

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
Rain or Shine Theatre Company
The Village Hall, Poulton
Saturday 19th December 2015

It is claimed that, at any given time, Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman* is being performed somewhere in the world. I should imagine the same is true of a production of *A Christmas Carol* between the first Sunday in Advent and Twelfth Night – or later. Ensuring they tick the box for Charles Dickens' classic yuletide yarn, local heroes Rain or Shine are currently touring (until 10th January 2016) with their own seasonal tale of Ebenezer Scrooge and his overnight conversion from sour-faced miser to winner of the Kindest Man in England contest.

It's a very good and amusing telling, too. It's also the briefest one I've ever watched, running its entertaining course in little more than eighty minutes. Director Tom Jordan focuses purely on the most familiar elements of the story, stitching them together with some brisk narration, thus ensuring **a spirited whizz** through the whole book, and fields **a typically versatile cast to recount it**. A mere five skilled actors assumed all the principal roles, creating **strong, believable characters gallivanting round another remarkably adaptable, all-locations-in-one-place set shoe-horned onto a postage stamp-sized stage**.

Anchoring everything in the title role, Anthony Young invested miserly Scrooge with all the usual unceasing misery and contempt for the world at large, whilst delivering a masterclass in crystal-clear diction. Jayne Lloyd and Emily Lomax played all the female parts, including the Ghost of Christmas Present, with considerable conviction and panache. Meanwhile, Ellis Wells and Craig "Clever Hat Trick" Rogers capably took care of the male roles, except Tiny Tim, superbly played by a woollen doll perched high on Bob Cratchit's shoulder. I half-expected him to blurt out a hearty "*Ah, Tim lad!*" In the midst of all the seasonal frivolity, however, Scrooge's transformation was a powerful and sobering moment, overseen by the towering black spectre of Christmas Yet To Come rising out of nowhere like a sinister phantom straight out of *The Woman In Black* in the play's most atmospheric scene.

Anyone seriously stressed-out is at least assured a happy ending, especially after yet another rendition of *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen*, and as regards everyone else, I have little doubt that nothing will you dismay, especially the delicious glass of Smoking Bishop during the interval, a tasty tippie created by Dickens himself, served up by his own great-great-granddaughter, and on the 172nd anniversary of the publication of the original novella. What a coup, and a very merry Christmas to all.

Simon Lewis