

Written by **Stuart Ross** | Arrangements by **James Raitt**
Directed by **JC Clementz** | **Sally Manegold**, Executive Producer

Milwaukee Repertory Theater presents



October 25 – December 29

Stackner Cabaret

Written by Stuart Ross

Arrangements by James Raitt

Directed by JC Clementz

Sally Manegold, Executive Producer

Forever Plaid

PLAY GUIDE

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Play Guide written by

Neal Easterling
Education Associate

With Contributions by

Lindsey Hoel-Neds
Education Assistant

•

Play Guide edited by

Jenny Kostreva
Education Director

Leda Hoffmann
Literary Coordinator

Lindsey Hoel-Neds
Education Assistant

Lisa Fulton
Director of Marketing &
Communications

•

Graphic Design by

Eric Reda

MARK'S TAKE



"*Forever Plaid* is a show that might as well have been written for the Stackner Cabaret—it's the kind of thing that we do best in that wonderfully close space. It's entertaining, it's funny, it's moving, and with its great songs in the style of the male harmony groups of the 1950s, it's the perfect holiday season family outing to enjoy after dinner and over a cocktail!"

-Mark Clements, Artistic Director



Mark Clements

Artistic Director

Chad Bauman

Managing Director

Milwaukee Repertory Theater

108 E. Wells Street

Milwaukee, WI • 53202

Tickets: 414-224-9490

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

When most of us think of the 1950s, we think of rock 'n' roll, greasers, hot rods, Elvis, Annette, Fabian, D.A., haircuts and teenage rebellion. But there was a flip side to this era – the side of harmony, innocence, and the sincerity of dreams. It is the side that's been lost in the shuffle of progress. It was a time when most parents and kids listened and danced to the same music; when families partook of the ritual of gathering in front of the TV to watch their favorite variety shows, like the Ed Sullivan Show or the Perry Como Show. It was a time when every family worked to fulfill the American Dream.

It was a period when four-part guy groups harmonized their way across the airwaves, jukeboxes, and hi-fis of the country. Throughout the land they would stand at a quartet of microphones, crooning a multitude of chaperoned prom-goers into dreamy romance.

They wore dinner jackets and bow ties (or perhaps cardigans and white bucks). Each move was drilled to precision. Each vocal arrangement soared to stratospheric heights of harmony. This sound crested right before rock 'n' roll stole the heartbeat of music across the globe.

During this time, guys across the country banded together to sing in the basement for fun. If things worked out they might be hired to sing at weddings, conventions, proms, and country club socials. Inspired by the success of the recording stars, they made plans to zoom into careers of fame and fortune. But the musical taste of the U.S.A. was changing, and the country would not stop to listen to their dreams.

This is the story of such a group – *Forever Plaid*.

Once upon a time, there were four guys (Sparky, Smudge, Jinx, and Frankie) who loved to sing. They all met in high school, when they joined the audiovisual club (1956). Discovering that they shared an affection for music and entertaining, they got together and dreamed of becoming like their idols – The Four Aces, The Four Lads, The Four Freshmen, The Hi-Los, and The Crew Cuts. They rehearsed in the basement of Smudge's family's plumbing supply company. It was here they became Forever Plaid – a name that connects the continuation of traditional values of family, home, and harmony. Although rock 'n' roll was racing down the fast lane like a candy apple "vette", they believed in their music. As their sound developed, they sang at family gatherings, fund-raisers, and eventually graduated to supermarket openings and proms. They had little time for romance or leisure for they supported their fantasy by holding down day jobs – Frankie was in dental supplies, Smudge was in bathroom fixtures, Sparky was in better dresses. They devoted themselves to singing at nights and on weekends. Then, finally, they landed their first big gig at the Airport Hilton cocktail bar – The Fusel Lounge.

February 9, 1964.

En route to pick up their custom-made plaid tuxedos, they were slammed broadside by a school bus filled with eager Catholic teens. The teens were on their way to witness The Beatles make their U.S. television debut on the Ed Sullivan Show and miraculously escaped uninjured. The members of Forever Plaid were killed instantly. It is at that moment, when their careers and lives ended, that the story of Forever Plaid begins.

Through the Power of Harmony and the Expanding Holes in the Ozone Layer, in conjunction with the positions of the planets and all the astrotechnical stuff, they are allowed to come back to perform the show they never got to do in life.

And having completed their Mission of Harmony, our men in plaid must return to the cosmos. Although they may be gone, through this production their dreams live on forever



Stuart Ross

About the Playwright

Stuart Ross recently won Chicago's Joseph Jefferson Award for Best Director of a Musical. He directed the original New York production of *Forever Plaid* as well as productions across the U.S., Japan, Canada, and on London's West End. He co-authored the Tony nominated musical *Starmites* and the acclaimed Radio City Music Hall Easter Show.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

JC CLEMENTZ, ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE

Neal Easterling, Education Associate: What does the concept of plaid mean in this show?

JC Clementz: There is obviously the historical Scottish plaid, but I think for these guys, it is really the embodiment of their dreams. They dreamed about these plaid tuxedos they wanted to create for their group, but they never actually got them. Plaid is always longing for this dream. These guys are your average Joes, but it is the music that is what makes them extraordinary. And so, throughout the course of the show, they make discoveries and learn that they actually *are* extraordinary. In the end, they achieve their dream of being the superstars they always wanted to be. I think plaid is the symbol of their dreams.

Neal: You actually went to Scotland and got to tour a plaid factory this summer, right?



JC Clementz

JC: Yeah, I went to a tartan factory in Edinburgh. I actually got to see them making cashmere scarves and different types of tartans. All the tartans are representative of specific Scottish clans, so they are all representative of something. It was a flag of pride; it was a flag of showing who they were, what their true colors were. You could see the clans walking in the highlands, and you would know that this person is a member of the McDonald family or this person was a member of the McMurran family. You knew exactly what that color represented, so in a similar fashion, these plaids are searching for their identity, who they actually are.

Neal: Is there a specific clan tartan you are using for this show?

JC: There is not. It is the *Forever Plaid* clan.

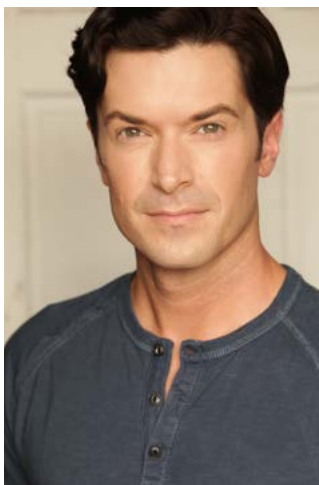


A traditional plaid factory

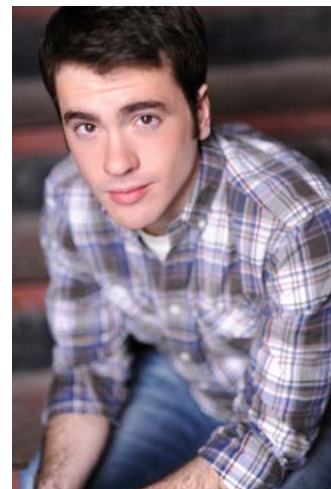
Neal: During the creative process for this show, did anything come up that got you really excited?

JC: It is really these four young men's journey, but I did not want them to be in charge of this journey. I liked the idea that the theater, the theater gods, or the space is pushing them towards these discoveries. When they hit that bus, they died instantly and never fulfilled what they truly could become. The power of music is what brought them back because these theater forces are really driving them to make that discovery and fulfill their destiny. They are forced into positions where they are not comfortable. As they make discoveries, they become more and more in control, and those magical theatrical elements embody them. They become part of the magic as well.

THE CHARACTERS



Sparky (Adam Estes) is the comedian of the group who is always looking for a place to slip in a joke or two. Once the audience gets past his slight speech impediment, Sparky reveals that he is a clown with a heart.



Francis (Nate Lewellyn) is the leader of the group who keeps the show on track, the guys in good spirits, and the audience on the Plaids' side. He is a confident performer, but his asthma acts up when numbers are too frenetic or the choreography too bouncy.



Jinx (Paul Helm) is terrified of being on stage, and he cannot always remember what is supposed to happen next. When he stretches for those high notes, his nose starts to bleed, but he recovers and continues the show every single time.



Smudge (Anand Nagraj) worries about everything from the props to show order to whether or not the audience will like him. His nervous stomach and problems with telling his left from his right make him reluctant to perform.

Song List

On February Ninth
Chant: Deus ex Plaid
What Happens
Three Coins in The Fountain
Gotta Be This or That
Undecided
Moments To Remember
Crazy 'Bout Ya Baby
The Osterizer School of Harmonic Theory
No Not Much
Perfidia
Cry

Sixteen Tons/Chain Gang
The Catering Drill/She Loves You
The Golden Cardigan
Catch A Falling Star
Caribbean Plaid
Heart and Soul
Mercury
Lady Of Spain
Scotland The Brave
Shangri-La/Rags To Riches
Before Love
Love is a Many Splendored Thing

THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW



The Ed Sullivan Show aired on CBS from 1948 to 1971 and became a television staple in most American homes. The variety show brought together performers from all different art forms and brought together entire families around the TV set on Sunday nights. While Ed Sullivan was not a charismatic and ebullient personality, his awkwardness and his ability to bring new and diverse talents to mainstream America endeared him to television audiences. Time and again, The Ed Sullivan Show broke viewership records as audiences tuned in to see acts such as Elvis Presley, The Beatles, the stars of Motown, opera stars, Broadway acts, puppeteers, and an entire cast of interesting characters.

To this day, The Ed Sullivan Show remains a touchstone in the history of American television and music.

The Beatles

On February 9, 1964, 73 million people tuned in to The Ed Sullivan Show to see Britain's hottest new band, The Beatles, on live American television for the first time. In the weeks leading up to The Beatles' performance, Beatlemania took over America, with radio stations playing Beatles' songs, teenage fans wearing Beatle wigs, and bumper stickers proclaiming "The Beatles are coming."

Over 50,000 fans requested seats for the show, even though the CBS Studio 50 could only hold 700 people. Celebrities and politicians from Walter Cronkite to Richard Nixon tried to secure tickets for their teenagers. Even Ed Sullivan said on the show the week before the performance: "Coincidentally, if anyone has a ticket for The Beatles on our show next Sunday, could I please borrow it? We need it very badly."

When John, Paul, George, and Ringo came onstage, the studio filled with screeches, screams, and cries from the teenage fans in attendance. The group performed their hits "All My Loving," "Till There Was You," and "She Loves You." This performance not only spurred the "British Invasion" but also served as one of the most enduring television moments of the 1960s.





Señor Wences

Spanish ventriloquist Señor Wences appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show 23 times between 1950 and 1971. With his hand dressed up as Johnny; the talking head in a box, Pedro; and Cecilia the chicken, Wences was a comedic addition to the variety show's repertoire. Wences not only incorporated funny voices and ventriloquism into his act but also plate-spinning and juggling as his puppets heckled from the sidelines.



The Singing Nun

Belgian nun Jeanine Decker appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show in January of 1964 under her stage name of Soeur Sourire (Sister Smile). Her French-language hit, "Dominique," had been a number one hit on the U.S. charts, and her appearance on the show was one of many she made as a newly minted international celebrity.



Topo Gigio

One of the most memorable acts of the show, Topo also starred in a feature film, an Italian TV show, and Japanese and Latin American animated series. Topo originally appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show in 1961 in an effort to make Ed Sullivan more engaging to his audience. Many viewers wondered how Topo could move, talk, roll his eyes, and wiggle his ears and toes without visible strings. Topo, who was only 10 inches tall, was puppeteered by his creator Maria Perego and three other people using small rods and hand movements.

Other Famous Acts on The Ed Sullivan Show



Elvis



The Rolling Stones



The Doors

PERRY COMO: THE NICE HOMETOWN BARBER WHO BECAME A CARDIGAN-CLAD STAR

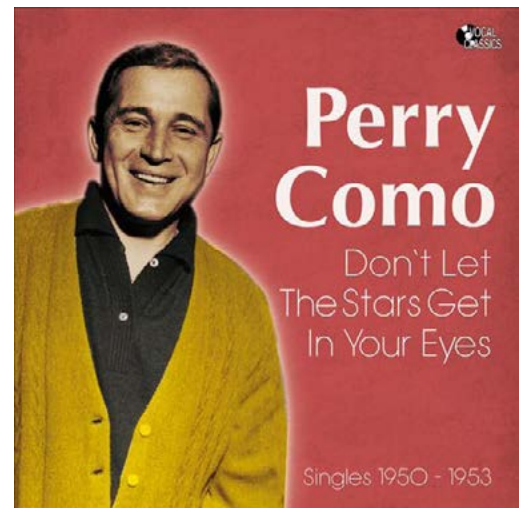


When asked what comes to mind when hearing the name Perry Como, many would say his television programs *The Perry Como Show* or *The Kraft Music Hall*. Others would mention the many Christmas specials he performed over the years. Some would imagine his smooth, easy-listening style of music, the iconic cardigan sweater he usually wore, or one of the thirteen #1 hits he had in a career spanning over six decades. Few, however, would picture a pair of scissors and a barber chair. It is no surprise. Mr. Como always tried to keep his private life separate from his professional one.

Born the seventh of thirteen children, Como began working in a barbershop at the age of 10 for fifty cents a week to help support the family. By 13, he had his own chair. At 14, the young Perry was offered a space of his own in the Greek coffee house of one of his customers. His shop was so popular that he had to hire two other barbers to keep up with demand. Como was especially popular with wedding planners. He would sing romantic ballads while tending to the groom and his friends.

At 17, he met his future wife, Roselle Belline, at a local picnic for young people. Gathered around a campfire singing, Como chose "More Than You Know" when it came his turn, looking into Roselle's eyes during the entire song. They were married in July of 1933 and remained so until Roselle's death in 1998.

At the age of 30, Perry Como signed with RCA Victor and, by 1946, appeared on his own television program. Though his professional career skyrocketed from that point on, he never left behind his hometown values. Many have attributed his longevity as a performer to his comfortable attitude and clean living - though maybe the cardigan helped.



QUARTETS OF THE 50'S AND 60'S



The Four Aces first performed in 1950 and continue to perform today. More information at www.thefouraces.org.

Hit Songs:

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| <i>Love is a Many-Splendored Thing</i> | <i>Tell Me Why</i> |
| <i>Three Coins in the Fountain</i> | <i>Shangri-La</i> |
| <i>Stranger in Paradise</i> | <i>Perfidia</i> |
| <i>(It's No) Sin</i> | <i>Sincerely</i> |

The Four Lads began singing together as choirboys at St. Michael's Cathedral Choir School in Toronto in the late 40's. They still perform today. More information at www.thefourlads.com.

Hit Songs:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Istanbul (Not Constantinople)</i> | <i>Standin' on the Corner</i> |
| <i>Moments to Remember</i> | <i>Who Needs You?</i> |
| <i>No, Not Much</i> | |



Formed in 1953, **The Hi-Lo's** never achieved much single chart topping success, being known more for their television appearances, especially on The Rosemary Clooney Show. Two of the members, Gene Puerling and Bob Stasen, are from Milwaukee. More information at www.thehi-los.com.

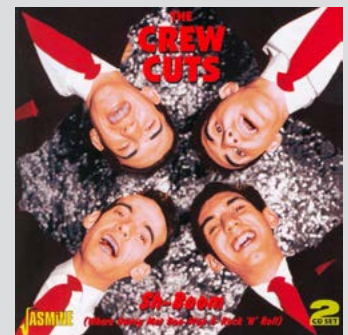
Hit Songs:

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>My Baby Just Cares For Me</i> | <i>Georgia on My Mind</i> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|

The Crew Cuts formed in 1954, naming the group after the popular hair cut at the time. Before disbanding in 1964, the group recorded nine albums.

Hit Songs:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Crazy 'Bout You Baby</i> | <i>Don't Be Angry</i> |
| <i>Earth Angel</i> | <i>Sh-Boom</i> |



VISITING THE REP

Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex is located in the Milwaukee Center, downtown at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. The building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company. The Ticket Office is visible on the left upon entering the Wells Street doors. The Stackner Cabaret is located on the second level and can be accessed via the escalator or elevator.



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