

The Road from Perdition

Capital Playhouse unwraps a stunner of Scrooge

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Scrooge: the Musical, like all incarnations of *A Christmas Carol*, is a transformation story. Rarely has that been so clearly represented as in this year's impeccable production at Capital Playhouse.



Start with Ebenezer himself, played by veteran Tacoma actor Michael

Self. It struck me in Act I that Scrooge is usually played with a twinkle in his eye, as if to signal that he's really a mensch in disguise. But that isn't the Scrooge of Dickens' novel. "No wind that blew was bitterer than he," Dickens sighs, "no pelting rain less open to entreaty." In other words, that "clutching, covetous old sinner" is an odious monster, cruel to everyone including children and his merriest relatives. Self and director Troy Arnold Fisher have the courage to let Scrooge be Scrooge, making his redemption from impending hellfire all the more dramatic. What a character arc! Self is up to the task, and while his singing timbre opens in Scrooge's "grating voice," it blooms with salvation in Act II.

Speaking of transformation, Dennis Kurtz's unit set deploys more secrets than Optimus Prime. Several actors play multiple roles, none more effectively than Patrick Wigren, a natural choice for this material. His specter of Jacob Marley is a masterful demonstration of physical and vocal technique, accentuated by memorable costume designs by Asa Thornton and sound effects by Tom Dakan. Even the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come gets in on Wigren's jaw-dropping metamorphosis.

Geoffery Simmons is so jolly good as the bacchanalian Ghost of Christmas Present that I worried the show would flag with his departure. It does, but only for a moment. That's about the time Ebenezer grasps the full error of his ways ... which brings us to the pluckiest little Cratchit. If you don't fall in love with Nicholas Hayes

as Tiny Tim, then I got news for ya, pal: You *are* Ebenezer Scrooge. Get ready for your 1 a.m. wake-up call.

Every member of the ensemble is at least pretty good, and the orchestra delivers on a demanding, eccentrically orchestrated score. Watch enough shows at Capital Playhouse, and you'll come to recognize (even anticipate) Fisher's directorial tics; he forgoes them all here in the service of a mesmerizing, heartwarming, rousing production. It's terrific, exemplary work, rich in detail and consistent in tone and milieu. He's listed as the choreographer as well, and his energetic dance numbers are first class.

I walked away from Olympia Little Theater's Jacob Marley (2010) with my critical bar for Dickens set dizzyingly high, but Scrooge may be the perfect Christmas show - and I say that while performing in a "competing" Yuletide production at Olympia Family Theater! Here's something you've heard rarely about Capital Playhouse: It's undercharging. Its Scrooge would be a steal at twice the price.

Is it easier for Capital Playhouse to execute Scrooge because they've done the show before? Maybe, but it's the first time I've seen Scrooge: the Musical anywhere, so I can only respond to the show I saw. My response was unremittingly positive. My wife and I are still humming "I Like Life" and "Thank You Very Much" a full day later. (She saw a previous production of Scrooge at CP and found this one far superior.) On our way to the theater Saturday night, I was mulling over the "Carvies," my year-end blowies in praise of the best in Olympia theater. Thanks to Capital Playhouse, I'll be obliged to reshuffle that list. *Scrooge: the Musical* is a must-see, a no-brainer finalist for best show of 2011.