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'Christmas Carol' A Helping of Cheer

Walter Lazenby

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'Christmas Carol'

By WALTER LAZENBY

Charles Dickens had an intense and abiding love for the theatre; but, disappointed in attempts at an acting career and at writing plays, he had to be content to act in amateur theatricals and write popular novels with theatrical elements in them.

Theatre has returned the affection full measure in its eagerness to present stage versions of his Christmas books and fifteen novels. Since 1837, his works have seldom been absent from public view in one form of theatre or another; well over 400 dramatic pieces and numerous films and radio and television plays owe their inspiration to his works. At one Christmas season versions of over 400 dramatic pieces and numerous films and radio and television plays owe their inspiration to his works. At one Christmas season versions of Christmas Carol were playing simultaneously at twelve London theatres.

This season, in addition to whatever television may offer (perhaps Mr. Magoo as Scrooge again), local audiences can this weekend see "A Christmas Carol" on the Eastern campus. For this production Director Gerald Sullivan, dissatisfied with available acting scripts, made his own adaptation.

To lengthen playing time he added a chorus singing Christmas carols -- appropriate, considering the title. Admittedly, the appearance of a chorus has no particular dramatic justification, except to create atmosphere; and it added to the costumer's burden.

The choral interludes rather stiffly interrupt the flow of the story, but the songs and singing are agreeable. The costumes, incidentally, are impressive, especially one cloak decorated with shamrock-shaped cut-outs. To flesh out certain scenes he took certain lesser known details from the original. The result is a version which gives slightly more explanation than usual of how Scrooge became unhappy with Christmases. And, with one striking visual effect it opens up a larger view of the story's relevance. I mean the tableau demonstrating the threat to the Future posed by Ignorance and Want, represented by two benighted and suffering children.

Legislators and taxpayers faced with the problem of funding education, take note. Preserved intact is the fairy-tale quality, fittingly suggested by Clarence Blanchette's stylized revolving set pieces and reinforced by the presence of a narrator, of this story of an ogre who becomes benign. The child in each of us can respond to this motif. The adult will perhaps more readily respond to Scrooge's coming to existential awareness of his own end, the cutting off of chances to make his life meaningful.

I did, more than usual this time. Perhaps the show moved me because of my large prejudice in favor of live performances, but surely the demeanor of Matthew McDivitt as Tiny Tim and an appealing performance by Jeff Eaton as Bob Cratchit contributed.

And I compliment John Hightower for his sustained, accomplished portrayal of Ebenezer Scrooge. He does an especially good job of capturing Scrooge's joy in his transformation.

IN BRIEF: seventy minutes of Christmas cheer to start the season off or help it on its way, good for young and old.