

CHERUBIC THEY'RE NOT

Acerbic is more like it, but The Fallen Angel Choir adds a dollop of holiday good cheer

by Inga Sorensen

Based on the outcome of the recent elections, liberal political observers may conclude the public is a glutton for punishment. After all, anyone who would voluntarily choose a Gingrich to steal Christmas must be a masochist, right?

Well, that public, most of whose members are currently caught up in the frenetic gluttony of the holiday season, has another opportunity to be chastised—in a more delicious way—by Portland's

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own Fallen Angel Choir, a four-woman a cappella troupe of political satirists which, for the past two decades, has been taking jabs at the near-tyrannical and indiscriminate consumerism that plows over our nation this time each year.

But that's not the only target. In a land of dittoheads, dollar signs, D'Amatos, Doles, and other congressional dolts, the angels are able to take our shopping angst and heebie-jeebies about Lon (14 years ago it was Ron, remember?) and transform (or shall we say revolutionize) them into a welcome emotional release. Plain and simple, angels Cathryn Cushing, Kate Finn, Melinda Pittman, and Judith Rizzio make us laugh. Whether it be about our shared weaknesses as human beings

or those otherwise mundane tasks of everyday life (including our perverse desire to spend way too much money on trendy coffee), the angels have a habit of touching people emotionally.

"That's the thing. We know that we're all in this thing together. We're making fun of ourselves as much as we're making fun of others," says Pittman.

Angel colleague Cushing chimes in, "We like to consider ourselves equal opportunity offenders."

Like cultural spelunkers, the angels delve into our some-

times uncomfortable social and political world and discover a glorious find: an all-too-rare and oft-humorous insight into the tough issues of the day (sexism, racism, homophobia, the Oregon Citizens Alliance, unbridled consumerism and greed). Like the creative artists they are, the angels meld itchy topics with friendly and familiar musical tunes (many of them Christmas favorites), that allow them to get across a progressive message without pummeling their audiences unconscious with a self-righteous hammer.

The group, founded in 1975, boasts a lively repertoire. What do they sing about, you ask? Here's a sampling of their titles: "God Rest Ye Tailhook Gentlemen" (sexual harassment); "Oh Holy Right, Pat Robertson Is Calling" (religion); "We Wish You a Merry Business" and "Hurlin' Sushi" (the economy); "We All Whack Away" (the environment); and as for those generational and regional differences, how about "How the Grunge Stole Christmas"? (Not all of their songs are quite so feathery, however. Some have taken a strictly serious track, tackling the very unfunny topics of domestic battering, abortion rights, urban violence, and alcoholism in a straightforward manner.)

"Humor is often a wonderful tool to get people to listen to you. If we simply said most of these things, people wouldn't listen because it would sound like we were on a soapbox," says Rizzio, the remaining original angel. "It's fascinating to go into conservative timber communities and actually have people who will come to our shows and really have a great time. If we instead showed up with our pickets and buttons, I don't think we'd get the positive reception we now do."

This year the group presents 20 new pieces in its show "Wake Up and Smell the Angels." Among the choice bits: "Clear Cut in the Woods," "The Can't Can't," "Deck Me Out in Shrink-Wrapped Plastic," "The Baritone-Playing Baptist Boy Commander-in-Chief," and "Expresso Yourself." Also look for their Hollywood blockbuster "Forrest Stump," and, in honor of political gridlock, "Who Ya Gonna Call? Filibusters."

The angels, a group of graying fortysomethings (or thereabouts), have the look and feel of '60s activism and the taste of crunchy granola.

"Members of our generation are starting to feel like they're becoming their parents. You know, they don't quite understand why their kids are listening to certain music. We are now the uncool parents that we used to accuse our parents of being," laughs Finn, who, despite the implication she may evolve into one of the parents of the uncool kind herself, boasts a head of hair that is an



The Fallen Angel Choir

admirable shade of pink. (Just like our parents, right?)

Backers of Democrats—"Clinton's done a lot of good," they tell me—the angels say they're in a bit of a quandary: "It's hard for us to take shots at the presidency these days," says Finn. Bush didn't get off quite so easily, note the 1992 angel tune "Pardon Me, George, We're in Deep Economic Doo Doo." And, in an ironic twist, the angels express almost a sadness that Oliver North lost his bid to become a U.S. senator.

"Following the election we had to bump our Ollie song because it wasn't applicable," says Pittman. It was a good one, too. To the tune of "Here Comes Santa Claus," the angels sang, "Here comes Ollie, here comes Ollie, right down Contragate lane..." You get the picture.

The Fallen Angel Choir will perform Dec. 2-3, Dec. 8-11, and Dec. 15-17 at the Scottish Rite Temple, 709 SW 15th Ave., in Portland. Shows are at 8 pm, with a 2 pm matinee performance Dec. 11. Tickets are \$15 and are available by calling the Fallen Angels box office 295-1142, or Fastixx 224-6499. Group discounts are available for groups of 20 or more; for information, call 295-1142.

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