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REVIEW: “Scrooge...The Relapse” Reading at LTV’s Playwrights’ Theatre

by [T.J. Clemente](#) in Entertainment, Featured

“Scrooge the Relapse” at LTV | Photo Credit: Phil Merritt

LTV’s Playwrights’ Theatre of East Hampton presented a staged reading of “Scrooge...The Relapse” at LTV Studios in Wainscott last Saturday (Dec 14th). Playwrights’ Theatre of East Hampton is a wonderful program that showcases local talents in front of live audiences. The production was well attended, and all the chairs were taken. Co-creators John McCaffrey and Jack Gwaltney were in attendance, watching their effort being produced, a project they started well before the COVID epidemic.

The play itself starts with a colorful recap of Dickens’, “A Christmas Carol,” showcasing the talents of the four-actor cast that brought their skills and creative energy into the production and brought the words to life. The venue was lit wonderfully and the sound was excellent something very important in staged readings.

Once, Tony-nominated actor Paul Hecht took on the role of Scrooge. His readings dominated the production, and I make no mistake about it; Mr. Hecht was game. Shifting his voice to fit the scene, the mood, and the excitement, his talent and profound skills were on full display. He shifted gears as the play moved along and was funny, serious, and, at times, profound. In the “Relapse,” the audience is introduced to a more complex Scrooge than the one Dickens created. It is fascinating the way the playwright drives the Scrooge character in order to intellectualize themes Dickens hints at but never dove into. These notions are perhaps the brick-and-mortar of this production, with wit, laughs, and some deep thoughts to ponder.

Daniela Mastropietro was also excellent. She played “Woman” and “Sigmund Freud.” Having just concluded playing a major role (Blanche DuBois) in the Literature Live production of “A Streetcar Named Desire,” she shifted gears and, using her toolbox of talents, vocalized important scenes in the production. She is to be applauded for tackling some of the most complex and difficult passages in a clear, precise voice, one I clearly understood, as did the audience. It must be noted that she brought a unique, serious perspective to the reading.

Brian Keane handled the roles of “Jacob Marley” and “Karl Marx” with panache and polished talent. Mr. Keane has a certain stage presence that, even in just a reading, one can’t help but notice him on stage. He draws you in as he has a keen ability to connect to the audience in an effective and endearing way. He was awesome juggling the chains while doing the “Marley” scene is so pronounced in those “A Christmas Carol” productions. A National touring actor it was a treat to have him in this cast, contributing to this reading.

Last but definitely not least in this cast was the Creative Director at LTV Studios, Josh Gladstone. Gladstone is a unique talent. His fingerprints are all over some of the best productions the East End has produced over the last twenty years. Actors are drawn to work with him because he brings so much to the table when he is involved in a show. In his roles as “Bob Cratchit,” then “Charles Darwin,” and the role of the “Producer,” Mr. Gladstone captains up his array of talent to add so much to this production besides being so very animated reading the lines. He has a “Burl Ives” quality that effectively warms, entertains, and communicates with the soul of the lines and connects to the minds of the listeners in the audience.

A play reading is usually never the actual final finished product. I can imagine there will be changes, cuts and additions to this play as is the nature of creating a play to be staged. However, Co-Creators John McCaffrey and Jack Gwaltney have assembled something, new, thought provoking and unique to tack on to the legend that is Dickens “A Christmas Carol,” perhaps in a way the highly successful musical, “Wicked,” expanded the horizons of “The Wizard of Oz.”