

Review: Clarence Brown's 'A Christmas Carol' a gift worth giving

By Harold Duckett
Saturday, November 28, 2009

The last thing anyone needs this Christmas season is a Scrooge.

At least, not the kind of curmudgeonly grinch who can suck the joy out of the most inescapably happy.

So for this year's production of "A Christmas Carol" at The Clarence Brown Theatre at the University of Tennessee, director Edward Morgan and his co-adaptor, Joseph Hanreddy, along with actor Jonathon Gillard Daly, who plays Ebenezer Scrooge, have shifted the balance point from a Scrooge who gradually transforms only after all three ghosts' visitations, to a character that needs only The Ghost of Christmas Past, angelically played by Cycleril Ash, to persuade him to change his ways.

Christmas Past shows Scrooge scenes of himself as a young man, involving Belle, played by Amy Elizabeth Mathews, and Young Marley, played by Jonathan Visser, the two leaves of the hinge on which Scrooge's life turned.

When Christmas Past reveals how much Belle loved him and how he lost his soul when, as a young man he chose the money offered by Marley, instead of Belle. Money became the only love of his life.

Old Scrooge realizes what a mistake he made and tries to turn back time by frantically telling his young image to make the right choice.

Had Scrooge only heeded the example of Fuzziwig, played by Neil Friedman, the generous businessman for whom he worked at the time, how different life would have been.

When the Ghost of Christmas Present arrives with scenes of the Cratchit household, Scrooge goes from trying to change his own past to being horrified by the person he had become.

Then, in the accompaniment of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, Scrooge sees that, in the end, all his wealth has gotten him is dying alone and being buried in a hole in the ground.

Through this process, Scrooge goes from one of the stingiest people in London to the life of the party.

All this of course, takes place on James Kronzer's believable set, with costumes by Kathryn Rohe, the most notable of which was the gray, chained death robes of Marley's ghost and the bright festive attire of Fezziwig that illuminated his glowing personality.

Under Katy Wolfe Zahn's musical direction, this "A Christmas Carol" is almost as much a musical as it is a character drama.

So if the economic times have almost gotten the best of you this year, this Cratchit family will show you that love is the best gift.

And maybe this "A Christmas Carol" is a gift you want to give yourself.

Harold Duckett is a freelance contributor to the News Sentinel.