

ASF's "A Christmas Carol" is still wholesome family fun

Theatre Talk

By FRED LIPPINCOTT

The Montgomery holiday season is off to its traditional start with the recent opening of "A Christmas Carol" at Alabama Shakespeare Festival, to run through the end of December. This adaptation of Charles Dickens' classic ghost story is the same one we have seen before, originally produced in Sacramento.

The 1843 tale of Londoner Ebenezer Scrooge, who is transformed from a "scrooge" about Christmas to a believer, is still wholesome family fare. For many people this is the only ASF production they will see all year, and the profits help carry the regular season. The very large cast includes a number of cute, Montgomery youngsters, but their potential for stealing the show is kept well under control.

Although not a pure musical, the play has a lot of singing of somewhat sugary original music, which has the virtue of not following too closely the traditional carols that have been so debased by overexposure. Thom Jenkins



A Christmas Carol will be showing through December.

Photo special to the Independent

coordinated the music, and ASF company member Ray Chambers was overall director.

With its green Charles Caldwell's fine, 2-story set before, making full use of stage traps and smoke, with Scrooge's bed rising and falling to clear the stage. Among Elizabeth Novak's traditional costumes, I was struck by a magnificent

"Father Christmas" coat, the British version of our Santa Claus costume. Thankfully, before Barry Boys started to speak his stentorian lines, as the Ghost of Christmas Present, he removed the costume's false white beard.

Newcomers to the cast include a vibrant Kirsten Wyatt as the Ghost of Christmas Past, a touch of energy and youth in an otherwise somewhat thankless role. Her white dress, later covered with a dark cloak, was striking. Casting the role as a woman made it seem less scary. Also here for the first time is Court Whisman, as Bob Cratchit, whom it would be nice to see again in the regular season. Was I fooled, or did Kevin Varner play an actual violin on stage?

Among the regulars, Rodney Clark and John Preston make fine comic merchants, and Mr. Clark is also imposing as the (mute) Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come. It's a pleasure to welcome back Montgomerian John Mulligan from semi-retirement as the Ghost of Marley, Scrooge's partner, who truly was scary. In a show curiously devoid of real humor (as opposed to good humor), Sonja

Lanzener adds her usual witty touches as Mrs. Fezziwig, and the MFA students do yeoman service in ensembles, especially Jenny Shaffer Stevens with her take-charge approach.

As in the past, the show belongs to Philip Pleasants (now in his 16th year with the company) as Scrooge. A Festival in

tution, he could play the role with his eyes closed, but he keeps the play fresh and moving, bringing to the role the same dedication as to his more serious ones. His solid acting technique is reason enough to see the play, or to see it again.