

## Reagle's 'ChristmasTime' is a family affair

By Keith Powers, Correspondent

Posted Nov 26, 2017 at 7:00 AM

Grandparents, parents, and children. After 35 years, the Reagle Music Theatre of Greater Boston's "ChristmasTime" has become a generational event.

Susan Chebookjian not only choreographs the more than 160 performers who will take the Reagle stage from Dec. 2 through 10, she epitomizes the traditional atmosphere that pervades the show.

"I danced and performed as a kid," she said, in a break between preparation for this year's show at the Robinson Theatre in Waltham. "I started performing when I was 5. I danced in the first edition of 'ChristmasTime,' and I became the first and only choreographer a year or two after that."

That's what the show is like. Children perform as Elves in Santa's Workshop, alongside boys who are "Santas in Training." Middle school girls are Raggedy Anns. Some of them grow up to take part as adults, and their children take their place as Elves, Santas and Raggedy Anns.

"A lot of them come back year after year," Chebookjian says, "and so do some of the audience members."

"ChristmasTime" doesn't follow any particular theme, although familiar holiday ideas pass through the revue. There's the Teddy Bears' Ballet, Christmas on the Common, the Parade of the Wooden Soldiers, and the concluding Living Nativity. Of course that guy with the beard and the soft red suit shows up, and there's a holiday sing-along too, when the children in the audience are invited to join the cast onstage.

Rehearsals for "ChristmasTime" begin in October, and the whole month of November is devoted to getting the cast ready.

"It's a large cast," Chebookjian says, "but it's not like a musical, where the cast does all the numbers.

"Kids have so many options these days that getting them to focus on a rehearsal is very rewarding. For the parents too: some of these numbers are outside of their comfort zone, and when you see how hard they work — it's a magical experience, and journey."

The revue is accompanied by an 18-piece live orchestra. "Most of the numbers in the show haven't changed," Chebookjian says. "I don't think we had elves 35 years ago. And back then I was in all of the dance numbers. But we continue to improve on some of the elements.

“One of my tap numbers this year has some different choreography,” she says. “And our special ‘Twelve Days of Christmas’ is back in the show — sometimes we switch it out, and I’m sure people will be happy to see it back in the show.”

“There are so many tragic things in the news,” she says. “This is a two-hour escape for everyone.”

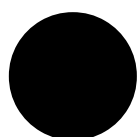
Nine performances — with plenty of matinees — begin at noon on Sat., Dec. 2.

“This is my home,” Chebookjian says of the Reagle stage. “This is where I grew up, and those first experiences onstage gave me confidence for my own life. It’s fun when you’re creating something new, and to see how it’s evolved. And the evolution continues.”

“ChristmasTime” runs Dec. 2 through Dec. 10 at the Reagle Theatre, 617 Lexington St., Waltham. Tickets (\$37-\$65) are available at [www.reaglemusictheatre.com](http://www.reaglemusictheatre.com) or by calling 781-891-5600.

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*Keith Powers covers music and the arts for GateHouse Media and WBUR’s ARTery. Follow [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith); email to [keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com](mailto:keithmichaelpowers@gmail.com)*



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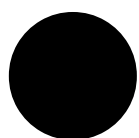
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