



Comment, blog & share photos
[Log in](#) | [Become a member](#) | [Search people](#)

POWERED BY YOU AND **The Des Moines Register**

This 'Carol' rings true in economy's current state

MICHAEL MORAIN • MMORAIN@DMREG.COM • DECEMBER 16, 2008

[Post a Comment](#) [Recommend](#) [Print this page](#) [E-mail this article](#) [Share](#) [?](#)

Months ago, when Theater ... For a Change decided to stage "Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol," they couldn't have guessed how timely it would be. But as the economy falls with the temperature this winter, it's easy to relate to the title character's predicament.

"Your debts, sir, are great," an afterworld accountant tells the ghost of Ebenezer Scrooge's old business partner in this re-telling of the Dickens classic. "And your credits, almost nonexistent ... you have exhausted your account, squandered it, if you will, and now you must settle, sir."

ADVERTISEMENT

Don't Miss a Minute Sale

give joy

Sunday, Dec 14 - Tuesday, Dec 16

Younkers

To set things straight, the late Marley (wonderfully, crustily played by Michael Cornelison) agrees to persuade the still-living Scrooge (John Butz) to change his miserly ways in the less-is-more production that runs through Dec. 23 at Grand View University's Viking Theatre in Des Moines. (On a related note, the local theater company itself has decided to economize: From now on, its name is simply Change.)

Directed by Sam Tuomi and Thatcher Williams, the play follows the same arc as the original "Carol" — there are still visits to Christmases past, present and future — but it fills in the back story, the way "Wicked" explains "The Wizard of Oz" or "Amahl and the Night Visitors" re-imagines

the three kings' trek to Bethlehem. So in this version, which playwright Tom Mula developed 10 years ago in Chicago, we see everything from Marley's point of view.

And that's a good thing, considering the way Cornelison brings Marley to life — or afterlife, as the case may be. The Des Moines actor's accent would fit right in on the streets of London, and he shows a natural ease with the script's Dickensian language. He even bounces around the stage with a kind of grumpy-old-man energy that belies his initial description as "a pruny, old thing," "a dried-up old peel" whose "face was frozen in sour disapproval, as if he had bitten into a lemon by mistake."

Butz's Scrooge is equally cantankerous, and it's fun to watch the pair squabble. Kyle Chizek's performance as Marley's ghostly sidekick is occasionally uneven, as is his accent, but Cornelison's son, Nick, holds his own as Bob Cratchit and in various smaller roles.

Although the action unfolds on Christmas Eve, it's worth noting everything but the ending feels like a Halloween ghost story. Things go bump in the dark. Mysterious voices echo across the stage. Heavy chains fall from the rafters.

The set, however, is bare-bones basic, and the special effects are special only when the actors don't spend too much time describing them. In one scene, for example, when Marley's spirit and his sidekick are supposed to fly through the starlit sky, the actors must explain why it is, exactly, they're twirling around the stage. (A narrator would help clear things up.)

Even so, it's impressive how much the cast and crew make of so little. They conjure up an elaborate, 90-minute story without much more than pluck and imagination — not a bad lesson, in fact, for this particular Christmas present.

- **Online discussion standards:** What we'll allow and what we won't allow
- **About discussion:** A message from the editor.

[Hide Comments](#)

IN YOUR VOICE

READ REACTIONS TO THIS STORY

POWERED BY Pluck

You must be logged in to leave a comment. [Login](#) | [Register](#)

Comment input area with a vertical line on the right side.

1000 characters left



In front: Michael Cornelison. In back, from left: Nick Cornelison, John Butz and Kyle Chizek.

(SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER)

'Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol'

Presented by Change

WHEN: 7 p.m. tonight, Thursday through Saturday, Monday and Dec. 23; 2 p.m. Sunday.

WHERE: Viking Theatre, 2811 E. 14th St., Des Moines

TICKETS: \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors and children

INFO: (515) 771-7766, theaterforachange.com