

Reviewed on Wednesday, 25th November 2009

Scrooge, the musical

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

The Harlequin Theatre, Redhill

Reviewed by Tony Flook

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 original but, at the same time, made it accessible to those who may not have read the original story.

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 leaden footed Marley, who warned Scrooge that 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 the pathetic Tiny Tim (played, alternately 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-in 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.