

Corny, campy Miss Richfield is still a delight

By Graydon Royce
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Theater review

Christmas kitsch has returned in the human sight gag who calls herself Miss Richfield 1981. With a beehive do and oversize lips, drag performer Russ King heaves his addled, sassy alter ego onto the stage of the Illusion Theater for Miss R's fourth holiday show, "Fall on Your Knees: Down on All Fours."

There isn't anything terribly new or profound in this edition, which is just as her fans prefer. After all, you don't watch "It's a Wonderful Life" for the 475th time because it might end differently.

Miss Richfield pulls double-entendres from her quiver, bellows about her ridiculous world travels and slaughters Christmas carols by singing lyrics to the wrong music — which actually is a bit of genius, realizing that "Frosty the Snowman" nearly fits "Ave Maria." Try it sometime. And almost like Harpo Marx when he sits down to the harp, she gets a little straight when she favors us with "Silver Bells," played with a violin bow on a steel saw. It's an unearthly sound, artistic even. But surely she would cringe or laugh if she thought someone was taking seriously this flake in a rainbow-colored spaghetti-strap gown.

Her loose collection of theatrical stuff, though, serves as little more than an excuse for Miss Richfield to get in front of an audience and yak it up. Her clunky platform shoes and balky body belie a catty verbal agility that she uses in sly and sardonic banter. While she takes this cabaret far afield, she always maintains control with arch self-deprecation and just the right word for rowdy fans who want to take the madness up a notch. Her ability to cajole and coddle folks — a terrific knack for

Fall on Your Knees: Down on All Fours

What: Miss Richfield 1981's Christmas show. Directed by Michael Robins. Musical direction by Todd Price.

When: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday, Sunday and Monday. 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Closes Monday.

Where: Illusion Theater, 528 Hennepin Av. S., Minneapolis.

Review: A great performer, Miss R. really hits her stride with spontaneous chats with her fans.

Tickets: \$20-\$26. 612-339-4944.

improvisation — makes me wonder why Miss Richfield hasn't broken out nationally as a talk-show host.

Not everything Miss Richfield touches turns to gold. She joked Friday night that she felt a little gassy, and so did the show — a craft segment in particular bloated up and her organ playing fell flat. At nearly two hours, the piece could sweat off 20 minutes of blubber and leave Miss Richfield giddy with her new svelte form.

Dancers Megan McClellan and Brian Sostek provide sultry interludes while the star is changing costumes offstage. Their crisp steps, physical passion and expressive faces are the perfect palate cleanser for Miss Richfield's corny banter.

The evening is framed by Todd Price's persistent piano and Dean Holzman's loopy set, which, Miss Richfield notes, show off "the three continents." Yes, well, she's confused. And that's the beauty of this thing.

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