

Scrooge takes the stage

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Etobicoke Musical Productions outdid themselves with their spectacular production of the Charles Dickens classic *A Christmas Carol*: The Musical that premiered last week at the Burnhamthorpe Auditorium.

A perfect story to get you in the feel-good, holiday spirit, this show about love, redemption and hope was a visually stunning, had beautiful singing, fantastic acting and special effects that altogether earned the group a well-deserved standing ovation.

This is the story of Ebenezer Scrooge (Don Berns), who detests Christmas and anything to do with love, sympathy or charity, and his transformation from a mean and miserly introvert to a giving and caring man.

This occurs after being visited by three spirits, the ghosts of Christmas past, present and yet to be (Jackie McCaffrey, Ted Ambrose, Carmen Gillespie) who make him face what he has become and what will become of him if he doesn't change his ways.

We also meet the few people in Scrooge's life: his employee Bob Cratchit (Paul Lacey) and the Cratchit family-wife (Marie Bova), daughters Belinda and Martha (Jennifer Abrose, Cassie Roy) and youngest, Tiny Tim (Spencer MacPherson), who is ill yet full of love and optimism.

While Scrooge is rich, the Cratchits are poor, but rich with love for one another as shown in the touching song 'You Mean More to Me,' sung by Tiny Tim and his father.

This show had several stand-out numbers like the 'Thriller' meets Jason in 'Friday the 13th' 'Link by Link' that shows Scrooge's dead business partner, Jacob Marley (Kevin Dunne) and other ghosts showing Scrooge how heavy his burden will be if he continues on his path.

But 'Mr. Fezziweg's Christmas Ball' and 'Dancing on Your Grave' tie for the best numbers. The first, a huge celebration during a flashback scene of Scrooge's past, and the second showing him at his own funeral, complete with an eerie graveyard.

Watching his past, present and future before his eyes is enough for Scrooge to have a change of heart, and of ways, just in time to make Christmas special for everyone he knows.

Just under two hours, the show was well-paced and full of warmth and humour. It was a mix of fairy tale meets a Disney movie suitable for all ages.

There are 40 people in this cast, many playing dual roles, so while it's impossible to name them all or their individual strengths and talent, let it be known that "ensemble" doesn't equal "stage fillers" in this show and each character added something to the story.

There is no *A Christmas Carol* without Scrooge, and Berns' portrayal was believable and endearing, and his performance was strong throughout the show.

Hats off to director Alexander Galant, his creative team and the orchestra. From the sound and lighting and the film projected images, to the costumes, sets and props (there was even snow), these details were just some of the many things that made this production amazing.

Although this show was littered with Scrooge's infamous catchphrase 'Bah Humbug' and images of the reality of poverty, sickness and emotional bankruptcy with ghosts to boot, it's not dark or scary, but portrayed in an upbeat, hopeful way.



Scrooge takes the stage. Etobicoke Musical Production presents 'A Christmas Carol' this season with two shows left on Dec. 11 and 12 at The Burnhamthorpe Auditorium located at 500 The East Mall. Here, in a scene from the production are left to right, Kevin Dunne, Paul Lacey, Jackie McCaffrey, Don Beans, and Spencer MacPhearson. For tickets and information call 416 248-0410. *Staff photo/ IAN KELSO*

This story has stood the test of time and is as relevant today as it was when Dickens wrote it in the 1800s. Amidst the greed of consumerism that's attached to Christmas the true meaning of kindness and celebrating the love of family and friends is often lost this time of year.

This show is a perfect way to be reminded of the true meaning of Christmas, and even if you've seen another rendition of this story on stage, this one is unique and a must see.

A Christmas Carol: The Musical's remaining shows Dec. 11, at 8 p.m., with 2 p.m. matinee Dec. 12, Burnhamthorpe Auditorium, 500 The East Mall. Tickets are \$24 and \$18 for youths. For tickets, please call 416-248-0410.

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