



GEORGE VETTER PHOTOS/CANNON-BEACH.NET

LEFT: The Cratchit family in "A Christmas Carol: The Musical" RIGHT: Ebenezer Scrooge confronts carolers while Bob Cratchit watches on.

Fergus has recruited a cast that's not only one of the Coaster's biggest — 30 actors in all — but also one of the widest-ranging in terms of experience. The time-tested skills of stage veterans like Darren Hull (who plays Scrooge), Richard Bowman (Jacob Marley) and Ann Bronson (the Ghost of Christmas Present) are augmented by a generous infusion of new blood.

Among the newcomers are Portland transplant Bennett Hunter (as both Young Scrooge and Fred Anderson), retired Lutheran Pastor and Seaside resident Rob Bjornstad (Mr. Fezziwig), and Brittanica Williams (the Ghost of Christmas Future), late of Salt Lake City.

"I'd say it's about a 50-50 split of old-hands and newcomers," Tronier said. "Some of them are doing their first show for us, and some are doing their first show ever, of any kind! We're getting people who are here just because they love the story, and it's great to see that kind of enthusiasm."

This excitement has proven crucial, given the challenges of the production. Unlike previous musicals, which relied on the live accompaniment of a pianist, or a small ensemble just offstage, "A Christmas Carol" is performed to a prerecorded, computerized track.

This gives the show a much fuller, orchestrated sound than is usual for community theater, but it requires a far more exacting discipline on



Ebenezer Scrooge and Tiny Tim

the part of the players, who have to negotiate complex choreography and near-constant singing without missing a beat.

"Having the score on a computer gives us a little more flexibility than just a simple backing track — you can adjust the tempo and change the pace as needed," Sweeney said. "It's helpful in that it gives us a bigger sound, but we really have to keep an eye on our conductor, Ryan Hull, to keep ourselves in line."

Interestingly, it's Coaster veterans like Emily Dante, who plays both Mrs. Cratchit and Scrooge's mother, who find the adjustment the most daunting.

"It's been a while since I've done a musical, so that makes it a little challenging. Most of the time when I'm doing music these days, I'm playing my own, so to sing to someone else's means I have to have ... timing," she said, laughing.

She's in good company, as this "Christmas Carol" is a family show in the truest sense. Several cast members, and the director herself, have brought their children along as part of the ensemble; four of Dante's five kids are involved in the production, including 10-year-old Clayton as Tiny Tim, making his debut on the Coaster stage ... almost.

"Most of my kids have been here in utero," Dante said. "I think they're kind of used to it." 