

The Capital Times

[News](#)
[Business](#)
[Sports](#)
[Opinion](#)
[Features](#)

[Recent stories](#)
[Ask the Expert](#)
[Linda Brazill](#)
[Vows](#)

[Linda Brazill](#), features editor

[Jacob Stockinger](#), culture desk editor

[Books](#)
[Local links](#)
[The Evjue Foundation](#)
[Customer service](#)

[About us](#)
[Contact our staff](#)
[Letters to the editor](#)
[FAQ/Help](#)
[Privacy policy](#)
[Subscribe](#)
[Photo reprints](#)
[Archives](#)

From CTM, a Christmas present

By Rob Thomas
November 30, 2005

At its essence, all the drama in Charles Dickens' classic novella "A Christmas Carol" takes place inside the mind of one man.

Sure, there are ghosts and parties, rattling chains and Tiny Tim, but at heart the play is about miserly Ebenezer Scrooge and his legendary change of heart.

That makes the story remarkably adaptable to the stage. "A Christmas Carol" can be a one-man Scrooge show, or it can take over a full stage like the old Isthmus Playhouse, which played home to CTM's long-running annual production of the show under previous artistic director Nancy Thurow.

This year, for its 30th production, CTM Madison Family Theatre is expanding the scope of "A Christmas Carol" even further, filling the 1,000-seat renovated Capitol Theater -- CTM's new permanent home in the Overture Center -- with the color, sound and spectacle of an all-new musical version direct from Broadway, with songs written by Alan Menken ("Beauty and the Beast" and "The Little Mermaid.")

"Because the Isthmus was much smaller and more intimate, Nancy's wonderful show worked well in that small area," says CTM's new artistic director Colin Douglas. "We needed a bigger set, we needed a bigger cast, we needed a bigger show. It's our first venture into the Capitol Theater, and we wanted it to be big, we wanted it to be splashy and a lot of fun. We really wanted to fill that stage with color and spectacle."

ADVERTISEMENT

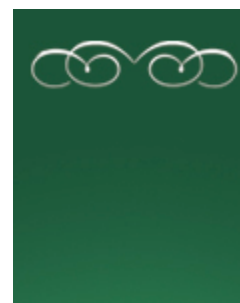
[Email this story to a friend](#)

[Printer-friendly format](#)

[Tell us what you think](#)
 Write a letter to the editor.



Scrooge (Ed Marion, center) poses with the Fezziwigs (Lydia Faulkner and Lee Waldhart) in the Capitol Theater lobby. (Michelle Stocker photo)





Performances for the new "Christmas Carol" begin this Friday at the Capitol Theater, and will continue through Dec. 18, with evening performances Thursdays and Fridays at 7:30 p.m. and matinee performances Saturdays and Sundays at 1 and 4 p.m. Tickets are \$24 for adults, \$16 for students, seniors and children 12 and under. They are available at the Overture box office, at 258-4141, or online at www.overturecenter.com.

Douglas says CTM pored over many versions of the Dickens classic before going with the Menken one, which has been performed in Madison Square Garden. Those who caught NBC's version of "A Christmas Carol" last year starring Kelsey Grammer as Scrooge will recognize the songbook, which features music by Menken and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens ("Ragtime" and "Schoolhouse Rock.")

"When I listened to the music, the music stuck," Douglas says. "It's tuneful, it's fun, and it allows children's voices to sing as well as adults'."

The production is simply on a larger scale than anything CTM has attempted before, with 80 actors in the cast singing and dancing (many playing multiple roles), an army of seamstresses working to create costumes, and some Broadway-style special effects that should leave audiences scratching their heads.

The challenge for Douglas and his large cast and crew was not only to bring all this flash and detail to the big stage, but to retain the essence and spirit of both the original novella and the beloved CTM productions of Christmases past.

"If it's not broken, don't fix it but enhance it," he says. "Bring it to the level of the new venue. The basic message is still there, the basic story is still there. All the main characters are still there, there's just some added new ones. "

One link that bridges the new CTM production and last year's is that Ed Marion, a former chief of staff to Gov. Tommy Thompson, will be reprising the central role of Scrooge. Douglas said that the new musical production obviously requires more of Marion as an actor, and he easily met the challenge.

"He was last year's Scrooge in a totally different environment," Douglas says. "He came through as the person with the most humanity. He's the one of the group that's age-appropriate, and able to handle not only all of the dramatic but the comedic elements of

the script. And he can sing and dance!"

Putting all the elements together has required about six weeks of rehearsals, longer than CTM is used to. But Douglas says the large cast has forged some close friendships with each other, and has enjoyed rehearsing at Meriter Retirement Services, where elderly residents in turn have been delighted to be able to pop in on rehearsals.

Costume designer Rebecca Sites says she and her 27 volunteer seamstresses (from girls to grandmothers) have probably logged a thousand hours creating the many costumes that the production requires. Some of the costumes look similar to what CTM audiences have seen in past years or have undergone minor improvements, such as the Cratchit family.

Other characters have gotten some extreme makeovers, particularly Jacob Marley and the infamous three ghosts that visit Scrooge during Christmas Eve.

Sites doesn't want to give away too many of the production's surprises, but she notes that the ghosts won't arrive out of thin air, but will be ordinary Londoners transformed, with their supernatural costumes echoing their old identities.

"I've been given a lot of creative leeway for creating new costumes," Sites says. "I feel really lucky that I've been able to work on 'Christmas Carol' for four of the past five years. I'm really familiar with the stock, and I'm really familiar with what direction to take it."

The attention to detail on the costumes is astounding, as Sites selects just the right fabric and just the right shade of color for every inch of costume. The costumers have even created historically accurate undergarments, even though they won't be seen by the audience, unless something goes awry.

Sites says she thinks that "Christmas Carol" is an ideal production for CTM's first foray onto the Capitol stage, as both the play and the theater are American classics.

" 'A Christmas Carol' is sort of like modern mythology," she says. "It's embedded in our culture. It's an old piece, but it's been refurbished, just like the theater is an old theater that's been refurbished."

Email: rthomas@madison.com

Published: 8:31 AM 11/30/05

[Home Delivery of The Capital Times from 2.25/week - Act Now!](#)

Technical questions and comments may be directed to [The Capital Times](#). Please state your concern in the subject line. To write a letter to the editor, e-mail our [editorial page](#) .

*Copyright 2005 The Capital Times
Freelance writers retain the copyright for their work that appears on this site.*