



# Adelaide Theatre Guide

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## WHITE CHRISTMAS

### Metropolitan Musical Theatre Company

The Arts Theatre  
Until 18 October 2008

Review by Richard Flynn

"White Christmas" is a product of the immediate post-World War II era, when the Hollywood dream factory was cranking out dozens of feel-good movies (and stage shows like "South Pacific" and "The Sound of Music" and TV series like "Victory at Sea") about America saving the planet (single-handedly) in some theatre of war, her troops returning to civilian life and the thanks of a grateful world. So it's not hard to see why, with the USA again desperate to feel good about itself in the face of disasters like Israel, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and George W. Bush, the stage adaptation of the "White Christmas" movie is seeing a Broadway revival next month. The pity is it's not much of a musical.

It's the second of the Met's Golden Jubilee Year shows. Fifty years of musicals! That alone is worth celebrating. The show is tuneful enough ("Happy Holiday", "Count Your Blessings", "Blue Skies", "I Love a Piano", and "How Deep is the Ocean?" for example), and it's colourful, but it struggles, despite the Irving Berlin music and lyrics. The famous feel-good title number is right at the end, in a concert for the Army General who could lose all the service pension he's invested in a Ski Lodge that's rather short on snow. But this is America, it's winter, it's Christmas (and it's a musical) so if you sing and dance hard enough, your dreams are sure to come true! Think of Dorothy! Cue snowflakes – on the count of five.

Greg Hart (as Bob Wallace, Bing Crosby's role), Ellyanne Bradford (his girlfriend, Betty Haynes, Rosemary Clooney's), Angus Smith (Phil Davis, Danny Kaye's role) and Selena Britz (his girlfriend, Judy Haynes, Vera-Ellen's) supply the love interest and most of the songs. Each performs well – the men better singers than dancers, the two women at home with both.

Kaye Hamlyn is in command of her comic role as Martha Watson, but Robert Reid is not so convincing as General Henry Waverly; Omkar Nagesh is successful as Mike, a stereotypically camp TV Floor Manager, (you know the type: funny walk, lisp, hysterical, and not like us), and Nikki Gaertner with Jessica Rossiter, a hoot as twin blond drop-kicks, Rita and Rhoda (more stereotyping, but hey! it's fun, it's Christmas ... and it's a musical) supply the "running gag" (in most outrageous costumes) and the best of the few good lines of dialogue like "If you can't hide it, decorate it!" – and they're not talking about Christmas trees! Sound (by Tim Freedman), yet to find its feet, is not helped by Bradford's pendant earrings constantly brushing her body mike (I think!). Lighting by Michael Whitmee is adequate and it's good to see his follow spot operators hitting their marks on time - most of the time.

Hermonn directs, and together with his costume designs he is to be commended, but the poorly designed sets need another's hand for really bold and creative ideas that also do away with the need to lower various curtains behind actors during still-playing scenes (to allow changes to be made for the next full-stage scene). Of the three used, the black curtain is particularly overpowering as it kills most of the ambient light.

Gordon Combes leads a large and generally well-balanced orchestra, while the choreography by Carmel Vistoli (originally by Bob Fosse) is, ... very Vistoli i.e. you've seen it many times before, but it fits the bill and it's well drilled - though this time 'the kids' need at least another week of rehearsal. And in the role of "ensemble-as-bystanders", especially dancing in the background in the "Jimmy's Back Room" scene, they need more specific direction of things to do.

If your world view is not upset by a Christmas show staged even earlier than the Credit Unions' Pageant, you'll enjoy the Met's seasonal and jubilee gift.