

A different Christmas feel

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The Christmas offering at Cornerstone Theatre is a sequel to the 1990s musical *Forever Plaid*.

There are many in town who will have seen the theatre's version of the off-Broadway musical comedy by Stuart Ross, but it's been a while since Cornerstone has put on a musical for Christmas.

Everybody will know the songs in this show — familiar Christmas favourites — they just might not have heard them like this before.

And many in town are familiar with the quality of the music the theatre is known for, but again this time there's something new to see.

Musical director Debbie Rosen is on stage the entire time with the Plaids.

And though it's rare for Rosen, it's not the first time she's been on stage. She joined the Plaids on stage the first time they came back to Earth — in *Forever Plaid*.

But the long-time musical director said this cast is doing "fabulously" with the music already. In this show the 1950s guy group is back on Earth to discover what they're doing there — and they find out they're on Earth to perform a Christmas TV special.

"Every day they're getting better and better," Rosen said. "It's really exciting. The sound is really coming together as a unit."

The performers playing the Plaids are: Jeffrey Sanders, who plays Smudge, the bass, the worrying dreamer; Clayton Labbe, who plays Frankie, the second tenor; Oliver Bailey, who plays Jinx, the first tenor, the shy follower; and Doug Price, who plays Sparky, the baritone, and the goofball of the four, who cracks jokes and just tries to have a good time.

"It's a pretty remarkable cast," Rosen said.

"I think it's going to be fabulous, right off the get go."

Currently the cast is gearing up to hit those four-part harmonies that make the show what it is, which are challenging at times, said Sanders, "But worth it when you get it.

"It's really tight, a lot of the notes are really close together at times."

They're sing about 90 per cent of the show often in very close four-part harmonies.

Plaid Tidings: The Holiday Edition of Forever Plaid is a sequel to *Forever Plaid*, in which the singing group comes back to life to perform a show they've never performed before.

Breaking the fourth wall is a part of the show, but that's more fun than it really is a challenge. The challenge for the performers is to find their 1950s base and then find the nuances of a variety of styles as the story takes shape.

"Trying to find the honesty of being in the 1950s and not having any sarcasm in your delivery — the jokes: the audience gets the jokes, but the humour comes from us not getting the jokes," Labbe said. He said the biggest challenge is not putting each performer's modern sensibilities into their characters. And this is a show that tests that — Labbe's feature is 'Twas the Night Before Christmas — a well-known tune — this time with a hip-hop, funk feel.

Throughout the show, the 1950s singing group is possessed by the Christmas spirit and they find music they simply do not know.

There's tango, swing, calypso, mambo and a variety of styles throughout the show, which maintains the show's

Christmas feel.

"Even though we go into a number of different styles the same musical feel and sound — instrumentation — is constant throughout," Price said. "So, even though we never make reference to it, that's a thread — and a spine — throughout the show."

Plaid Tidings: The Holiday Edition of Forever Plaid runs Nov. 24 through Dec. 31 at Cornerstone Theatre. For ticket information go to atthecorner.ca or call (403) 609 – 0004.

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