

## Holiday theater preview

Nov. 27, 2011

Written by Jackie Demaline

Area stages present a host of great holiday entertainment in the coming weeks. From an all new “Nutcracker” ballet, to Cincinnati Pops holiday concerts to the 21st edition of “Christmas Carol” at Playhouse in the Park.

New this year is original musical fairytale “Snow White,” premiering at Ensemble Theatre. It’s the eighth collaboration by David Kisor and Joseph McDonough and definitely a departure for the team who made their debut with “The Frog Princess” in 1997.

Kisor, who lives in Clifton, and McDonough, a resident of Colerain Township, decided before they started working that “we didn’t want to repeat ourselves,” McDonough said.

Don’t expect a Disney retread. It’s more Tim Burton-y as they use the Brothers Grimm as the source for this tale of a modern heroine, celebrating her 16th birthday.

“The source material is darker – in the original, the wicked Queen kills Snow White three times,” Kisor pointed out.

“It’s still a lot of fun,” McDonough interjected. This is, after all, a holiday musical and there will be a happy ending.

There’s still a talking mirror to chat with the wicked Queen, but dwarves are replaced by “halflings,” characters who are half-human, half-animal. They represent virtues including compassion, courage, happiness and patience, which fit with the moral of the annual musicals: look beyond the surface for real beauty. Redemption is also a primary theme of “Snow White.”

Both characters and music “are layered and complicated,” said composer Kisor. “It’s a different pallet for us; there are lots of reflections.” He grinned that composing the show reminded him of getting his master’s degree at College-Conservatory of Music.

Kisor added, dropping more clues, “the ‘halflings’ have been diminished.”

“Spiritually,” McDonough inserted.

Kisor noted, “Every one in the show has something to lose or gain.”

Two members of Ensemble’s intern company play Snow White and her Prince. Sara Kenny is a recent Northern Kentucky University grad and Michael Carr graduated from the University of Cincinnati’s CCM Drama in 2011.

Ensemble’s annual holiday musicals always feature a standing cast of favorite supporting characters and all the favorites are back, most importantly Deb Girdler with Michael Bath and Buz Davis are the evil queen and her dim-witted henchmen.

### **More top holiday picks on area stages:**

**“A Christmas Carol”** – Dec. 1-30, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. Miserly Ebenezer Scrooge undergoes a miraculous Christmas Eve transformation as he looks at his past, present and the possibilities of the future in Playhouse’s magical telling of Charles Dickens’ holiday classic. Terrific Bruce Cromer leads the cast again this year. Spooky, heart-catching and joyous by turn, it’s the most uplifting show of the season. God bless us, every one! 513-421-3888 and <http://www.cincyplay.com/>

**“White Christmas”** – Dec. 1-23, Covedale Center. Take a pair of WWII vets who are showbiz stars, a pair of singing sisters, a retired general, a holiday inn with no snow and Irving Berlin. Mix them together and get a classic screen-to-stage hit with lots of comedy, romance, misunderstandings and timeless hits like “Blue Skies” and “Count Your Blessings” on the way to a title tune finale. The show makes its Covedale Center debut. 513-241-6550 and [www.cincinnatiandmarkproductions.com](http://www.cincinnatiandmarkproductions.com).

**Frisch’s “The Nutcracker”** – Dec. 15-24, Cincinnati Ballet. This year Cincinnati Ballet introduces a new, \$1 million production of the holiday favorite. New hand-painted sets are designed by John Ezell and more than 200 new costumes by Tony Award-nominated designer Carrie F. Robbins 513-621-5282 and [www.cballet.org](http://www.cballet.org)

**“Love’s Labours Lost”** – Nov. 30-Dec. 31. Cincinnati Shakespeare Company. For the last few years Cincinnati Shakespeare has offered Shakespearian comedy as a holiday alternative. This year, “L3” gets a storybook setting as it tells the story of the young King of Navarre and his three noble companions who take an oath forego the company of women and devote themselves to scholarship. Then a princess and her ladies arrive on their doorstep. 513-381-2273 and [www.cincyshakes.com](http://www.cincyshakes.com)

**“The Santaland Diaries”/“trueCHRISTMAS”** – Dec. 1-17. Last year, New Edgecliff Theatre’s artistic director Jim Stump took a fresh look at their long-time holiday entry by David Sedaris and it’s so much fun. Josh Steele (The Carnegie’s theater chief) stars in the sardonic one-man show about a guy who’s signed on to play an elf in Macy’s Santaland. This year the one-act is partnered with real people’s holiday stories, different combinations every night of the run by phenom trueTHEATRE -- if you haven’t caught their act, give it a try. 888-588-0137 and [www.newedgecliff.com](http://www.newedgecliff.com)

**“A Christmas Survival Guide”** – Dec. 15-22. Northern Kentucky University’s Commonwealth Theatre gets in the holiday act with a dinner theatre evening, a revue from the creators of “I Love a Piano.” This “Miniature Christmas Spectacular” takes a knowing look at the joy-filled (and stress-filled) Christmas season. Lots of songs, traditional and lesser known fun. 859-572-5464 and [www.Theatre.nku.edu/boxoffice](http://www.Theatre.nku.edu/boxoffice)

**“Abraham Lincoln’s Big Gay Dance Party”** – Through Dec. 23. And now for something completely different – Ms. Harmony Green’s fourth-grade class presents a new take on their traditional Christmas pageant in a rural Illinois town. The production sets off a firestorm of controversy when it calls into question Honest Abe’s sexual orientation. The first-rate indie theater cast includes Torie Wiggins and Robert Pavlovich. 513-300-5669 and [www.knowtheatre.com](http://www.knowtheatre.com)