

# SEE Magazine

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## COVER STORY

**BY RICHARD CAIRNEY**

## PREVIEW

### **A Christmas Carol**

Theatre Network/Shadow Theatre

at the Roxy (10708 - 124 Street) until Dec. 6;

at the Varscona (10329 - 83 Ave.) Dec. 8 - 20

So something really crazy happened to old Scrooge - something that changed his character so profoundly he even looks different now.

The guy was always such a complete . . . asshole - valued money above all else, felt nothing but contempt, took delight in belittling those around him. And now the old miser will come clean. Scrooge is going to tell us just what happened to move him so deeply, to wake him from his selfish, mean-spirited ways so thoroughly, as Theatre Network and Shadow Theatre present A Christmas Carol, adapted by Lezlie Wade.

"The way I pictured it is a year has passed, this is the following Christmas," Wade explained of her stage adaptation. "And Scrooge is saying 'listen, I wasn't always like this. Last year, my soul was this close to perdition.' "

And so it happens that audiences will see and hear a version of the story that is closer to the one Charles Dickens wrote than the one they've seen on television. In this production, directed by David Mann, Scrooge confides in the audience.

"The script has elements of storytelling in it so, right away, the audience is invited to use their imaginations," said Mann. "If Scrooge is up on the stage jumping about, saying that people were singing and dancing and making merry, you see it."

It helps, of course, that everyone knows the story. Telling a story this good, this timeless, makes everyone's job easier.

"But it also challenges us because it means we can't screw around with it too much."

In a stroke of casting genius, Dave Clarke - of Dr. Grot fame - plays Scrooge. No matter how incredible the events surrounding his conversion seem, no matter how bizarre the details, expect nothing but the truth from this reformed penny-pincher. Clarke is approaching the telling of this tale as he might in his own life. So the question arises: how can you tell people you actually spoke with ghosts?

"The way I think of it, it becomes almost like a guy trying to describe this strange thing that happened to him - that he was abducted by aliens or something."

In the course of the story, which consists of Scrooge's recollections of the old bastard he used to be, the tightwad slips back into his former pit-bull persona, Clarke says, speaking proudly of the righteous ways he dealt with do-gooders and deadbeats.

"Oh yeah, he thinks it's good," said Clarke. "He still has a sense of humor." And he manages to keep his wits about himself well enough that he's able to strike up the deal of a lifetime.

Of course, every good businessowner has a good partner. To that end, Scrooge's opportunity to save himself presents itself because of some behind-the-scenes wheeling and dealing by his seven-years-dead partner, Jacob Marley.

"Marley says 'you have a chance and a hope of my procuring, so don't wreck it, buddy,' " said Shadow Theatre artistic director John Hudson who plays almost every other male role in the production.

Hudson supposes that Marley, every bit as shrewd a businessman as Scrooge, is the architect of a deal that will save his own soul as well as Scrooge's. It's good sense: imagine if the great entrepreneurs of our day were forced to wander the Earth for a time wearing a chain of their own making, forged link by link while they were alive. They just wouldn't accept such a fate. A guy like Peter Pocklington would have a squadron of lawyers negotiating his way out of Hell and into Heaven via Purgatory.

"I think maybe Marley's redemption is on the line too," said Hudson. "If he can redeem Scrooge, he can redeem himself . . . I think somehow in the great beyond, he has swung a deal."

Hudson and Clarke agree on something else, too. Both suspect Scrooge actually dies, then is brought back.

"A lot of this happens on his bed, so it's the idea that he's having this feverish, on-the-brink-of-death nightmare," explained Clarke.

The story mentions that Scrooge is feeling ill, that things aren't going so well.

"Scrooge is ailing. He's depressed. He doesn't understand it," Clarke explained, "but he's about to die."

Death isn't explicit here but in the classic morality plays, death comes to you and you are given a chance to set things right.

So Scrooge's actual death is never mentioned. "But he's a poor, lonely, old guy who dies alone and, the next thing he knows, he's listening to people saying 'well, if he hadn't been such a bastard he wouldn't have choked to death in his own bed.' "

Wade, who not only had a hand in writing the script but also plays female roles, offers further insight. Belle, Scrooge's ex-fiancée, tells the budding tycoon he has changed, that she is "in love with a ghost."

A cast of three leaves the stage pretty bare and allows audiences to revel in story, says Mann. And they'll also delight in the spirits that visit Scrooge. Built by First Night Festival designer

Randall Fraser, the costumes and dolls are based on Dickens' descriptions. Marley is gauzy and transparent; the Ghost of Christmas Past is a diminutive blond who glows from within; the Ghost of Christmas Present is a 12-foot-tall behemoth operated by a puppeteer wearing it on a backpack, controlling its arms with long sticks; the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come is frightening in its simplicity.

A Christmas Carol runs for three weeks at two theatres. It plays at the Roxy Theatre (10708 - 124 St.) until Dec. 6 and at the New Varscona Theatre (10329 - 83 Ave.) from Dec. 8 - 20.