

'Plaid Tidings' will warm hearts

Musical: Show features nostalgic '50s and '60s tunes

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For the holiday season, Capital Playhouse was ready to deck the halls with nostalgia, reminiscences and innocence in a production of "Annie."

But the touring production of the musical about the indefatigable orphan — coming to Seattle in February — got in the way.

"The production company got very tight with the rights and said no," said Jeff Kingsbury, the theater's artistic director. "We needed to get a show that we knew, that we liked and that we knew our audiences would like."

That show: "Plaid Tidings," which is also filled with nostalgia, reminiscences and innocence.

"It's darling; it's really delightful," said Kingsbury, who's directing the show.

"Annie," which has already been cast, will still be part of the playhouse season, replacing "Into the Woods" in May.

If "Plaid Tidings" isn't quite as familiar as "Annie," it might help to know that it's a holiday version of "Forever Plaid," which the theater last staged seven years ago.

The basic plot: A harmonious quartet of young men, who died before realizing their dreams of musical fame, comes back from the dead for another chance to shine.

Through the story of the clean-cut and slightly awkward young singers, "Plaid Tidings" showcases the music: pop tunes of the '50s and '60s and lots of holiday music.

"All four of the guys are the underdogs," said Bruce Haasl, who'll play Frankie, the asthmatic leader of the Plaids. "They are the guys from the AV squad who like music. They're not really comfortable in their own skin.

"It's fun to play these wannabe performers who are not really polished."

A show about a group of quirky characters putting on a show sounds a bit like the playhouse's recent "Nonsense," which was such a favorite with audiences that it was held over.

"There are, now that you mention it, a lot of similarities in concept," Haasl said.

The show has some audience interaction, too.

“It’s not as funny as ‘Nonsense,’ ” said Kingsbury. “It’s very heartwarming, and it’s a visit to memory lane.”

Audiences will know the songs, he said.

“When you walk out of ‘Forever Plaid,’ you will be humming those tunes for days,” he said. “It’s got that familiar connection that people know.

“There’s the fun of taking a trip down memory lane,” Kingsbury added. “At holiday time, that resonates a little bit more.”

And “Plaid Tidings” was designed to lift spirits: It was created in 2001 for the Pasadena (Calif.) Playhouse, when the events of Sept. 11 had left the nation in need of some holiday cheer.

“You remember we’re doing all feel-good shows this season,” Kingsbury said. “It’s the perfect feel-good.”