

The real Scrooge surfaces in Clarence Brown Theatre's 'A Christmas Carol'

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There's a moment early in this year's Clarence Brown Theatre production of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" that reveals the true nature of Ebenezer Scrooge. But he hides it until he's an old man.

A mountain of theoretical and academic material describes what shaped young Ebenezer's outlook on life. From his early years as a student, he was dedicated to getting all of his schoolwork just right, especially the math. So much so that he sacrificed just being a boy.

His hard work, though, earned him a job at Fezziwig's, run by a busy chipmunk of a character brilliantly played by Peter Kevoian.

Fezziwig rewards young Ebenezer with a promotion, to which Ebenezer (Brady Moldrup) responds, "If what we call progress crushes our other values, is money worth it?"

It's the key line in Edward Morgan and Joseph Hanreddy's stage adaptation that explains everything that happens. That thought, unfortunately, also gets shoved backward by Ebenezer's drive to succeed. Getting all the math problems right becomes the need to accumulate money, which becomes a sense of inadequacy without it. That, in turn, becomes rejection of people who don't have it.

No one sees that more clearly than Belle (Brenda Orellana). She has no dowry or anything else to offer their relationship but her love. It's all she wants from Ebenezer. He just can't see it.

It's from Jacob Marley that Scrooge learns the tight-fisted moneylending practices that turn him into a miser.

Ironically, it's Marley's ghost (Jed Diamond) who comes in a dream to warn Scrooge that he has to change his ways. In Bill Black's intuitive costume, Marley's ghost looks like his arrival came through the lint filter of a clothes dryer where he learned that the lint in his pockets is all he has left to count.



Photo by Brynn Yeager

The Ghost of Christmas Past (Brittany Marie Pirozzeli), the Ghost of Christmas Future (Abigail Rae Jones) and the Ghost of Christmas Present (in another energized characterization by Kevoian) follow Marley's ghost in their efforts to get Scrooge to mend his ways.

The giant clock that's the centerpiece in Kevin Depinet's set design winds back and forth as the episodes in Scrooge's dream take their turn.

Scrooge has had plenty of examples if he had just paid attention. His nephew, Fred (Brian Gligor), does his best. So does Bob Cratchit (Collin Andrews), his loyal assistant who struggles to feed and clothe his family on the meager wages Scrooge pays him.

There's music in this "Christmas Carol." The tone of the music changes from dismal to cheerful to joyful as the play progresses.

But it's Terry Weber's Scrooge that, despite his behavior, is a joy to watch. There are hints of a better person that he works at keeping packed away. His meanness is clearly learned behavior. He's a cheapskate by years of practice. Inside, though, there's a heart of gold.

That's why, in director Kathleen F. Conlin's interpretation, watching Weber's Scrooge change before one's eyes is a joy to observe.

"A Christmas Carol" runs at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 4-8, 11-15 and 19- 22 and 2 p.m. Sundays, Dec. 9 and 16.

Tickets can be purchased online or by calling 865-770-4761.