

Roxy's stages 'Church Basement Ladies' as Christmas show

BY DAVID BURKE
Eagle Correspondent

Rick Bumgardner admits that a "Church Basement Ladies" musical isn't something Roxy's Downtown patrons might expect.

"I like the franchise. I like the concept behind it," Bumgardner, artistic director for the theater, said. "Where it does fit in the

Roxy's mold is that it takes a look at a particular culture in this society — this being Lutheran women in the basement of a rural Minnesota church in 1959 — and finding those moments we all relate to and finding the commonalities with people who are different than us."

The Christmas-themed installment, "Away in the Basement," opens this

week and continues through Dec. 19. It is the third of seven "Church Basement Ladies" musicals and serves as a prequel to the original.

"It's kind of the beginnings of everything," Bumgardner said.

Although this is the first "Church Basement Ladies" at Roxy's, Crown Uptown Theatre has staged three "CBL" productions.

The original, in 2008, was called the Crown's most successful musical in its then 30-year history. "A Second Helping" followed in 2010, and the fourth edition, "A Mighty Fortress is Our Basement," played in 2013.

Bumgardner said the themes of changing society and a heartwarming nostalgia are among the keys to the success of the "CBL" shows.

"The more things change, the more they stay the same," he said. "We are making sure we comment on those things dur-

ing the course of the show."

The characters hit home for Bumgardner as well, as he recalls his paternal grandmother, the wife of a Methodist minister, "stuffing pie tins, baking cookies and organizing Christmas pageants" in the basement of their church.

"It is that nod to the past and to a family ... we all know and have had as a part of our lives," he said.

The cast includes Sabrina Hamble, Sarah Wine and Megan Parsley (who has performed "CBL" shows on tour) as the stal-

wart ladies, Wichita State musical theater student Olivia Goodspeed as the daughter of one; and Philip Hanson as the widowed Lutheran pastor.

"AWAY IN THE BASEMENT: A CHURCH LADIES MUSICAL"

When: Nov. 18 to Dec. 19; performances at 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays (except Thanksgiving) and 2 p.m. Sundays

Where: Roxy's Downtown, 412 1/2 E. Douglas

Tickets: \$30, at roxy-downtown.com or 265-4400