

THEATER REVIEW

DTC's 'Christmas Carol:' Spectacularly inventive and engrossing for all ages

By Betsy Price
The News Journal

Give yourself a memorable holiday present and go see the Delaware Theatre Co.'s "A Christmas Carol," an inventive show in which five actors tell the familiar story in such an entertaining way that the departing audience is happily buzzing about what they just saw.

Adapted by Patrick Barlow – the same playwright whose four-actor "39 Steps" won a bunch of British and Broadway awards – the play features one actor who plays Scrooge, and four others who play multiple roles, seamlessly switching costumes, props, voices, body language – and musical instruments.

The net effect is dazzling, giving theatergoers the same kind of high-quality, high-impact experience that the University of Delaware's Resident Ensemble Players pulled off with their 2010 "Midsummer Night's Dream" and DTC presented with 2007's "Henry V," which was also a show that asked a small cast to play multiple roles.

The performance, directed by Joe Calarco, breaks a lot of rules, starting with casting a hearty, handsome Scrooge instead of making him look mean and wizened. This Scrooge could be at home in any modern boardroom, his admirable sleek exterior masking a seething

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Mark Light-Orr's portrayal of Jacob Marley in DTC's "A Christmas Carol" was reminiscent of Japanese kabuki. COURTESY OF MATT URBAN/DTC

DTC: Set swings apart, moves around

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core of greed – which only underscores just how evil he is, making it more poignant for a guy who focuses on me-meme to wrestle with long-buried emotions and memories.

The actors pop in and out of the audience, starting from the first moment, when Actor Four (Steve Pacek) unexpectedly charges into the stands with a trumpet, plays the first line of “Deck the Halls With Boughs of Joy,” and then raises his arm like a conductor, instantly communicating to the audience that he wants them to continue the song. And they do.

“Vice nice,” he says and runs up the steps to do it again, with more cast members and more of the audience joining in. Then the cast flees in song to the stage, continuing the music until one step forward and pronounces, “Marley was dead” – and the play is off to a running start.

Part of the fun of the show is that it allows the audience to see all the changes in costume, instruments and sound effects, mostly produced right on stage by the cast. A chain raised and lowered into a metal

bucket becomes Marley’s unseen restraints. We watch as the actors – to great effect – control the mask that is Scrooge as a child and the puppet that is Tiny Tim.

In the creepiest moments, Actor One (Mark Light-Orr) portrays Jacob Marley by donning a frozen white Kabuki-like mask on his head, and creeping along the floor like a spider on his hands and legs, a simple concept that gives the entire scene a netherworld-like aura. At one point, Light-Orr removes the mask, but instead of shattering the illusion, it’s only heightened when he replaces the mask. Several people during intermission noted that the scene reminded them of a character, No Name, in Hayao Miyazaki’s Japanese anime film, “Spirited Away.”

Bryan Prather’s set becomes a dynamic player in itself, and photos of it do not do it justice. It swings apart, moves around and becomes Scrooge’s office, home, childhood school, childhood home, first job and so much more. Wonderful lighting, costumes that are traditional but have trendy touches from today, such as capes, and the use of shadows on curtains only

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Delaware Theatre Company’s “A Christmas Carol”

WHERE: 200 Water St., Wilmington

WHEN: Through Dec. 30

COST: \$35-\$49

FOR TICKETS AND INFO: 594-1100; www.delawaretheatre.org

THE DOWNSTATE ‘CAROL’: Through Sunday, Clear Space Theatre’s more traditional “A Christmas Carol” is playing at 20 Baltimore Ave., Rehoboth Beach. \$30. 227-2270; www.clearspace theatre.org

heighten the drama.

This “Christmas Carol” has a lot of humor, but Barlow doesn’t let it become a running joke, like “The 39 Steps,” although he has some fun with the story and with the audience in ways that seem like major comments on today’s me-centric techie society. At the same time, it has really affecting emotional moments, such as Scrooge’s reunion with his nephew.

The show would be nothing without the outstanding cast, which is as close to perfect as you

can get. Each has plenty of chances to shine, and each does, and yet they all work well together – and they better because it’s a very physical show. Right in front of the audience, they flip their costumes, pass props, play instruments – trumpet, violin, flute, tambourine, drum and more – while manipulating the set and ... quite often ... literally running from point to point.

Andrew Long is masterful as Scrooge, his modern manner the perfect foil to being forced to confront his past and his choices of coping with it. Light-Orr, Pacek, Jesse Shelton as Actor Two and Tina Stafford as Actor Three are simply amazing to watch as they transform themselves from role to role to role. They offer the kind of performances that make it hard to imagine anyone else playing the parts.

The show isn’t perfect. It reels a bit into excess a few times, such as when Scrooge manically cackles over his box of gold at one point, and his Act II memories of his schoolmaster chiding him seem to drag on unnecessarily in an otherwise tightly scripted show.

But it’s definitely one of the rare Delaware



Scrooge, played by Andrew Long, wrestles with memories of his schoolmaster in Patrick Barlow’s new adaptation of “A Christmas Carol.” COURTESY OF MATT URBAN/DTC

productions that absolutely deserved the standing ovation it got from an appreciative

audience.

Contact Betsy Price at 324-2884 or beprice@delawareonline.com.

Please note, the deadline will be Friday, December 21st by 5 pm
To place an IN MEMORIAM to print on:
Christmas Eve Monday, Dec. 24th
Christmas Day Tuesday, Dec. 25th
Or Wednesday, Dec. 26th
Call: 302-324-2781 or email: obituary@delawareonline.com
or visit the self-service tool at:
<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/delawareonline/>
and click on "How To Submit An In Memoriam" at the bottom of the page
We will have limited hours from 9 am - 2 pm on Monday, Dec. 24th and will be closed for business on Tuesday, Dec. 25th