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Cabrillo Stage captures holiday magic in 'Scrooge'

By KATIE HUGHES MCKEE
 Posted: 12/24/2010 01:30:58 AM PST

Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" has been performed time and again since it was written over a century and a half ago. As a play, a film or a musical, the tale of redemption and epiphany never grows stale. The shade of Norman Pesenti, as Scrooge in "Appalachian Ebenezer," will always stalk the theater on Center Street, no matter what company is established there.

Cabrillo Stage is re-mounting last year's production of "Scrooge," but with an almost entirely different cast and a timely take on want and need during this holiday season. Homeless people are not "someone else" anymore. We all know folks who are jobless and homeless, who have never been a "burden" on society, as Scrooge claims them to be. He "can't afford to keep idle people merry." Welcome to Homeless R Us.

Opening night of this production was an unqualified success. Tiny tots with their eyes all aglow were scared out of their wits by the four ghosts. Not just the tots, either. I definitely jumped once or twice -- or more. Michael Stark's Jacob Marley was terrifying, and he's only the beginning. A trio of women -- Brie Michaud, Eleanor Hunter and Elizabeth Shipton, who channels the gamut from Mae West to Marilyn Manson -- will keep you highly engaged.

Tony Panighetti is an empathetic Scrooge. His transformation is a pleasure to watch as the tale unfolds. We understand why he became the unloved miser who had such a promising youth. Act I ends with a "Bedknobs and Broomsticks" finale that had

me whistling in the restroom. Act II starts with sniffles as Scrooge revisits his unhappy childhood.

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Standouts abound in this production: Nicholas Ceglie as Bob Cratchit; Robin DiCello as his wife; Ginger Hurley as their crippled son, Tiny Tim; Geoffrey Ward and Jennifer Taylor-Daniels as Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig; and Max Bennett-Parker as young Scrooge. Choreographer Trevor Little, who literally grew up at Cabrillo Stage, is a dazzling nephew and leads the ensemble in some very flashy footsteps.

As usual, Cabrillo Stage's production values are off the charts. Skip Epperson's scenic design dominated by a giant clock, Andrew Ceglie's thoughtful direction, Jon Nordgren's musical direction, Kevin Johnston's spooky lighting, Maria Crush's period costumes and Skyler Kirby's sound design were flawless

opening night.

This is, of course, a scary story, but there is much humor in evidence, and the musical numbers are catchy, touching and beautiful. Very small children may be frightened -- the set designer's youngest certainly was -- but she assured me it was a "good scared."

The opening night audience gave "Scrooge" a standing ovation. Not the usual kind, where the house is papered with relatives and someone's uncle stands up and then other folks do, one by one. This was a genuine standing O, people, where the audience as one got to its feet and gave this production the response it deserved.

Honestly, don't miss this! Make it your holiday gift to yourself.

IF YOU GO
 'scrooge'
 WRITTEN BY: Leslie Bricusse
 PRESENTED BY: Cabrillo Stage
 When: Tuesdays through Saturdays, 7:30 p.m.
 Matinees 2 p.m. through Dec. 30. No performance Dec. 25.
 WHERE: Crocker Theater, on the campus of

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 EOE, m/f/d/v.

Cabrillo College, Aptos
TICKETS: \$16 to \$34, plus service charges
DETAILS: 479-6154 or www.cabrillostage.com

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