

By Julie McHale

"Miracle on 34th Street," a live musical radio show, runs through December 22 in the Brumder Mansion on 3046 West Wisconsin Avenue in Milwaukee, performed by MEG (Milwaukee Entertainment Group.) Call 414-388-9104 or visit their website at MilwaukeeEntertainmentGroup.com

A classic story told with a new twist, "Miracle on 34th Street," a live musical radio play, adapted by Lance Arthur Smith and Jon Lorenz from the 1947 radio show, is a charmer.

The actors hold scripts in their hands and sit or stand on stage as required by their participation in the story. Seven actor/vocalists comprise the engaging cast.

The role of Susan Walker is alternated between Aven Spahn and Ellie Christian. Spahn was performing on the night I saw the production, and performing very well, I might add. Her duet with her mom, "I Believe in You" was endearing.

Conner Blankenship takes on the role of radio announcer, sound effects man, CEO of Macy's and the prosecuting lawyer in the case against Kris Kringle. He also lends his strong voice to the many songs. He is amusing.

Hayley San Fillippo, with her zest and strong vocals, plays many roles. She is a delight to watch.

Kira Walters and Travis Cheever play the roles of the icy Doris Walker, the reluctant believer in imagination, and her clumsy wooer Fred Gailey, the lawyer who finally wins his case with her and the one where he defends the forlorn Kris Kringle. As an unlikely pairing, they provide a lot of laughs and a lovely duet, "A Little Make-Believe."

Lastly, the remaining two actors, Matthew Ecclestone and James P. Iaquina, the latter as the lovable Kris Kringle, entertain us throughout. Ecclestone is especially effective when playing the crotchety Macy manager and the clueless psychiatrist. Iaquina radiates warmth and a twinkle in his eye throughout. We love him, almost as much as little Susan does. His interactions with her are priceless.

Besides the versatile acting skills, this illustrious group with the help of Vocal Director Adam Qutaishat and accompanist Ryan Cappleman, perform some very beautiful ensemble numbers. One of the most melodious is the arrangement of "Rest Ye Merry, Gents." Most of the ensemble songs are performed as a quintet – with San Fillippo, Kira Walters, Travis Cheever, Ecclestone and Blankenship participating. Occasionally they are joined by little Susan. Kris Kringle's lovely

voice has a chance to shine in his duo with Fred, “Don’t Let Us Down.”

Co-directed by Tom Marks and Amanda Hull, the show, though experiencing a few sound glitches, proceeded very beautifully, giving us laughs, heartfelt moments, and a reminder that belief in the power of imagination and faith in spiritual realities enriches our lives.

If you’ve never experienced the beauty of the Brumder Mansion and the cozy space in the lower level where many moments of magic occur, go see “Miracle on 34th Street” to add to your Christmas cheer.

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