

Hope is the message of 'A Christmas Carol'

Performances of "A Christmas Carol" at Meadow Brook Theatre continue through Sunday, Dec. 30, on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information call 377-3300.

By Mary Jane Doerr
special writer

As Ebenezer Scrooge, Booth Colman takes center stage just after his partner's ghost, Jacob Marley, disappears in the window with a burst of light. It was only a dream, he says to the audience.

"No it wasn't," a child in the audience answered softly, at a performance last weekend.

Meadow Brook Theatre's production of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" is very real to children and adults. As it has for eight years, director Charles Nolte's delightful

adaptation continues to transcend designer Peter Hicks' 19th century English setting with a universal message of hope.

It is the very simplicity of this production and its adherence to Dickens' own story that keeps it a box-office draw. Nolte lets the lessons of Dickens speak to all of us, through the charm of English Christmas customs and the surprises of his theatrical tricks.

THE MOMENT we arrive at the theater, an ocelt takes us back in time to England with caroling of traditional tunes: "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," "What Child Is This," "Deck the Halls" and wassailing songs. Music director Donald Daniels can take credit for the well-blended vocal group.

As Scrooge himself admits, his is not a very pleasant name — which is remembered more for his greediness



Mary Jane Doerr

than his change of character. He was a product of his time when economists rationalized the ruthlessness of the business-controlled society. Counting the coin in the bin and the minutes on the clock, Scrooge gets his money's worth but learns he can't take it with him. Lost in his society are the less aggressive Bob Cratchits, the weak iron-braced Tiny Tim and the poor laundresses.

No one counts money faster than Booth Colman counts pounds. His Scrooge is classic and so smooth we forget he is acting. Paul DelBoy is an outgoing nephew Fred with an authentic English accent. Paul Hopper is properly submissive as Bob

Cratchit. Shirleyann Kaladjian is a sweet Spirit of Christmas Past with an upper-class English accent and a pleasant voice for her reprise of "Silent Night," as Martha Cratchit. Dinah Lynch is different every time she steps on stage, this time as a motherly Mrs. Cratchit.

The laugh of the Spirit of Christmas Present is that of Joseph Reed, who has done this production for the past eight years.

This American show mixes English Christmas traditions — of gifts, folk dances, "yes and no" games, and meals of goose, stuffing, mashed potatoes, apples and oranges, and brandy sauce puddings — with German

customs — of Christmas trees and decorations. It does not matter that Christmas trees are not mentioned in the book and that in Dickens' native country, English pantomimes are more popular.

What matters is the message of "A Christmas Carol" that is so easily appreciated at Meadow Brook. The hope of Christmas is that Scrooge does change. The future is not carved in stone. The die has not been cast. Scrooge's tombstone has no epitaph.

Mary Jane Doerr of Troy is a fulltime teacher and freelance writer who specializes in opera and musical theater.



Booth Colman plays Ebenezer Scrooge, the miser transformed into a generous man.

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