

Bennington Theatre, Bennington, VT

SCROOGE IN ROUGE, Created by Ricky Graham, Jeffery Robinson. & Yvette Hargis;
Original Music by Jefferson Turner. Directed by John Lugar
Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

“A very merry Christmas to you, Uncle E.”

An irreverent tone takes the stage at Bennington Theatre as their edition of Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” plays out its whimsical variation on this theme. Having grown up with my grandfather, Harry Percival, and his special take on entertainment - he was a veteran of the English Music Hall as a performer - this year’s choice of the Scrooge story both chilled my blood, and thrilled my heart. I can only take one “Christmas Carol” a year at this point in my life and this one, a musical silliness, was my choice. It was a good choice, almost a great choice. Here’s the premise: a British vaudeville troupe of twenty players is offering their annual Dickens show but seventeen of them are down with food poisoning leaving only three members to deliver the annual holiday tradition. One, a woman, plays Ebenezer Scrooge and the other two, both men, play all the other roles. Wordplay, semi-dirty jokes, hilarious one-liners and a lot of delicious songs fill the two acts of this show along with audience participation for the key role of Tiny Tim.



Lottie Obligato (Dylan Angell), Vesta Virtue (Mary Jo Greco), Charlie Schmaltz (David Sutton); Photo: Alexey Tassinov

A group of Victorian clad folks serenade the in-coming audience with Christmas Carols for a half an hour before the show starts and it does get you into the mood for a filmed welcome

to Her Majesty's Promenade Grand Theatre by Queen Victoria herself (she is voiced by Ross Jacobs). Once the premise is established we are in for a classic British Pantomime (Panto) in



Dylan Angell; Photo: Alexey Tassinov

which cross-dressing performers bring us the story in comic fashion. Miss Obligato's many costumes alter her bust-size in appropriate fashion and emphasize her utter femininity in spite of her deep, bass-baritone voice. Angell makes it work especially well and we don't every object to his sweetness or his forced posturing.

Mary Jo Greco delivers a well-formed portrait of Scrooge. She gives us the meanest man in London who is converted to the nice guy of the future without missing a beat. There is no effort to be mannish, and yet she is believable in the role she plays. As

the "lead" she ventures us into the intermission with grace and charm and her musical performance of the lead-off second act song (reminiscent of "Off to the Races" from *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*," is a sure winner.

David Sutton is the hardest-working actor in the group. I'm not even sure how he masters his many costume changes in the short amount of time he has to make them. He plays his narrative roles with style and grace and he is a funny actor whose sense of humor about it all plays extremely well.

Directed by John Lugar and designed by a talented team (costumes by Elizabeth Robio) including wonderful projections by Lugar himself, the show moves along with the speed of lightning. Choreographer K. Morgan Prikazsky adds a very period perfect look to the show. Jefferson Turner's music illuminates the place and the time to perfection and the witty lyrics and spicy dialogue by Ricky Graham idally reflect the British traditions of Panto I hope their shows goes on to a bright National future. It deserves to be seen everywhere. Luckily we have it nearby and accessible. This is a true Christmas confection.



David Sutton, Mary Jo Greco, Dylan Angell;
Photo: Alexey Tassinov

+ 12/16/2924 +

Scrooge in Rouge plays at the Bennington Theatre, 331 Main Street, Bennington, VT through December 22. For information and tickets go to: information@benningtontheatre.org.