



Charles MacEachern, Vincent Tong, Jeremy Crittenden, David Hurwitz and Geoff Stevens in *Altar Boyz*, touring the Lower Mainland. DAVID COOPER/ARTS CLUB THEATRE

Altar Boyz busy saving sinners

■ **PREVIEW** Band will deliver Christian rock with a wink across the Lower Mainland for the next two months

BY PETER BIRNIE
VANCOUVER SUN

Saints be praised, the Boyz are here to save Metro Vancouver. Not from our weather — that's an act of God beyond anyone's ability to clean up — but from the scourges of sin and degradation.

Altar Boyz is a tongue-in-cheek tribute to Christian-rock boy bands, and Arts Club Theatre artistic managing director Bill Millerd fell in love with this little off-Broadway wonder when he saw it in New York. Millerd directs a new production of *Altar Boyz* that starts with a tour of the Lower Mainland, shifts to the B.C. interior for a week and then takes a break before spending most of the summer on the Arts Club's Granville Island Stage.

Across a single act of about 90 minutes, five fresh-faced guys present the final concert of their *Raise the Praise* tour.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and Juan (cute, huh?) are joined by their Jewish friend Abraham in singing the

praises of, well, singing the praises.

"It's sort of a send-up of Christian boy bands," says cast member Jeremy Crittenden, "but it's never mean, it's never offensive in what it says, either about pop culture or about religion."

Altar Boyz began as an entry in the 2004 New York Musical Theater Festival. By the following spring it had found a permanent home in Hell's Kitchen, a midtown neighbourhood renamed Clinton for the real-estate boom, and the guys have been getting godly there ever since.

The show is so popular that it has not only spawned innumerable clones all over the planet, but even sees the Altar Boyz Fantasy Camp helping fans learn how to bust a move, Jesus-style.

"I have a thing for new musicals," says Crittenden, "and this one has a really strong pop sound, which I really dig, and it's incredibly well-written."

The secret of the show's success, he reveals, lies in the truth of its beliefs.

"It's the absolute commitment and conviction that these characters have towards what they're doing," says Crittenden. "They really, truly believe that their mission in life — given to them by God — is to save souls by using pop music."

And employing something dubbed the Soul Sensor DX-12. It's an on-stage machine keeping track of how many sinners still sit in the audience — and it's the mission of the Boyz, of course, to reduce that number to zero by the end of the show.

Since this is the end of the road for *Raise the Praise*, what's next?

"It's the final show because something special is about to happen," Crittenden reveals. "A couple of special things are planned and I can't give them away, but they would only be the sort of thing the Altar Boyz would want to do for their last performance."

The premise is so clean-cut that it seems entirely possible some Christian audience members may think they're attending the real deal.

"You know," says Crittenden with

■ ALTAR BOYZ ON TOUR

Jan. 12: North Vancouver
Capilano Performing Arts Theatre
(604-990-7810)

Jan. 16 to 31: Surrey
Surrey Arts Centre (604-501-5566)

Feb. 2: West Vancouver
Kay Meek Centre (604-913-3634)

Feb. 3: Mission
Clarke Theatre (604-820-3961)

Feb. 4 and 5: Burnaby
Shadbolt Centre for the Arts
(604-205-3000)

Feb. 6 and 7: Maple Ridge
The ACT Maple Ridge Arts Centre &

Theatre (604-476-2787)

Feb. 10 to 14: Coquitlam
Evergreen Cultural Centre
(604-927-6555)

Feb. 17: Vernon

Vernon and District Performing
Arts Centre (250-549-7469)

Feb. 19: Cranbrook
Key City Theatre (250-426-5483)

Feb. 21: Nelson
Capitol Theatre (250-352-6363)

June 18 to August 1: Vancouver
Granville Island Stage
(604-687-1644)

a laugh, "I was thinking about that myself, and it absolutely is a real possibility someone could go and say wow, this is an awesome Christ-

ian band, I love what they're doing up there."

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