct personalities reveal themselves as they attempt to pass whatever test is being set before them to get cosmically recertified through their "spiritual SATs." Max Bennett-Parker is Frankie, the den mother and head cheerleader of the group, whose asthma acts up under stress. Matt Dunn is Sparky, the class clown who has to make a joke of everything. Smudge is played by Sean Gorski. Smudge is the group's Eeyore and tends to go off on political rants. Tad Kistner's Jinx is fragile and frightened, and given to nosebleeds.

These men perform breathtaking harmonies to classics like "Sh-Boom," "Mambo Italiano" and "Strangers in Paradise," while delivering choreography that ranges from standard doo-wop to, in Smudge's case, the physically

**IF YOU GO**  
'PLAID TIDINGS'

**PRESENTED BY:** Cabrillo Stage  
**DIRECTED BY:** Andrew Ceglio  
**MUSICAL DIRECTOR:** Drew Lewis  
**WHEN:** Thursday and Friday, 7:30 p.m., through Dec. 30. Saturday, special Christmas Eve show at 2 p.m.  
**WHERE:** The Crocker Theater on the campus of Cabrillo College  
**TICKETS:** Adult: \$16 to \$34. Senior (60+): \$16 to \$28. Children under 12: \$16 to \$28  
**DETAILS:** 479-6154 or www.cabrillostage.com

punishing. The holiday songs begin with a version of "The Christmas Song" that was so beautiful I instantly teared up, and end with a wistful version of what I have long considered to be the saddest song ever written, holiday or not: "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas."

I was very pleasantly surprised at "Plaid Tidings." I was expecting a nice little revue of '50s songs and holiday music, and that it was. There was a belabored scene regarding a nosebleed that I would have pared down, but the rest of the evening had a surprising amount of meat on its bones. The holidays can bring up angst, nostalgia, confusion and sadness, and "Plaid Tidings" didn't shy away from any of these, yet had me doubled over in laughter in several scenes, notably an entire episode of "The Ed Sullivan Show" done in less than four minutes and Frankie's monologue on the cruelty inherent in "Rudolph" and "Frosty" and the paranoia of "Santa Claus is Coming to Town."

Give yourself a nice holiday gift: check out the Men in Plaid.



JANA MARCUS/CONTRIBUTED

The four guys make up the Plaids sing holiday songs and other goodies in the Cabrillo Stage production of 'Plaid Tidings.'