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**A MERRY CHRISTMAS SAMPLER**

"Plaid Tidings" to all: The Forever Plaid guys sprinkle holiday songs and '50s tunes at the Walnut Street Theatre. MARK GARVIN

The calendar is chock-full of theater, music, and other entertainment.  
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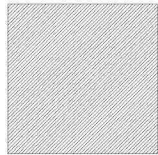
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## COVER STORY

# LIGHTING UP HOLIDAY STAGES

Season's greetings to the mellow and merry entertainments about to come out of their Christmas wrappings.

By Michael Harrington

INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

**N**ow that the Thanksgiving Day feast is over, let the mad, merry dash begin!

No, not to the stores (some of us like to stay traditional and wait until Dec. 23 to start our shopping).

It's off to the region's cornucopia of Christmas theater, music, and spectacles we go (in a noncomprehensive way — it's a *big* cornucopia, and we can only hit some of the highlights):

### Handel's Messiah

A performance of the oratorio is welcome any time of year — the first performances back in the 18th century were given in April, and it was not a hit — but it has really become a holiday standard over the centuries.

The Philadelphia Orchestra's annual performances date to 1961. This year, Paul Goodwin conducts, with soloists Karina Gauvin, soprano; Diana Moore, mezzo-soprano; John Tessier, tenor; and Christophèren Nomura, baritone, along with the Philadelphia Singers chorale, at the Kimmel Center's Verizon Hall, Broad and Spruce Streets, at 2 p.m. Dec. 23. Tickets are \$29 to \$124. Call 215-893-1999. (The orchestra will also perform selections from its CD *The Glorious Sound of Christmas*, with conductor Bramwell Tovey and guests the Mendelssohn Club, at the Kimmel Center at 7 p.m. Dec. 15 to 17.)

Continuing a tradition begun by music professor William F. Philip in 1937, John French leads the **Ursinus College Choir and Meistersingers** in a 75th-anniversary performance featuring soloists Leslie Johnson, soprano, Robert O'Neil, countertenor, Kenneth Garner, tenor, and Reginald Pindell, bass, at the college's Bomberger Auditorium, Main

Street, Collegeville, at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 1 and 2:30 p.m. Dec. 2. Tickets are \$10. Call 610-409-3000.

### The Nutcracker

It's not just for little girls in taffeta dresses, and it's not exactly frothy. Tchaikovsky's ballet is a masterpiece of music, and the story based on E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale is a testament to community's triumph over chaos.

The Pennsylvania Ballet presents George Balanchine's version of the work at the Academy of Music, Broad and Locust Streets, opening with performances at 2 and 7 p.m. Dec. 8 and running on a varied schedule to Dec. 30. Tickets are \$20 to \$125. Call 215-893-1999.

The Brandywine Ballet's presentation of Donna Muzio and Nancy Page's version at West Chester University's Asplundh Hall, 700 S. High St., opens with a performance at 10 a.m. Dec. 7, and continues on a Thursday-through-Sunday schedule to Dec. 16. Call 610-696-2711.

### Panto, plus two

The British tradition of the holiday panto — fractured fairy tales featuring topical jokes, audience participation, a “messy bit,” and silly songs — has found a welcome home in our region.

The People's Light & Theatre Company, panto pioneers, presents **Aladdin** at 2 and 7 p.m. Friday at the company's theater, 39 Conestoga Rd., Malvern, and continues with shows on a varied schedule to Jan. 6. Tickets are \$35 to \$45. Call 610-644-3500.

Two that are not pantos, but children's classics:

The Arden Theatre's magic-and-Mozart version of **Cinderella**, opening with a show at 7 p.m. Dec. 1 at the company's theater, 40 N. Second St., and continuing on a Tuesday-

through-Sunday schedule to Jan. 27. Tickets are \$16 to \$36. Call 215-922-1122.

The Enchantment Theatre performs **The Velveteen Rabbit**, the story of a worn plush toy that wishes to become real, in Don Sebesky's musical adaptation, at Bristol Riverside Theatre, 10 Radcliffe St., Bristol, at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Tickets are \$25; \$15 students. Call 215-785-0100.

### A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens' 1843 novel has become the story of the season.

The venerable **Hedgerow Theatre** presents Nagle Jackson's version, with the show going on at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 6 at the company's theater, 64 Rose Valley Rd., Rose Valley, and continuing on a varied schedule to Dec. 15. Tickets are \$10 to \$32. Call 610-565-4211.

For another take, check out **Humbug!**, Sheldon Harnick and Michel Legrand's one-man musical, starring Alan Safier as, well, everybody, at the Bristol Riverside Theatre, at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, 8 p.m. Nov. 30, 2 and 8 p.m. Dec. 1, and 3 p.m. Dec. 2. Tickets are \$15 to \$45. Call 215-785-0100.

### Theater

The pre-rock, post-life, close-harmony, square-guy group Forever Plaid returns in **Plaid Tidings**, performing 1950s pop hits such as “Mambo Italiano” and holiday gems such as “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.” The show goes on at 7:30 p.m. at the Walnut

See **HOLIDAY** on W16

Street Theatre's Independence Studio on 3, 825 Walnut St., and continues on a Tuesday-through-Sunday schedule to Dec. 30 (no show on Christmas Day). Tickets are \$35 to \$45. Call 215-574-3550.

Also check out: The 11th Hour Theatre Company's **Winter Won-**

**derettes**, in which a 1960s girl group comes out of retirement to save the day at a hardware store's Christmas party. The show opens with a performance at 7 p.m. Dec. 10 at Theatre Horizon, 401 DeKalb St., Norristown, and continues on a Thursday-through-Sunday schedule to Dec. 30. Tickets are \$15 to \$31. Call 267-987-9865.

### **Pops, jazz and pop**

Peter Nero leads **the Philly Pops** for one last holiday concert at the Kimmel Center's Verizon Hall, at 8 p.m. Dec. 7, 3 p.m. Dec. 8 and 9, 8 p.m. Dec. 12, 3 p.m. Dec. 14 through 16, 8 p.m. Dec. 19, and 3 p.m. Dec. 22. Tickets are \$26 to \$111. Call 215-893-1999.

The sensational singer **Dianne Reeves** performs jazzy arrangements of Christmas standards at the **Annenberg Center**, 3680 Walnut St., at 8 p.m. Dec. 1. Tickets are \$20 to \$70. Call 215-898-3900.

You didn't know **Eddie Money** had a holiday show, but now that you do, you want to see it, right? Yeah, you do. The great 1970s rocker performs at the Sellersville Theater, 24 W. Temple Ave., Sellersville, at 6 and 9 p.m. Dec. 8. Tickets are \$39.50 and \$555. Call 215-257-5808.

Also check out two vocal amazons: The quartet **Manhattan Transfer** sings at the Keswick Theatre, Easton Road and Keswick Avenue, Glenside, at 8 p.m. Dec. 13. Tickets are \$38 to \$58. Call 215-572-7650.

The neo-psychedelic collective **the Polyphonic Spree** plays at the Trocadero, 10th and Arch Streets,

at 7 p.m. Dec. 14. Tickets are \$22. Call 215-922-6888.

### **Fun stuff**

**Buddy Valastro**, star of TV's *Cake Boss*, shares holiday recipes and stories from his Hoboken, N.J., bakery and demonstrates some pastry decorating at the Kimmel Center's Verizon Hall at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday. Tickets are \$35 to \$45.75. Call 215-893-1999.

A great stress reliever: Taking in the foliage at the Morris Arboretum, 100 E. Northwestern Ave., and watching the children (and most adults) delight in the miniature **Holiday Garden Railway**, starting Friday and running until Dec. 31. Admission is \$16; \$14 seniors and ages 13 to 18; free under 3. Call 215-247-5777.

### **Anti-seasonal**

Everybody loves this time of year, unless they don't. Sometimes you want to be a bit naughty rather than nice. Time to add to your collection of coal.

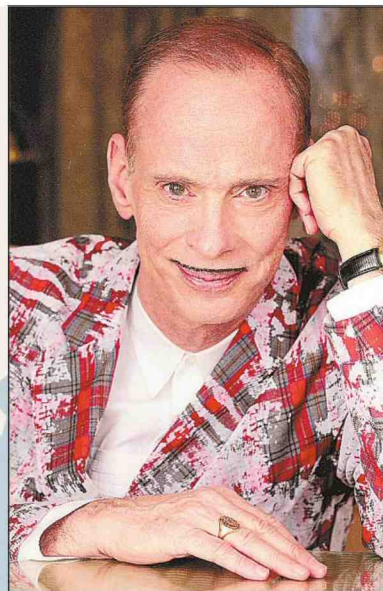
The self-proclaimed "Pope of Trash," director **John Waters** (*Pink Flamingos*, *Hairspray*), takes an eccentric bent in his one-man Christmas show, discussing real-life holiday horror stories, the great bad movies that plague us each year, and his own urge to remake all his films into seasonal children's classics. The show goes on at the Trocadero at 8 p.m. Thursday. Tickets are \$42. Call 215-922-6888.

Contact Michael Harrington at [mharrington@phillynews.com](mailto:mharrington@phillynews.com).





**The Enchantment Theatre performs** "The Velveteen Rabbit," the story of a worn plush toy that wishes to become real, at Bristol Riverside Theatre.



**Director John Waters'** skewed view of the holiday will be on display Thursday at the Trocadero.



**Jimmy Reath** (left) and Hooper Murphy view Morris Arboretum's little train.



**The Polyphonic Spree** sings Dec. 14 at the Trocadero.





**The Philadelphia Orchestra's** annual concerts are a 50-year-old tradition.  
MICHAEL T. REGAN



**Dianne Reeves** gives holiday standards a jazzy sound, Dec. 1 at Annenberg Center



**Manhattan Transfer** performs Dec. 13 at the Keswick Theatre.