

'A Christmas Carol' captures holiday spirit

Performances of "A Christmas Carol" continue through Sunday, Dec. 27, at Meadow Brook Theatre on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call 377-3300.

By Ethel Simmons
Staff writer

Meadow Brook Theatre's annual Christmas show, "A Christmas Carol," is a charming interpretation of the Dickens classic.

The production is beautifully staged, with revolving sets that create all the familiar settings in the story of Scrooge and the Cratchit family. Special effects, including people and things that appear and disappear in a puff of smoke, lend magic to the proceedings.

The cast is headed by Booth Colman, who has starred as the miserly Scrooge since Meadow Brook's first production of "A Christmas Carol." Colman underplays his character, Scrooge, but one who is a quietly smug pinchpenny.

It takes Marley's Ghost and the Spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Future to show him how to mend his ways. Scrooge looks on in amazement as the scenes of his life are re-enacted. Colman does a lot with his facial expressions, as in many of the sequences he merely reacts to what he sees.

GLEN ALLEN PRUETT is a vigorous Ghost of Jacob Marley, who cautions ex-partner Scrooge against making the same mistakes in life that money-grubbing Marley made. Also strong in their presentations are Joseph Reed, as a rotund lover of life, the Spirit of Christmas Present, and Pruett again, as the horrifying Spirit of Christmas Future.

As the Spirit of Christmas Past, Mar Riehl seems a bit theatrical



Booth Colman stars as Scrooge.

where a more natural presentation might be called for. Riehl is outstanding in another of her guises (many in the cast have several roles) as the Landlady, who with a Charwoman played by Bethany Carpenter and the Undertaker portrayed by Phillip Locker describe

articles they have stolen from Scrooge's body and bedroom after his death. This is the most powerful dramatic sequence in the production, and the actors rivet your attention.

Them Haneline is a marvelously cheerful Bob Cratchit, with only goodwill toward all, including his miserably boss Scrooge. Cratchit turns despondent when little Tiny Tim dies — but luckily this, like other events of the future, prove to be only "shadows," which can be changed.

Mary Wright Bremer is a believably plucky Mrs. Cratchit. Other family members also are good, and

review

Kaspar Noel Lane is an adorable Tiny Tim, although he has only a few lines. Gregory Wilson, who plays Peter Cratchit, the oldest son, is also cast in the role of Scrooge as a boy and appears too big and mature to be childishly reciting Scrooge's schoolboy dialogue.

SCROOGE MAKES UP for his

mercenary ways and is reunited with his own nephew and family. Brian Schultz and Mar Riehl again, as nephew Fred and Fred's wife, are compelling in their portrayals, in a scene where Scrooge is the unlikely topic of a guessing game.

When Scrooge repents and sends a boy to get a big turkey for the Cratchits on Christmas Day, Wayne David Parker is both overly exag-

gerated and equally hilarious as the exuberant Turkey Boy.

Charles Nolte adapted the production, which he directed. It's a smooth-flowing show, perhaps a little slow in some of the first, familiar scenes on opening night, but pleasantly appealing. Sequences where actors in the background move without speaking aloud, while other ac-

tion goes on, is an interesting touch well suited to the fantasy.

Costumes by Mary Lynn Bonnell, scenery by Barry Griffiths and lighting by Reid J. Johnson are impressive. One of the sets, Scrooge's upstairs bedroom, swings around to turn into an exterior where he goes out on his balcony to discover Christmas Day.

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