



Why, Ebenezer, Why?

No, you cannot resist the spectacle of ACE's *Christmas Carol*

Costumes glitter, lights twinkle, high school students affect English accents and the juggernaut of a tricked-out Dickensian Christmas sweeps up everyone in its path.

Yep, the Actors Cabaret of Eugene's *A Christmas Carol*, Broadway musical version, will leap into your brain, and you'll leave the theater humming the song "Christmas Together" — that is, unless you run into one of the several Jewish members of the cast, and she or he sings you the special rewritten Jewish version of the all-too-catchy tune. Then you will laugh, remembering there's a world outside of greenery and ribbons, a world where bells don't jingle all the time and

where grandparents aren't always bedecked in Santa hats and flashing LED displays.

Not that there's anything wrong with that.

For a couple of hours, ACE's over-the-top celebration of the holiday classic definitely entertains. How you are entertained, exactly, depends on your attitude toward large helpings of schlock — though admittedly it's schlock with a sweet attitude and a joyful sound. One is not supposed to laugh at the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Be, but did the ghost come from Mordor by way of a rave? And oh, the jacks-in-the-boxes. However: There's so much to enjoy that *Christmas Carol* should woo anyone, even Grinchy performing arts editors (and if not, there's

whiskey for sale during intermission).

In the program, director Joe Zingo writes that this version is sure to remind audience members of the first time they saw *A Christmas Carol*. True. I remember my mom taking my sister and me, dressed in holiday finery, to the Missouri Rep's annual *Carol*: Victorian-costumed carolers entertained us in the lobby; The Ghost of Christmas Present seemed three stories tall; Scrooge was *mean*; the graveyard scene was scary. In short, I remember spectacle. And that means ACE's show is as it should be. The story can be a bit more realistically bleak, as in the WillRep's currently running *Carol*, but for young families wanting a ritual holiday celebration, this Broadway version should work marvelously.

Anyone familiar with Alan Menken's music will hear echoes of his other musicals ("A Whole New World" from *Aladdin*, the opening town scene from *Beauty and the Beast*). Lynn Ahrens' lyrics stick mostly to the text but deviate enough to provide a *Les Miserables*-like reference to stars and compassion that leads to the signature line of any *Christmas Carol* — "God bless us, every one."

This ACE production celebrates the various families intertwined in the theater's frequent productions. Did we see some of these same people in *Seussical*? Did we see them in *Bat Boy*? In *A Christmas Carol*, 2006 version? How about in *All Shook Up*? Yes, yes, we did.

The delightful Ashley Apelzin appears in several roles (including the Ghost of Christmas Past in a wintery wedding-like

costume), and Tyler Holden turns his focus from the Cat in the Hat in *Seussical* to a rather amusing Bob Cratchit here. The two young Cratchits (Maggie Clark as Martha and Bryce Walters as Tiny Tim) charm away, and the ubiquitous Marc Innocenti makes Marley's Ghost look like the monster in *Young Frankenstein*. As kind Mr. Fezziwig, Rob Olson stands out, and Kevin Boling uses his knowing countenance to excellent effect as the Ghost of Christmas Present. Other repeat performers fill the stage with lovely tableaux, freezing when the various ghosts speak to a goofy Ebenezer Scrooge (Bruce McCarthy). The lavish production with its gorgeous costumes and incessant soundtrack showers decorative holiday scenes upon Eugene.

At the end of the recent UO/LCC production of *The Threepenny Opera*, cast and crew took up a collection for St. Vinny's, trying to stay true to the play's message of honoring the poor. If *Christmas Carol* is about nothing else, it's about changing the behavior of the wealthy in order to benefit the downtrodden. ACE dons the mantle of giving with a "Tiny Tim's Food Drive" for FOOD for Lane County, something that a reformed Scrooge would no doubt support. Whether audience members are warm from the glow of alcohol or "Christmas Together," they'll happily pony up and make the season that much brighter. Without LEDs, at that. **EW**

ACE's *A Christmas Carol* continues Dec. 7-9, 14-16 and 21-22. Go to www.actorscabaret.org or call 683-4368 for tix.

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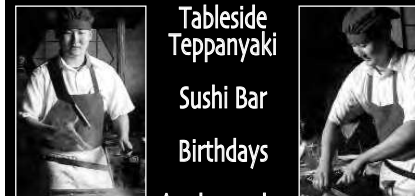
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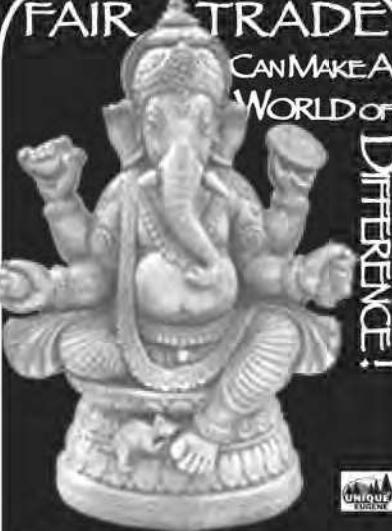
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