

## Annual 'Christmas Carol' production reinvents itself, impresses audience

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Many have read or seen a production of Charles Dickens' classic story "A Christmas Carol." For the seventh year in a row, the Clarence Brown Theatre brought the story to the stage.

This production has become a tradition at the theatre due in part to its popularity, but also due to the fact it is still deeply relevant today. As the Christmas season approaches, seeing the tale of a man who has forgotten the true joys of the holiday season rediscover what Christmas is about is the perfect addition to the holiday festivities.

Within seconds of the production beginning, the audience was transported back to the 19th century. From there, they were taken through the tale of Ebenezer Scrooge's journey to redemption.

Though the script may be the same as last year, this year's production is anything but a repeat, featuring several new contributions to costume, set, lighting and sound designs. These changes didn't distract from the message of the story.

Instead, they served to enhance and intensify the world of the play.

The set was redesigned to create a more functional space for the actors to move and work in, as well as to better accommodate the number of scene changes in the production. Like previous years, the quick scene changes were made possible through the use of moving pallets that brought the furniture and props onto the stage smoothly. This is particularly important, as it provided an uninterrupted flow to the story that kept the audience's focus.

Many of the other changes were incorporated in the scenes with the ghosts. The designers' efforts of costuming, lighting, sound and projections came together to create an elaborate and incredibly vivid scene with each of Scrooge's visitors.

The ghost of Jacob Marley now enters from a trapdoor underneath the stage, which is accentuated by red lighting and fog that spills up out of the pit into Scrooge's bedroom. The iconic chains he carries are incredibly realistic, with the clinking and clanking of the chains accentuated at points for emphasis, and his voice is also magnified to a ghostly echo that reverberates throughout the audience. When he descends back into his pit, the chains are pulled in before him, giving the appearance he is being pulled back to where he came from.

The Ghost of Christmas Past appears through the use of a fly. When she descends into Scrooge's bedroom, she brings with her all the magic of every Christmas past. Her costume and the sound effects that accompany her give a wistful tone to Scrooge's memories.

The Ghost of Christmas Present is made splendid by the bountiful scene that he brings with him to his entrance. He sits upon a huge carved throne and is surrounded by a feast, representing all the good of the Christmas that still is.

Though all the other ghosts affected the story in their own way, it was the Ghost of Christmas Future that really became a focal point of the production. It is with Future that Scrooge finally sees the error of his ways and makes a turn for the better.

To accomplish this successfully, the production found a way of making Future larger than life...literally.

Whereas last year Future was made up of only a projection, this year used a combination of projections and a large puppet that was controlled by three crew members. The huge, ominous, black-shrouded ghost makes his appearance in a swarm of crows, almost as if he is coalescing from them. Though he does not say a word, his intent is clear.

Altogether, the production was a huge success in retelling a classic story in a new way. Through a combination of a new design, as well as incorporating live musicians into the cast, the Clarence Brown Theatre was able to produce a show that reminded the audience of the true meaning of Christmas.

As the play ended and the cast stepped forward to sing the final song, the audience sang along too, rejoicing in welcoming the holiday season in all its wonder.