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THT weaves historical perspective into Christmas musical celebration in 'A Civil War Christmas'

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By Sophie Braccini



From left: Tom Reilly and Terrance Smith

Photo Stu Selland

own Hall Theatre ends 2017 crimp each scene. with an American musical celebration – an ambitious and vast play a musical instrument, and they epic story set on Christmas Eve in 1864, on a very cold Civil War beautiful voices in the show; Alicia night. During that one night, a na- von Kugelgen sings with the purity tion divided as never before is por- of an opera singer. trayed through the lives of historical figures and simple Americans, rector, asked Dawn Monique Wilstruggling with the difficult times liams to direct the play. She had and transcended by the miracle of never seen the play by Pulitzer Christmas, whether they believe or Prize winner Paula Vogel before, not. Through songs and narratives, but knew of it and was very inthe 50 characters played by 14 actors in "A Civil War Christmas" take the spectators on a journey of thought. She says that this is a human struggle and hope.

1864, in Washington D.C., in the White House with President Lincoln and his wife preparing for Christmas despite the burden of responsibilities, in the cold street of the capital city where a black woman who escaped slavery desperately searches for her daughter, riety and beauty of the songs. with Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant hunkered down with their exhausted troops, on the banks of the Potomac River where a man seeks vengeance and a kid wants to went to the theater to see a final become a man and a hero.

the picture of that harsh night in the He is working on a documentary middle of war. The 14 actors com- about 2017 in America, a year that prising the cast constantly change he sees as a moment in history costume, shift from supplying con- when this country has been more textual commentaries, to embody- divided than ever. He sees this play ing one of the many unique char- as representative of our times of acters whose stories the audience separation, but with the possibility follows. Costumes here are key: of still reaching out to each other. a top hat turns a commoner into Lincoln, a wide dress and a shawl in Sankofa, a Ghanaian word meantransform a simple woman into the ing "go back and get it." She says First Lady. The Christmas songs, that as we move forward in time, the period hymns and marches we carry our cultural memory, and

The actors act, dance, some sing. There are some very solid and

Susan Evans, THT artistic diterested in creating entertainment that would also provide food for Christmas play, but not full of fluff, The audience is taken back to and that even if there is laughter there is also gravity. She liked that the play mixes real historical figures with fictional characters that are the conflation of several ordinary people of the time. Williams, who also was a singer, loved the musical aspect of the play, the va-

The director says that it is particularly relevant to create this play at a time when the country is so polarized. The night this reporter rehearsal, filmmaker Eric Metzger Fifty different characters paint had come to film THT's adventure.

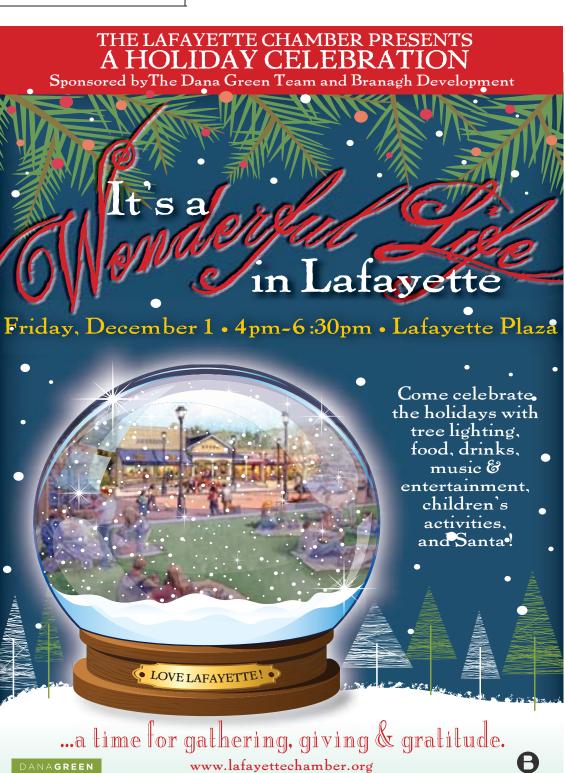
Williams says that she believes

that the lessons of our past that we transport into the future can bring hope. The play shows us that in a moment of time we can be united.

The play is a family show that will entertain all ages. The Civil War is studied in the fourth grade, so children 9 years old and older will understand most out of the show.

"A Civil War Christmas" will play at Town Hall Theatre from Nov. 30 to Dec. 16. For details and tickets, visit www.townhalltheatre. com.





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XOXO, Annie

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