

Surrey/North Delta Leader

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Scrooge tale a treasure

"Once upon a time - of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve - old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather, foggy withal..."

My mother started a Christmas tradition years ago. Now that I have a family of my own, I enjoy continuing it. Each year, we let the kids stay up past bedtime in order to attend a seasonal performance of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* by any theatre group that has brought it to town.

I have seen it in schools, in churches, on television and in countless theatres around the Lower Mainland. I even acted the part of the Ghost of Jacob Marley somewhere along the line.

For ten years running, the Waterfront Theatre on Granville Island has been presenting a superb musical adaptation of the play by Mavor Moore. He wrote it expressly for Carousel Theatre in 1988, and since then it "has become a treasured Carousel tradition" according to Artistic Director Elizabeth Ball. This year's performance is indeed a treasure - of song, color and talent.

Surrey is proud to be the home of two key characters:

Tiny Tim and Ebenezer himself. Nine-year-old Ryan Whitmarsh attends Ray Shepard Elementary when he is not appearing on stage in cap and crutch as Bob Cratchit's

ON STAGE



Karen Kinna

youngest and neediest. Ron Halder calls South Surrey home when he is not grousing miserly as that most famous of all stage Humbugs.

Halder's Scrooge is perhaps younger and more spritely than other Scrooges of Christmases past, but the actor has done his homework, characterizing every mannerism in careful detail, right down to twitching thumbs and other minute signs of agitation.

He blends a correctly measured portion of physical comedy with expertly-timed line delivery in a concoction so sprinkled with bits of gruff business, the audience simply laps him up.

Halder is the only actor of the eleven-member cast who does not play more than one role, due to his constant presence on stage. He is joined by a solid cast, both musically and theatrically.

UBC grad Peter Wilson was most impressive as a quick-change artist, playing - (count them) seven characters - including Marley and Nephew Fred. His comic spin on the

ghost and earnest delivery of Fred's "Come then, uncle, what right have you to be dismal?" speech endeared him to the audience from the get-go.

Annabel Kershaw has a great voice as Belle and Mrs. Dilber, and the vocally talented Chancz Perry lent verve and charm to the roles of Fezziwig and the Ghost of Christmas Present. Whitmarsh's Tiny Tim was a tad timid of voice opening night, but this is his first professional performance and he is still learning the ropes.

This production boasts spectacular special effects, particularly when Marley appears in haunting blue light in place of the door knocker, and again in Act Two during a lightning and thunder storm when Ebenezer's tombstone eerily appears through a haze of dry ice.

Costumes are accurate Victorian-London: layer-upon-layer of petticoats, bustle and hoop skirts for the ladies, with scarves, top hats and capes for the gents.

The set features sliding flats of realistic brick, actual windows, a "marble" mantle piece, and a revolving turntable-type platform inset seamlessly in centre stage.

A Christmas Carol 'the Musical, directed by Susan Lehmann, appears nightly at the Waterfront Theatre on Granville Island until Dec. 24. Book tickets for your own seasonal tradition at 685-6217.

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