



San Jose Repertory: A Christmas Carol

Thursday, December 8, 2011



Hope everyone is feeling the holiday spirit! Downtown is full of festive events and shows -- one in particular is A Christmas Carol playing at the San Jose Repertory Theatre until December 24th!

Now, the earliest memory I have of A Christmas Carol is the Walt Disney version; Mickey, Scrooge McDuck, Goofy... you know, the whole gang. Here I am, 31 years old and that's my frame of reference for this story. Granted, I know in either middle school or high school we read the actual story. That said, it's a classic story - if you don't know it then maybe you live under a rock. (And living under rocks just isn't comfortable, so get your bum out from under there!)

The other day I attended Opening Night and immediately felt the holiday spirit upon entering the Rep. Garland, bells, Christmas wreaths and trees greet you and really begin to set the tone.

Just before the show is to start, the actors arrive on the steps of the Rep and begin to sing classic Christmas carols. While I have heard some before, others I have not - they're very old fashioned (then again, what Christmas carols are 'new'? Hmm...) and while generally not my cup of tea, the caroling really

helps bring you into the show you're about to see. You're going to be sucked into the Victorian era!

Before watching the show I had read a tweet from the Rep saying that the production featured 18 actors playing more than 50 roles. This above all intrigued me. First off - AWESOME memories these actors must have (I have a hard time remembering things I did last week, let alone lines for multiple characters!) but also, that must be some great organization behind the scenes for the costume designers.

Ok since I'm not a professional theatre critic I'm going to break this down by category - again, I am what I'll define as a casual theatre-goer; I enjoy plays and musicals and theatre in general. So maybe I'm more like you, random reader - hope my review helps you decide if you'll see the show or not.

Acting

Like I said before there, there are 18 actors who collectively played more than 50 roles. To bounce between a few different characters and often times providing the part of narrators is a feat unto itself. Everyone did a great job and I was never once confused as to what character was talking or what was happening.

I must say right now, sorry to the adults in the play, but the children simply stole the show - as often they do! Making her first professional stage performance, little Alison Lubeins had my full attention. She's just darling as Alice Cratchit and did a great job with all the lines and actions she had to perform.

Another one of the child actors that stood out, and importantly so as his character is vital to the story, Everett Meckler as Tiny Tim. When he sang (while Marvin Greene as Bob Cratchit played acoustic guitar beautifully) the audience was silent. I don't even think people were breathing. He has a soft voice and sang with the Victorian-style accent as well. Wonderfully done and I think I heard a few sniffles in the audience after the song.



Costumes

I'm a details person. I love to dissect costumes and the accessories used. From the lacy gloves, scarves, and even the ratted clothing - everything felt, to this untrained eye, that it was spot on Victorian-era clothing (and A Christmas Carol-themed.)

Music

There was a lot more singing than I had anticipated. And while I am a fan of musicals, it's the old-fashioned carols and songs that *personally* can get on my nerves after a while -- but do not let this sway you. I'm a blogger, I am personally giving my opinion here. All songs are really appropriate and help traditionally tell the story.

Set Design

Very interesting and I am not surprised as The Rep often has such a unique approach for its set design. The actors were often the ones, as narration goes on, to physically adjust the scene. Set change came off as a seamless, choreographed dance and never once confused me as a viewer.

Stand-Out Moments

In relation to set design - there were a few surprise moments that stood out to me.

When Marley's spirit shows itself to Scrooge in his chambers and how the Rep did it was a fun and unique way. Lots of lighting and dry ice to set the eerie, scary moment alive. That said, I think in this ONE case, there seems to be something missing, perhaps a mixture of the actor's movements or delivery and audio effects something just didn't feel spooky enough to me.

However when Marley's ghost first appears to Scrooge on the door knocker, The Rep used a technical approach that worked wonderfully. I was curious as to how they'd do it and pleasantly pleased how they did.

Overall the show is a great way to spend a holiday evening out with family and friends!

A Christmas Carol
San Jose Repertory Theatre
Nov 23 - Dec 24, 2011

Photo of Everett Meckler by Kevin Berne