

A Fragment of Underdone Potato

Staged classics new and old offer a little holiday cheer BY RICK LEVIN

The holidays are not progressive — far from it. We may strive for challenge and change in our daily lives, and we may shape our politics according to the humanistic ideals of advancement and reform, but come Christmastime we are as profoundly conservative as a clutch of Tea Baggers at a Fourth of July picnic. We want our Yuletide slack and our status quo as hard and sweet as a candy cane.

Repetition of familiar favorites, heaped with a cloying dose of nostalgia and sprinkled with the dust of domesticity, is what the holidays are all about. And, really, aside from all those mnemonically metronymic carols, there's nothing that puts us in the merry mood like the stories of Ebenezer Scrooge or George Bailey. This year, we in Eugene are being offered a Santa's sack of options for getting on our Hanukkahs and ho ho hos.

After the excellent but angst-riddled teenage tragedy of *Spring Awakening*, the talented volunteers at Actors Cabaret (actorscabaret.org, 683-4368) are mounting that perfect piece of seasonal-affective uplift, **A Christmas Carol**, a Broadway musical version of Charles Dickens's classic Victorian tale of time, memory and redemption. This production, which runs Nov. 18 through Dec. 17, features a pre-play dinner and an early start time so you can get back to your shopping and drinking.

Nothing says Christmas like the Von Trapps. No? Okay, this one might not immediately strike you as a traditional holiday staple, but it's actually quite shrewd of The Shedd (theshedd.org, 434-7000) to put on **The Sound of Music** right now. There's music, family, uplift and Nazis — everything you require of a Christmas entertainment. The hills are alive with this musical Dec. 2-18, with Sunday matinees.

David Sedaris, who recently graced Hult Center with a wonderful reading, was never more on his game than in **The SantaLand Diaries**, the hilarious real-life account of the author's employment as a Macy's elf. Adapted for the stage by Joe Mantello, this mordant tale



A CHRISTMAS CAROL
OPENS NOV. 18 AT
ACTORS CABARET

of mistletoe'd misanthropy is a lovely antidote to the crass commercialization of Jesus' birthday. It runs at Lord Leebrick (lordleebrick.com, 465-1506) Dec. 2-18.

The amphibians will be hopping out in Cottage Grove when Cottage Theatre (cottage theatre.org, 942-2934) stages **A Year with Frog and Toad**, a 2002 musical based on the beloved kids' books by Arnold Lobel. This is fun, family-friendly entertainment with song, dance, heart and soul, and a sure way to keep those antsy kids rapt for at least two hours.

If you're feeling a bit Grinch-ish this time 'round,

there's "**A Child's Christmas in Wales**," a fundraising performance Dec. 11 at Café Soriah (res. at 342-4410) that will benefit Free Shakespeare in the Park, with local actor David Stuart Bell reading the Dylan Thomas classic and Celtic music by Chico Schwall and Linda Danielson. And Fred Crafts' Radio Redux players continue a wonderful holiday tradition Dec. 16-18 with a radio theater adaptation of **It's a Wonderful Life** at Wildish Community Theater in Springfield (736-4544).

Remember, every time you support local theater, an angel gets her wings. **HH**

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