

NORTHWEST HERALD

Review: 'Eleanor's Very Merry Christmas Wish' delights

By REGINA M. BELT-DANIELS



You are in store for a wonderful holiday treat, “Eleanor’s Very Merry Christmas Wish – The Musical,” streaming now through Dec. 27.

It’s a delight for all ages and available in two options: \$25 per household viewing, or the party box ranging from \$45 to \$60, which includes a copy of the book the musical is based on, an ornament, and special stationery, sent directly to your door.

Lasting slightly over an hour, “Eleanor’s Very Merry Christmas Wish” is based on the children’s book written by Chicagoan Denise McGowan Tracy, who also serves as executive producer of the musical. It is the story of a rag doll named Eleanor who lives in the magical world of the North Pole with Santa, Mrs. “Cookie” Claus, elves Twinkle, Sprinkle and Sparkle and Santa’s cousin Clara who just happens to be in charge of the Naughty and Nice List (and unscuffed white boots). Every Christmas, Eleanor sadly watches as toys depart for new homes and wonders why she doesn’t. She wishes for a best friend and a home of her own and consequently writes a letter to Santa.

Directed and choreographed by Zachary L. Gray, the musical is well-paced and involves audience interaction – the excitement is palpable. And this is a full-scale musical complete with sparkling, joyous holiday costumes by Tatjana Radisic and a very functional and clever Christmas package scenic design by Kehoe. The original music and lyrics by Kathleen Butler-Duplessis, arranged by David Fiorello, are fun, bright, charming and cheery. The ensemble’s singing is exceptional. The opening number, “The North Pole Is a Magical Place,” introduces the characters and the plot; and the “Wrap It Rap” and finale “Make Your Wish” are two other outstanding pieces to watch out for.

The 10-member ensemble bubbles and engages. Samantha Bonzi is an endearing, eyeglasses-wearing Eleanor. Her singing voice is incredible, and I believe her gratefulness, her dreams and her character’s ability to spread happiness. In other words, she’s not a mopey rag doll. She loves Christmas. David Turrentine is the Santa of perfect voice and stature. He gets applause the second he walks onstage.

Also enjoyable is Lindsey Jane Bullen as Twinkle, the sprightly narrator, who keeps the audience involved with questions and comments. (I chuckled as she noted adults on the Naughty List because they make kids eat broccoli and are always on their cellphones.)

Plainfield North High School alum Sydney Swanson portrays Noelle, the perfect hopeful match for Eleanor. Noelle has a letter-writing duet with Eleanor in “Dear Santa” that is most satisfying.

And wait till you meet Emily Rohm, double cast as Holly and Clara. Clara is perhaps the too brief comic relief – she’s Santa’s cousin in charge of the Naughty and Nice List who dares to disagree with him.

From page to stage, “Eleanor’s Very Merry Christmas Wish – The Musical” is a story about family, friendship, hopes, dreams and love. I easily can envision it becoming a holiday classic.

As McGowan Tracy said, “Our wish is to keep the magic of the holidays sparkling in the eyes of children no matter what challenges we face this year.”

Theaters may be dark and shuttered right now, but this spirited, whimsical production shines.

IF YOU VIEW

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WHEN: Streaming through Dec. 27

COST: \$25 per household, or party boxes ranging from \$45 to \$60

INFO: www.eleanorswish.com