

Bah! Ha! Ha!

A Gay Christmas Carol gives Charles Dickens a sense of humor

BY ANDY MANGELS



Scrooge gets dragged out of the closet

The holiday season is full of all sorts of fluffy things: fluffy snow, fluffy trees, fluffy presents, fluffy songs. And every year, like clockwork, two entertainment events happen to lend a little depression to our holiday cheer, although each has an uplifting message.

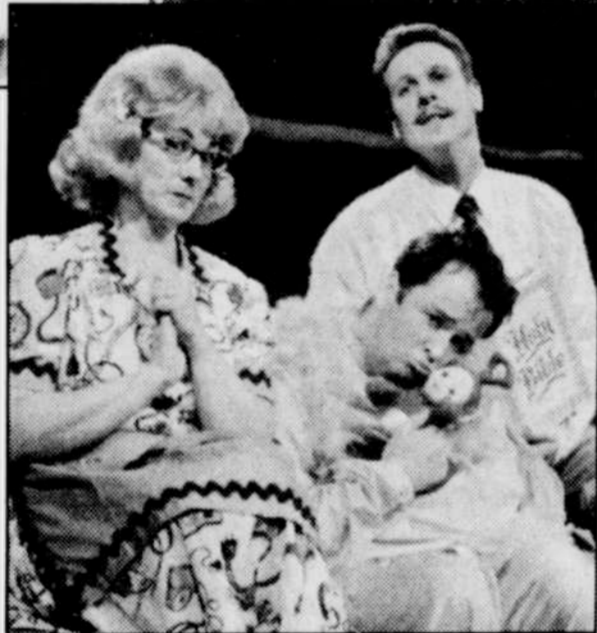
It's a Wonderful Life and A Christmas Carol are as regular as an old-timer on bran, and you can catch them in umpteen versions on television or stage. But this holiday season, triangle productions! is putting a queer spin on the festivities with a fluffy production of A Gay Christmas Carol.

Ebenezer Scrooge (James Lawrence) is a heartless money lender who has kept his gay side hidden ever since his partner (in both meanings of the word), Jacob Marley, passed away in an unfortunate hair dryer accident. Scrooge works his lesbian assistant, Bobbi Cratchett (a Clark Kent-looking Michelle Seaton) until she's about to drop and cares little about her or her wife Martina's (Tori Zanzalari) adopted gay stepchild, Tiny Tim (James W. Peppers).

Scrooge is also grouchy with his granola-dyke niece Fredricka (Sharon Mann), refusing to attend her Christmas party. But on Christmas Eve, he is visited by the ghost of Marley (Todd Chatalas), who is a precursor to the Spirit of Christmas Past, Judy Garland (Jodi Eichelberger), Christmas Present, Liza Minelli (Eichelberger again), Bette Midler (Gary Norman) and the hood-wearing Ghost of Christmas Future (Chatalas again).

I won't spoil the ending for you, other than to say you probably know what it is, as the tone of the play veers little from Charles Dickens' original. The text, however, is campier than an episode of *Will & Grace*, and many of the actors mug shamelessly to the audience, eye-popping and telegraphing punch lines like aging vaudevillians. The comparison to a sitcom is not far off, as the humor in the play comes fast and furious, with verbal gags side by side to physical slapstick.

As befits a play with "Carol" in the title—but differing from most "straight" versions—this also has a selection of musical numbers, but the mixture of songs makes it tonally and



Putting the fun in dysfunctional fam

emotionally schizophrenic. Some are rewritten parodies of other songs, while some are sung seriously (as several of Judy Garland's numbers). Eichelberger has a strong voice and sounds something like Garland (although much less like Minelli), but Peppers shows he's not so tiny with a vocal number that is well-sung, crisply emotional and heartbreaking.

Most of the cast members show up in multiple parts, with Mann showing the most range as both tofu-loving PC lesbian Fredricka and a leather-wearing, Xena-worshipping Brooklyn-esque baby dyke. Director Angela Keene makes the best use of a too-bare stage and deserves kudos for her casting of several "nontraditional" heavier actors in major roles.

I enjoyed A Gay Christmas Carol while watching it, but like any light and airy confection, it wasn't tremendously emotionally satisfying in the long run. That isn't what it's meant to be, however. A Gay Christmas Carol is meant to be campy, corny, queer fluff, and it succeeds in being just that. **IN**

A GAY CHRISTMAS CAROL runs through Dec. 23 at Theater! Theatre!, 3430 S.E. Belmont St. For tickets call the box office at 503-239-5919 or Fastixx.

ANDY MANGELS wore his first facial hair as a young performer in a production of A Christmas Carol, and he now sports an infamously large mustache. He is a longtime entertainment writer, and you can write him at AMangelsSW@aol.com.

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