

Hilarious, Heartwarming Humbug

Written by Gail Westerfield

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Misspent Youth Productions serves up Dickens... with a twist.

This holiday season, Monty Python, Mel Brooks, “Saturday Night Live,” “Family Guy,” and Benny Hill meet Tiny Tim and the ultimate miserly misanthrope (pre-ghostly intervention), Ebenezer Scrooge, when Misspent Youth Productions presents a new vision of “A Christmas Carol” by Charles Dickens, adapted and directed by Travis Hornsby, at ARTworks.

Hornsby, 32, and a recent theater graduate of Armstrong State University in Savannah, chose Dickens’ classic – which he notes is the second-best known Christmas story after that of the Nativity – to adapt for the stage, though he’d never seen a live performance of it. Like a number of members of the cast, whose ages range from 5 to 86, until now, his favorite version was “A Muppet Christmas Carol.”

He calls watching his work being taken “from the page to the stage . . . quite the creative

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experience.” A big fan of farce, Hornsby had found that “my desire to give my own brand of comedy was always restricted by the stipulations of acquiring royalties and performance rights. You can get around (the author’s words) somewhat, but you can’t just add lines.”

Though the script’s words are all Dickens’, Hornsby sought a cast that would make the well-worn tale their own. “Theatre, being the collaborative force it is, has given me so much. I wrote the play to allow for some adlibs and scene additions,” he recalls, and his actors “make it even better.”

From his cast’s playing among Dickens’ “prime” words and Hornsby’s love of comic “irreverence, slapstick, absurdity, and, of course, cross-dressing,” comes a unique Christmas confection that celebrates the holiday’s humorous side, which is how Hornsby thinks it should be: “Christmas is a time for more than peace on earth, love, joy and gift-giving. It’s also a time to laugh!”

Lily Nicole Beck, a seasoned stage veteran at age 8, echoes his sentiment, stating that everyone should attend “A Christmas Carol” because it’s going to be a very funny play, and the ending makes me happy!”

It makes Alan Lathan, who is playing the wretched-then-redeemed Scrooge for the third time, happy, too, as he “makes people hate Scrooge so much in the beginning, and then absolutely love him in the end. My favorite scene is when Scrooge finds himself back in his room after the visitations and realizes what Christmas, and Life, are all about.”

Alan Purdy, who “grew up in the heart of England,” has been a Dickens fan “ever since I could read.” His first acting gig was as “a tree in an enchanted forest at age 7,” and in this production, he’s Bob Cratchett, the much put-upon father of Tiny Tim, played by 7-year-old Jonah Szeder, who foresees very large audiences receiving his wish that “God bless us, every one!”: “Because it’s a play that people all over the world will want to come and see. Like all the way from South America and North America.”

Other ensemble members include Henry and Aidan Dreier, Ellie Friedman Beck, Anne Errington, Kelly Hall, Jessica Lopes, Benjamin Morgan, Christian Philip Osborne, Matthew Osborne, and Sophia Dickinson.

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To sweeten the season's start, audiences will enjoy free homemade cookies and live entertainment for half an hour before curtain at every performance. Cocoa, wassail, and other beverages will help warm even the coldest of hearts.

So others can also enjoy Christmas feasts (and to honor Scrooge's conversion from cynical skinflint to giddy humanitarian), guests who bring cash donations or non-perishable food items to the theater for HELP of Beaufort will receive the gift of discounts on future Misspent Youth shows.

Performances are November 28 and 29, December 4-6 at 7:30 p.m. and November 30 at 3:00 p.m. An Opening Night reception November 28 at 7:00 p.m. will feature free champagne and delicious treats.

Tickets are \$17 for adults, \$15 for students, \$12 for active duty military and children under 12. Group discounts are available for 10 or more people. For more information and tickets, contact ARTworks at 843.379.2787, visit www.beaufortcountyarts.com, or stop in at ARTworks, 2127 Boundary Street, next to OMNI in the Bi-Lo/K-Mart shopping center.