

REVIEW

David Alford returns to the Rep stage, providing a charming holiday experience

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David Alford's return to the Tennessee Rep stage as part of the Rep's holiday celebration finds one of Nashville's most important theater artists in top form. *Christmas Down Home*, Alford's folksy two-act revue, blends Southern good cheer with classy musicianship and sincere storytelling — offering good bang for the Yuletide buck.

Noted as an actor, director and playwright — with noteworthy credits in each discipline — Alford occasionally showcases his skills as a musician, which he did as pianist in the Rep's radio play version of *It's a Wonderful Life* a few years back. For those who didn't know it, Alford is also a rock-solid rhythm guitarist and a pretty fair bluegrass singer, and we get a nice sampling of his unending versatility in this program.

Backed by a talented ensemble of instrumentalists — fiddle, upright bass, mandolin — plus actor-singers Erin Ramsey and Kahle Reardon, Alford plays host to a series of homey family stories, some Appalachian nostalgia, country-style caroling and light verse, all rendered with a warm seasonal touch.

Musical selections include "Go Tell It on the Mountain," a hip "Jingle Bells," an a cappella "Star of Wonder" (in the style of vocal group The Roches) and a "Silent Night" sing-along. Among the spoken-word pieces is poet Ogden Nash's comical "The Boy Who Laughed at Santa Claus."

Act 1 serves as fulsome prelude to the show's Act 2 cornerstone, Alford's reading of the Truman Capote short story "A Christmas Memory," first published in 1956, later broadcast on television in various versions and featured on recordings (including by Capote himself). Alford has performed this piece many times over, in Nashville and elsewhere, and it shows in his confident delivery of the tale of loneliness and simple hope during Christmastime in rural Alabama. Musical director Paul Binkley accompanies Alford's recitation with limpid acoustic guitar underscoring, and the remainder of Act 2 is graced with Binkley's stirring original arrangements of the hymns "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" and "O Holy Night." Brad Albin is the bassist; Toni Ferguson is on fiddle.

Good tidings and the lively arts come together beautifully in *Christmas Down Home*. Only two performances remain, and it's unquestionably worth the trip to TPAC.