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A Christmas 'Miracle' Radio Play on the Air at Brumder Mansion

BY HARRY CHERKINIAN DEC. 10, 2018 11:00 A.M.

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Christmas time is here and that means one thing for kids of all ages: Santa Claus is coming to town. Or is he? And does he really exist?

That's the premise of the classic film, *Miracle on 34th Street*. And now Milwaukee Entertainment Group is staging the original 1947 radio play first adapted by Lance Arthur Smith with original songs and arrangements by Jon Lorenz. It's a delightfully nostalgic look back at how this beloved Yuletide story is depicted to the radio

studio audience as well how the sights and sounds were created for listeners glued to their radios.

When Kris Kringle substitutes at the last minute for a soused Santa in the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade, he immediately changes the lives of all he comes into contact with—from single mom and Macy's employee, Doris Walker and her daughter Susan, to R.H. Macy himself and his chief rival, Adam Gimbel. Enter idealistic lawyer, Fred Gailey and the romantic angle fits right in.

Co-Directors Amanda J. Hull and Tom Marks have turned the lower level Brumder Mansion space into a cozy holiday setting, which works perfectly for the radio version as actors step up and back to read their parts. This adaptation has famous stars of the time portraying the seven characters. And the cast does a fine job despite a few opening glitches (sound system issues in Act I and some not quite harmonious harmonies). As most play a variety of roles, particularly noteworthy is Conor Blankenship as the announcer and R.H. Macy among other cameos. Perfectly over the top with any number of non-verbal sight gags, Blankenship give this production a boost of holiday spirit, visual or otherwise.

James P. Iaguinta is a very believable Kris Kringle and Kira Walters brings a nuanced performance to her slow-to-believe-in-Santa's Doris. Showing a remarkable depth of maturity and on-stage presence is Travis Cheever as Fred. A senior at Oak Creek High School, Cheever's subtly shaded portrayal of the attorney as well as innocent employee Alfred was impressive, start to finish. (Keep an eye on this fine young actor; he's going places).

As Kris Kringle tells Fred, "we all need someone to believe in us." And at Christmas time, who better to believe in than Santa Claus ?

*Through Dec. 22 at Brumder Mansion, 3046 W. Wisconsin Ave.
For tickets call 414-388-9104 or visit
www.milwaukeeentertainmentgroup.com.*

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Harry Cherkinian is an award-winning writer and reviewer in the arts and entertainment field, specializing in music and theater.

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