

ON THE SCENE

THEATER REVIEW

A naughty Christmas treat

Miss Richfield's holiday drag show is an alternative tradition

BY DOMINIC P. PAPANOLA

Theater Critic

Come December, it seems as if "Fall on Your Knees" is to the gay and lesbian crowd what "A Christmas Carol" is to Guthrie goers.

The annual holiday show by Miss Richfield 1981 — aka drag performer Russ King — has nothing thematically to do with the Dickens tale that haunts the Vineland Place stage every year. But like "A Christmas Carol," "Fall on Your Knees" includes much of the same familiar and beloved material year after year, with just enough new stuff to keep audiences on their toes.

This is the fourth incarnation of Miss Richfield's holiday show at Illusion Theatre, and audiences would presumably plotz if the evening passed without a video travelogue (this year's version shows Miss Richfield traveling to Barcelona, London, Amsterdam and a northern Minnesota fishing boat). Or without the traditional slaughtering of Christmas Carols ("Frosty the Snowman" sung to the tune of "Ave Maria"). Or if she didn't play "Silent Night" on a crosscut saw.

Mostly, it's reliably funny stuff, but each year, Miss Richfield finds some new way to tweak the nose of the Christmas spirit. This year, for

What: "Fall on Your Knees: Get Down on All Fours" featuring Miss Richfield 1981

Where: Illusion Theatre, Hennepin Center for the Arts, 528 Hennepin Ave., Mpls.

When: 7:30 p.m. today and Wednesday-Thursday; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday; 7:30 p.m. Dec. 8-9

Tickets: \$26-\$20

Information: (612) 339-4944

instance, she invites a couple of audience members to the stage for a retelling of the Nativity tale that unexpectedly turns into a raucous Tina Turner number ("Joseph, stop that cursin', proud Mary keep on nursin'").

And then there are always the inexplicable guest stars, who have nothing to do with the show but provide a little distraction while the star changes clothes. This year, it was a sultry pair of tango dancers — Megan McClellan and Brian Sostek — who brought a whiff of heterosexuality to the evening.

But the essence of a Miss Richfield show is the star's interaction with her audience

members. For as long as I've been watching him, King has always had a natural rapport with the crowd, but he's honed his schmoozing skills to a fine point.

When he's really on his game — as was the case at Friday's opening night — he can deliver the kind of zingers that make Dame Edna look like Mother Teresa. And without losing a stride on his chunky, jingle-bell-festooned platform shoes, he can make the obnoxious and probably drunken antics of a group from Fridley ("the Richfield of the north," Miss R noted dryly) seem like an organic part of the show.

As has been the case with her other holiday offerings, some of Miss Richfield's shtick goes on too long — an audience-participation arts and crafts project easily ran twice the length it should have for the minimal payoff of a predictably vulgar sight gag.

But for those who know and love the routine — and for anyone who wants to see drag done on the sunny side — it's worth sitting through the lulls. Whether you're old or young, male or female, gay or straight, Miss Richfield is a naughty and bawdy Christmas tickle.

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