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Mr. Scrooge takes a bow

By ANN BENNETT
Posted: 12/24/2009 01:30:55 AM PST

Cabrillo Stage has inaugurated its presentation of an annual family holiday show in its beautiful new Crocker Theater with the bright and entertaining "Scrooge" -- a sparkling production guaranteed to delight kids and parents alike.

Over a six-week period in the fall of 1843, Charles Dickens wrote "A Christmas Carol," the holiday story that over the years has become a seasonal classic and continues to be performed, in one fashion or another, this time of year. Its story about a lonely miser who is shown the errors of his selfish ways and becomes a joyous benefactor is a perfect morality tale for Christmas, when we celebrate the spirit of giving.

Now we have "Scrooge" the musical, created in 1970 by Leslie Bricusse, which offers us an opportunity to see "A Christmas Carol" once again, but this time with a lot of songs and other upgrades. The plot is left more or less intact, but the addition of music doesn't really do much for the classic tale other than dress it up and fluff it out and spin it into a visual extravaganza. The familiar story is still there, just bigger and gaudier.

Cabrillo Stage is presenting "Scrooge" with lots of energy and a spectacular set and a troupe of fine actors and a very capable orchestra.

Under the direction of Andrew Ceglio and starring the irrepressible Joseph Ribeiro as Scrooge, the show cavorts about the large stage with cheerful abandon. Ceglio uses the space well, moving his large cast in and about Skip Epperson's

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imaginative set with good timing and nice visual effect.

Epperson's clever design allows for a lot of illustrative action without overdoing the gimmickry, and its seeming simplicity provides a satisfying backdrop for the play.

Musical director Jon Nordgren and his fine small orchestra deliver the medley of melodies in the show with foot-tapping exuberance -- the songs are very nice but not what you'd call memorable -- and choreographer Trevor Little is responsible for the charming dance pieces.

Costumes by Maria Crush are rich and attractive -- lots of pretty hats and cute bloomers and swirling skirts to contrast with the obligatory drab poverty outfits and appropriately spooky in this case peculiar ghost outfits. Ethan Hoerneman's lighting design and Skyler Kirby's sound design add to

the visual success of the show -- the sound in this theater is really great!

Joseph Ribeiro is undeniably a perfect Scrooge. He looks exactly right and personifies the "bah, humbug" character with what appears to be great glee, endures his mysterious visitors and their revelations, and finds redemption through generosity. Actually, Ribeiro seems happier as the grouchy miser than he does as the newly beneficent convert, but that may be because the curmudgeonly Scrooge is more fun and has way better lines.

Michael Stark moans and groans and clanks his way about the stage as the deceased but still miserable Jacob Marley, and the three ghosts are quite effective: Christmas Past Ariel Buck in flowing white nuptial drapery, Present Ben Jammin Holck in a muddled assemblage of contemporary indecision, and Future Lizzie Shipton, disguised as, I'm pretty sure, the Grim Reaper. All three are appropriately scary, and each offers a symbolic touch to the evening.

Nicholas Ceglio does a good portrayal of the humble, unobtrusive Bob Cratchit, so submissive and self-effacing as to be almost non-existent, and Ariel Buck counters with a richly assured interpretation of his more spunky wife. Morgen Cree is totally darling as the sweetly angelic Tiny Tim, skillfully providing the heart-wrenching aspect of the story, and David Jackson handles the roles of young Scrooge and

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Scrooge's nephew with easy charm.

The huge ensemble accounts for all the assorted characters who contribute to the plot and add to the success of Scrooge's out-of-body experiences. The back-story scenes are full of the action and emotion needed to accomplish the greedy Scrooge's transformation, and the cast appears to be enjoying every minute.

"Scrooge" is definitely an audience pleaser -- the opening night crowd gave it a standing ovation -- and a welcome addition to the list of traditions for the holiday season. It's like getting the old familiar "A Christmas Carol" -- but all decked out in new finery.

"Scrooge" continues at the Cabrillo Crocker Theater, Cabrillo College, 6500 Soquel Drive, Aptos, through Jan. 3, with performances Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays at 7:30 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday matinees at 2 p.m. There is a wide range of ticket prices; for more information or to order tickets, phone 479-6331 or go to www.cabrillostage.com.

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'scrooge! the musical'
 presented by: Cabrillo Stage
 when: Opening Friday. Tuesday through Saturday at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday at 2 p.m. through Jan. 3.
 where: The Crocker Theater on the campus of Cabrillo College
 Tickets: Prices range from \$15 to \$34.
 details: www.cabrillostage.com or 479-6154

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