

Seasons greetings, friends and family!

And what a season it is. As you know, this is typically the busiest time of year for me, but I've managed to steal a few minutes here to share something with all of you lovely humans, something near and dear to my heart, something that I think captures the spirit of Christmas, the real reason for the season:

Theater criticism.

This year, I was fortunate enough to participate in three Christmas pageants—the Big Three! St. James, St. Peter, and St. Aloysius. Now, I know what you're saying. "Didn't Abram say last year he was done with the pageant circuit?" Well friend, you're more than correct. But since that time, I've done a lot of thinking and come to understand something important. You know what they say: There are no small parts, only small actors. And in my case, it seems, there are very few parts available of any size at all! And I chalk that up to bias. The big theaters downtown claim they're doing blind casting, but when I turn up to read for Macbeth or Willie Loman, what do they say? I'll tell you what they say.

"Someone get this sheep out of here!"

Can you believe it? Bald-faced bias!

I've taken it up with the Beleaguered Actors Association, and we wrote an open letter in Tristate Theater Monthly magazine. Whether our activism will have any result, we will have to wait and see.

But in the meantime, as a veteran of eight Christmas seasons now, let me share with you some insider insights on St. Jim's, St. Pete's, and St. Al's productions.

**St. James Catholic's Annual Christmas Mass and Pageant** - There's no better consecrated festival of Christmas constancy than St. Jim's. Not just the text, but the blocking, choreography, costumes, etc. have not changed since the church's founding 126 years ago. And speaking of staying power, you'll need a healthy amount to survive this church's commitment to length. Seasoned patrons strap in for what amounts to the most faithful retelling of Christ's birth...as it pertains to runtime. That's right...it covers the 48 hour period between the arrival of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem to when the wisemen arrive to greet the Baby Jesus. Where they got 48 hours, who's to say? But you do something long enough, and people become nostalgic for even pain and boredom. And speaking of unchanging, they haven't given me a raise...EVER! And I get scale. SCALE! However, I will say I approve of the craft services. Their grass is delicious and I always sneak some "takeaway snacks" from the front lawn if the snow isn't too deep.

**St. Pete's Pancake Pagaent** - Now I'm not saying I'm a method actor. I can filter out a cough or candy wrapper and even the occasional wispy conversion. But even for a sheep, there are limits. And St. Pete's far exceeds those limits. How am I expected to portray the awe and solemnity of a sheep beholding the face of the newborn Christchild, when children are screaming, old people smacking their rubbery maws onto stacks of burnt pancakes, and syrup bottles are being tossed between tables. I'm talking about you, Darren. And I get the need for esprit de corp in the kitchen, but can you at least turn down "Back Door Santa" while the show is in progress. Read the room, Darren. (I'll be real...you get rid of Darren, my grade shoots up significantly.)

**St. Al's Reason for the Season Rockin' Nativity** - I'll be totally honest: the Reason for the Season Ain't Pleasin' (thank you.) Look I'm all for getting young butts in the seats. Guitars and drum sets for your regular services...go for it! But this is Christmas. And Christmas doesn't need the Pink Floyd treatment. 3 guitars, racks of synths, lasers, Led Zeppelin songs with the lyrics changed to be about Myrrh. They even tried to fly me off the rafters like the pig in Laser Floyd, but the high schoolers hoisting me up got distracted and I fell on the vicar. In a way, it reminds me of my black box days performing Off Broadway. Because my day job was working at a CostCo. And this church is in an old CostCo.

All in all, I hope you found these reviews helpful in determining what you'll do this Ewe-Itide season (get it) and that my representatives at BAA will potentially find me a more expanded palette of work in the coming year. They've already done wonders for my friend Ed who's now playing the horse in Equus on Broadway. And he's not even a horse! He's a 70-year-old Filipino man! With amazing range!

So Merry Christmas, Happy New Year! And to all the churches mentioned above who feel I've burned bridges and wizzed on the ashes....I believe it was famed theatre critic Brooks Atkinson who once said, "Suck on a short stack, Darren!"