

“SLEIGH BELLS IN THE SNOW”

The musical hits & highlights of the holidays!

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It's the "season" which, these days, seems to begin the day after Halloween and features well-advertised, endless opportunities for shopping bonanzas. You may know it by a more traditional name - the Christmas holidays.

But Jon Putzke's Theatre-Go-Round joyfully (and thankfully) puts the true spirit of Noel back into Christmas with his latest holiday-inspired show "Sleigh Bells in the Snow" which opened Nov. 16 to a full-capacity audience ready to celebrate the season. And Putzke and his talented songstresses delivered with a joyous, moving and meaningful holiday gift that no "Black Friday" special could hope to match.

Located within the popular Quilted Giraffe restaurant in Vero Beach, Theatre-Go-Round thrilled the 110 patrons assembled for the show's opening night with a wonderfully culled selection of classic and beloved holiday favorites as well as some lesser-known but uniquely enjoyable and inspirational songs perfectly matched to the joy and sanctity of Christmas.

Putzke's ever-popular musical revues always feature a theme and songs tied together with a dialogue of appropriately interesting facts and trivia related to the music. This time, he personalizes the holiday theme further by encouraging cast members Patty Carreau, Caitlin Harris, Beth McKenzie-Shestak and Shamara Turner to share their own homey and heartwarming recollections of family Christmas celebrations and Gregory Harris' (husband of Caitlin) musical direction for this show truly shines.

McKenzie-Shestak proved the adage "the show must go on" by gamely, bravely and beautifully taking to the stage only a week after foot surgery left her in a cast and in need of a leg rest/scooter combination to move about.

I am sure I was not the only one in the audience with chills running up my spine at the truly glorious arrangement and vocals of "A Celtic Silent Night." It was an exquisite and even holy experience to listen to those voices in four-part harmony. Later, Turner took the lead in a gospel-inspired number "Jesus, Oh What a Wonderful Child" that would have made Mahalia Jackson proud and an arrangement combining "Little Drummer Boy" with "Peace on Earth" was inspirational in its message and moved me to tears with its beauty.

It was apparent that the audience was more than ready to put a little holiday in their hearts after the theatre's Christmas show hiatus last holiday season. Putzke had thought that with so many Christmas-themed musical events taking place in the community at one time that there were enough holiday shows. His Theatre-Go-Round audience, however, thought differently.

"Everyone asked me to do a holiday show after a big disappointment of not having one last year so "Sleigh Bells" is really by popular demand," Putzke said. "I had thought there is enough of it but there's never enough of it. The whole purpose is to make you feel good and it does because it evokes memories of happy times and hope."

Omitting a holiday show is not something he's likely to do again soon.

"I broke the tradition for one year and I haven't heard the end of it yet from our regular followers," he said with a laugh.

Putzke noted that in the days of his own childhood, there was nary a single establishment open on Christmas day and yet in today's American society "it's 24 hours of everything around the clock."

It is the blatant commercialism of Christmas which Putzke rejects in his show.

"Christmas is not the day Santa Claus brings presents. It's Christ's birthday," he said. "And I stick to the music that I feel is appropriate for what the show is about."

In his inimitable style, Putzke sets up the show's song list to feature an appropriately seasonal selection of snow-related songs like the show's eponymous "Sleigh Ride" or "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas" and "Let It Snow/Winter Wonderland."

"Half way through, we get to the religious aspect because I have very staunch feelings about what Christmas is," Putzke said.

With an opening before Thanksgiving, "Sleigh Bells in the Snow" is a musical extravaganza specifically geared to that all-too-brief joyous season which culminates with New Year's celebrations. Those wishing to partake in this uniquely delightful and moving holiday spirit need to make reservations as soon as possible because the show will only run on Sundays including Nov. 30; Dec. 7, 14, 21 and 28.

A brand-new country jamboree show will "Raise a Ruckus Tonight" opening New Year's Eve and continuing its run of old-fashioned fun every Sunday through Feb. 22, 2015.

"Sleigh Bells in the Snow" features a \$55 per person dinner theatre package which includes a three-course dinner with a choice of carved tenderloin of beef or fresh seafood of the day, show ticket, tax and gratuity. A la carte beer, wine and cocktail service is available and reservations are required by calling the box office at 772-252-9341.

The Quilted Giraffe is located at 500 U.S. 1 (south) in Vero Beach just north of Oslo Road.