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# BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

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“Ebenezer Scrooge’s Big Playhouse Christmas Show” is a comedic romp featuring plenty of local references.



Don Stephenson, who starred in “The Producers” on Broadway, plays the title character in “Ebenezer Scrooge’s Big Playhouse Christmas Show” in New Hope. [PHOTO BY CORINDA BRAVO/BUCKS COUNTY PLAYHOUSE]

By Andy Vineberg

Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” has been adapted for the stage and screen too many times to count, in seemingly every manner possible, but that didn’t stop writers Gordon Greenberg and Steve Rosen from trying to put an entirely new spin on the beloved classic for this year’s holiday production at the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope.

And if that sounds like an impossible task, well, even Rosen initially had his doubts after Greenberg, who had directed two previous holiday shows at the Playhouse, asked him to collaborate.

“I think I was a little wary of coming up with something we’d like well enough to put onstage in front of people (in a short amount of time),” Rosen said. “But like what usually happens when Gordon and I work together, we very quickly came up with something we really liked that made us laugh. We wound up sitting in a room talking about all the things we could do to embrace the holiday spirit and also embrace the magic of seeing a show in a theater.”



The cast includes (from left) Tracey Conyer Lee, Evan Alexander Smith, Don Stephenson, Kate Wetherhead and James Ludwig. [PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS/BUCKS COUNTY PLAYHOUSE]

The end result is “Ebenezer Scrooge’s Big Playhouse Christmas Show,” a family-friendly comedic romp that features just five actors playing nearly three dozen roles while maintaining the traditional elements of Dickens’ original story. The show, which is the fourth world premiere at the Playhouse this year, continues through Dec. 31.

Adding to the local appeal is the fact the story is set in New Hope and contains multiple area references, ranging from historical Bucks County landmarks to Wawa.

“(Greenberg and Rosen) have created a high-energy, outrageously entertaining take on a story that is so familiar but has never been experienced this way before,” executive producer Robyn Goodman said. The play is directed by Broadway choreographer Josh Rhodes (“Rodgers + Hammerstein’s Cinderella”) and stars Broadway veteran Don Stephenson (“The Producers”) as Scrooge. Greenberg and Rosen had previously worked with Stephenson in multiple capacities and knew from the beginning he was the man for this part.

The rest of the versatile cast includes Evan Alexander Smith, Kate Wetherhead, James Ludwig and Tracey Conyer Lee.

“The idea was, how do you take a small group of comic actors — almost like ‘Saturday Night Live’ funny — these athletic actors who can do anything, and give them the impossible task of playing 30 characters with whip-like costume changes and character changes, and a million different dialects,” Greenberg said. “Josh is great at creating theatrical movement, just this tornado of activity onstage that excites an audience and helps tell the story in original ways.”

The show is very definitely a comedy, but the humor is neither too risqué for minors nor too infantile for adults, Greenberg said, pointing out that during a rehearsal for family and friends, people in their 80s and a 7-year-old were laughing and smiling at the same parts.

And just when you think you know what to expect ... you probably don't.

"It's fun to see the actors brilliantly moving from character to character, and then start singing and dancing," Rosen said. "You start to wonder if there's anything these actors can't do, and the answer is, there probably isn't."

With all the costume changes and other quick-moving parts, it's possible the actors might have to react to situations on the fly, but as Greenberg said, "this cast can easily handle it if they need to improvise." In writing the story, Greenberg said he was fascinated by Bucks County history, how it was founded by British immigrants and named after the English county of Buckinghamshire. He was intrigued by the sacrifices immigrants might have made in coming here in search of a fortune, and used this as his foundation for Scrooge.

"We're both so happy to be back in Bucks County," he said. "I love the town of New Hope, especially at Christmas. There's a unique beauty to it that makes your heart warm."

Added Rosen: "I'm really excited for the whole Bucks County area to see a show that not only celebrates the holiday but also celebrates the community at a time of year where people really need to come together and laugh. Hopefully, this show is able to do that."