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Christmas Show' at Bucks County Playhouse

By [Tim Dunleavy](#) on December 16, 2017

How many versions of *A Christmas Carol* have you seen? Probably too many to count. But I can guarantee you've never seen one that mentions Doylestown, Lambertville and Peddler's Village before.



Don Stephenson. Photo by Joan Marcus.

They all get shout-outs in [*Ebenezer Scrooge's BIG Playhouse Christmas Show*](#), this year's Yuletide offering at Bucks County Playhouse. Yes, it's an adaptation of Charles Dickens' 1843 classic, this time transplanted from 19th Century London to 19th Century New Hope. But writers Gordon Greenberg and Steve Rosen have a few tricks up their sleeve.

Their script sticks to the basic outlines of Dickens' story, and they're delivered with the sentiment *A Christmas Carol* deserves. Don Stephenson, as Scrooge, has a forlorn expression as the Ghost of Christmas Past takes him on a tour of all his missed opportunities. But there are many asides that take the story out of its own era and into our own. You'll hear references to popular culture – emojis, Obamacare, the movie *Titanic* – as well as in-jokes aimed at New Hope natives (the Ghost of Christmas Future predicts that “there will be a Dunkin' Donuts on Main Street!”). The in-jokes are inclusive, though, so even if you don't live in Bucks County, you won't have any trouble following them.

This is a very funny show. But maintaining the balance between sincerity and silliness is tricky, and the show often works so hard to land its laughs that it undercuts the sensitivity the story's more dramatic moments require. For instance, when Scrooge wakes up after his visits from the ghosts, he exclaims “Oh spirit, I need a hug!” Even when we most need to be reminded of Dickens' message, Greenberg and Rosen can't resist a gag that makes the whole enterprise seem too irreverent for its own good. And the brief running time (65 minutes) makes it all seem too slight. The best versions of *A Christmas Carol* leave the viewer feeling transformed; this time, the only one transformed is Scrooge himself.



Kate Wetherhead, Evan Alexander Smith, Don Stephenson, Tracey Conyer Lee, and James Ludwig. Photo by Joan Marcus.

Still, there's much to admire here. As Scrooge, Don Stephenson is angry, animated and spry all at once, with a scratchy voice that makes him seem older than his years. He's supported by four versatile, quick-changing actors who play all the other roles – and who even supply the sound

effects. James Ludwig is a suitably spooky Marley's Ghost and a meek Bob Cratchit; Evan Alexander Smith is Scrooge's nephew Fred and, thanks to some puppetry work, Tiny Tim (who tells his mother in aggravated voice, "It's just *Tim*, Mom!"). Tracey Conyer Lee is Fred's wife and a sophisticated and imposing Ghost of Christmas Past; Kate Wetherhead is a distracted, Yuppie Ghost of Christmas Present and, in the show's most touching sequence, the fiancé who breaks the young Scrooge's heart.

Director Josh Rhodes keeps the production galloping along, barely pausing for breath between gags. Michael Carnahan's set design puts furniture, staircases and door frames on wheels, allowing them to be quickly moved on and off the stage. Brian C. Hemesath's costume design allows the actors to jump back and forth across eras, aided by J. Jared Janas' wigs (plus mutton-chop sideburns for the men). And the lighting design (by Cory Pattak) and sound design (by Matthew Given) give the ghosts' visits the proper eerie atmosphere.

While the show could use more weight (and a longer running time), Scrooge and his chummy, hard-working crew are hard to dislike. This may take too many liberties with a classic story, but it'll leave you with a big smile on your face.

Running Time: 65 minutes, with no intermission.



James Ludwig and Don Stephenson. Photo by Joan Marcus.

[Ebenezer Scrooge's BIG Playhouse Christmas Show](#) plays through December 31, 2017 at the Bucks County Playhouse – 70 South Main Street, in New Hope, PA. For tickets, call the box office at (215) 862-2121, or purchase them [online](#).