

Scrooge, the musical

East Surrey Operatic Society and The Opera Club of Reigate and Redhill

The Harlequin Theatre, Redhill

Reviewed by Tony Flook

Surrey Mirror

Devotees of Dickens would have been relieved to find that Leslie Bricusse's musical version of *A Christmas Carol* not only captured the essence of the Scrooge is, at heart, a simple morality tale in which the central, curmudgeonly character is shown where he has failed in the past and the bleak future awaiting him.

Terry Foster caught the essence of the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge, who had turned his face against friendship and begrudged his loyal clerk, Bob Cratchit, a day off work at Christmas. With his croaky tones, he was totally believable as he relentlessly pursued his debtors and even stole from a beggar's tin. His outlook was perfectly summarised when he growled *I Hate People*.

Enter the spirits who were to change his outlook. Nick Rogers set the scene as the chain-laden Marley, who warned Scrooge he would endure an even worse fate than the one he had suffered. Next, Nicky Allen's thoughtfully played Ghost of Christmas Past reminded him how life had once been and could still have been. Here we met his younger self, shown as seemingly carefree by Ben Taylor, together with Isabel, the girl he might have married, portrayed with youthful cheerfulness by Katie Shearman. Stephen Bonnett's towering, booming Ghost of Christmas Present showed Scrooge the misery he had inflicted on the Cratchit family – the uncomplaining Bob (Chris Whitebread), his careworn, less forgiving wife (Liz Barnett) and their six children including Tiny Tim (played by Hugh Blaney and Joseph Scaglione).

Jon Ford put in lively appearances as Scrooge's nephew, Fred. Kevin Stuart and June Gautrey hosted the Fezziwigs' party with bonhomie. Mark Nicholson, playing Tom Jenkins, led the ensemble in the joyful *Thank You Very Much* when it was thought that the skinflint had died and their debts expunged. No wonder Scrooge became reformed and sang *I Like Life*.

The only slight problem with this otherwise excellent production was that the hired set was cumbersome and tended to slow down continuity. John Taylor's meticulous direction was evident throughout, from the impressive opening tableau to the final curtain. Musical director Angela Barker and her orchestra integrated perfectly with the onstage performers.

Who knows, perhaps this impressive show might encourage us to pick up the work that inspired it.

Bah, humbug!

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It's always an interesting time of year in the publishing business - as in many ways Christmas has been and gone, with the December edition already in stores. I have to admit, that while I'd like to think I'm not a complete Scrooge, getting in the spirit of things in October - as we have to - is often not the easiest thing in the world, and by the time everyone else starts joining in with their festivities, I'm often Christmas-ed out.

Anyway, to seek a little inspiration, I joined family members to get in the Christmas spirit with a host of, erm, Christmas spirits, as we went to watch my little sister, Sarah, in Scrooge at the Harlequin Theatre in Redhill. There are many at Surrey Life who are more thespian than I, but I thoroughly enjoyed the show and I'm sure the warm glow I left with at the end wasn't purely down to the pre-show wine...

Anyway, I thought that the East Surrey Operative Society (ESOS) created a thoroughly professional production. The rousing applause they received from the sell out crowd following the denouement, testified that I wasn't alone in my enjoyment.

Don't tell anyone, but I think I'm starting to feel my Christmas spirit returning ...

Matt

Comment by Debbie

Great to hear you enjoyed the show, it really was fantastic, congratulations to everyone involved. Can I just mention that it was a joint production with ESOS and The Opera Club of Reigate and Redhill.

Comment by Matthew Williams

Thank you very much for the clarification on that one. Credit where credit is due.