



Standing in another pair of Dickensian shoes

A theatre review by John Busbee for The Culture Buzz

Des Moines, Iowa Theater...for a Change (Change) rings in the holiday season with a marvelous piece of stage work by Tom Mula with *Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol*. After experiencing this show, one can only wonder how this classic Christmas story could have gone so long without this new perspective being written. With his usual talent for ferreting out new works that will fit into this market, while not overlapping with other producers, Change founder and the show's co-director, Thatcher Williams, brings an early Christmas gift for theatre-goers hungering for a delectable serving of wit and talent.

Choosing appealing shows that work in the Viking Theatre at Grandview University has become a staple of Change's success. Change's penchant for modesty by not identifying who does set and lighting design in the playbill is a little vexing, but the black box with props and lighting concept works well for a show that wanders the Victorian countryside like a hoard of spirits, leaving ample room for imaginations to fill in the details.

Anchored by veteran actor Michael Cornelison in the title role, this show succeeds as a quartet of actors deliver the entertaining goods in the spartan stage area. Cornelison masterfully delivers levels in his Marley we could only previously have guessed about, as he is given the netherworld task of returning to save his former business partner, Ebenezer Scrooge. His initial response to the chore? "Scrooge? I have to redeem old Scrooge? The one man I knew who was worse than I was? Impossible!"

Assigned the management of Marley's Herculean task is the Bogle, played with mincing manipulation by Kyle Chizek. A bogle can best be described as "a malicious little hell-sprite with an agenda of his own." As Ebenezer Scrooge (and, other characters), John Butz provides a rough-textured Scrooge worthy of his harsh reputation. As the itinerate doormat, Bob Cratchit, Nick Cornelison delivers a performance that belies his youth. He also portrays other characters, and for each he captures a special flavor and posture.

What patrons will find when they venture to this show – and, venture there they should – is a heart-warming re-invention of a classic story that captures the iconic Dickens story with a fresh look, filled with irreverence and delight. This production will convey some true messages of the season and humanity that ring true all year long, and should not be missed. *Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol* runs through December 23.