

Lewiston's Public Theatre's 'Christmas Carol' delights imagination

The audience is rapt as the Dickens classic unfolds with a magical narrative revealed through a child's eyes.

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In a society where people of all ages are glued to electronic devices, The Public Theatre's rendition of "A Christmas Carol" shows the power of not only redemption, but also a good book. Like young Scrooge reading "Robinson Crusoe" in Dickens' classic tale, the imagination of a child (played by Andrea Dolci) comes to life as he reads "A Christmas Carol."

With the opening words "Old Marley was as dead as a doornail," the boy is hooked, along with the rapt audience watching the spirited story unfold. And with each turn of the page, the boy is drawn more and more into the magic of Dickens' timeless tale.

The Public Theatre's "A Christmas Carol" is story time at its best. Six actors, backed by Jennifer Armstrong on fiddle, deliver a narrated performance that closely follows Dickens' original text. With limited props and costume changes, the imagination is left to flourish, unfettered by grand spectacle.

There's an impish glee to the performance as the actors drift between roles, animating characters both young and old. Annie Grier is a treat to watch as she simultaneously portrays two Cratchit children, eager for the Christmas feast.

Conventional boundaries dissolve in director Christopher Schario's adaptation, allowing the characters and narrators to interact with the boy reading the tale and the audience watching. "Andy" is literally pulled into the story, experiencing such roles as young Scrooge, Dick Wilkins and Tiny Tim. And the characters ham it up for the audience's amusement, tormenting Scrooge from the sides of the stage and resetting scenes for dramatic effect.

Matthew Delamater is a riot as the Ghost of Christmas Present, re-entering Scrooge's room three times, unable to wake Scrooge from his snoring slumber.

The Public Theatre has assembled a fun cast that seems to revel in Scrooge's redemptive journey from miserable miser to a steward of Christmas. Michael O'Brien heads up the cast as Scrooge, bringing a fitting combination of crotchety bah-humbugs and lighthearted humor to entertain viewers of all ages.

Russell Berrigan and Sheila Stasack are Mr. and Mrs. Cratchit, as well as a host of other colorful characters. Their roles as the money-grubbing Old Joe and the charwoman provide wonderful contrast to their bighearted primary roles, as well as highlighting the kindness of Stasack's Christmas Past, and the repentant nature of Berrigan's Marley.

In the tradition of old-time radio, Guenevere Figueroa, who gives Ghostly form to Christmas Future, provides atmospheric sound effects, unseen to the side of the stage.

"A Christmas Carol" has been bringing Christmas cheer for well over a century and a half. The Public Theatre continues the tradition with a fast-paced, one-hour production that draws the audience into the magic of the ghostly tale, adding a nice twist that reminds us of the benefits derived from unplugging from the ever-present digital world.

Adding to the cheerful nature of the production, Armstrong returns after a short intermission to regale the audience with song and stories. The engaging performance, called "Silent Night," features Armstrong on banjo, fiddle, bagpipes and guitar, and the audience is encouraged to join in as she sings a collection of Christmas carols and folk songs.