

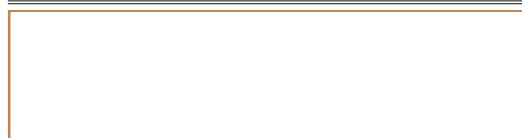
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## Santa Flaws

Like elves, the cast of "Another Night Before Christmas" works hard to save the show.

by Perry Stewart

Published Wednesday, December 2, 2009

When describing a Christmas-themed musical, the term, "hard-working" seldom springs to mind. But **Theatre Three's** production of *Another Night Before Christmas* is just that. Script, score and performances are often frantic in attempting to administer a dose of holiday spirit.

Not surprisingly, this staging by director Terry Dobson in T3's cozy Theatre Too basement space has some of its best moments when everyone relaxes.

Author and lyricist Sean Grennan's Scrooge-esque protagonist is Karol, a social worker who would just as soon skip the whole Yuletide mess. In the show's opening number, she pleads "Put It Away," meaning the tinsel, the holly and the infernal good cheer.

But what to her wondering eyes should appear, but a white-bearded homeless guy who claims to be Santa Claus. "Believe in Me," he entreats in song. Okay, we know the drill: Santa has two acts in which to convert Karol. We, the audience, are meant to be his cheering section.

But, wait: Karol is right. Merchants start hawking their holiday wares earlier each year, to the accompaniment of dreadful Christmas pop songs. Santa concedes the point, in one of the funnier bits in the show. Realizing that they were onto something, Grennan and composer Leah Okimoto team Santa and Karol on "Kill Der Bingle," a tirade against the done-to-death "White Christmas."

The banter between Patty Breckenridge, as Karol, and R Bruce Elliott as Santa (known as the Guy), is the wit and soul of *Another Night*. Elliott's signature drollery is perfect for this character, and Breckenridge sings brilliance into even the most pastel of songs. She's especially good on "I Want My Life Back," which benefits from musical director Vonda Bowling's fiery arrangement and spirited piano accompaniment.

This is very much a two-person show. The shoehorning-in of two satellite characters plainly wastes the talent of Marisa Diotalevi and Philip Bentham, although each brings welcome vocal clout. Diotalevi and Breckenridge, for



R Bruce Elliot and Patty Breckenridge. Photo by Ken Birdsell.



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## Another Night Before Christmas

by Sean Grennan and Leah Okimoto

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example, achieve lovely harmony on "Poles Apart."

(Interestingly, a California production earlier this year featured Karol, Santa and a third character billed as The Voice.)


Frankly, many of the most enjoyable moments in this show are non-musical. Elliott cajoles and conspires. Breckenridge snipes and sulks. We concur and guffaw. There's a priceless running gag that pits Karol against a talking burglar alarm, and an in-joke involving "Clem Moore." (Reference the famous poem that inspired the title of this musical.)

Costume designer Bruce R. Coleman outfits Elliott in layers of tattered clothing. Why this instead of Santa's traditional garb? That's explained, and it's a clever twist.

This Santa also wears a bathrobe with a Kansas City Chiefs logo—an obvious homage to K.C.'s American Heartland Theatre, where *Another Night Before Christmas* was first produced. One might have expected director Dobson to change the garment to a Dallas Cowboys robe. But, then, the script's disparaging remarks about the Chiefs wouldn't apply to the Cowboys.

Would they?

TJ



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