



Society : Riverside Players
Production : **SCROOGE**
Date : Thursday 8th December 2011
Venue : The Memorial Hall, Old Windsor
Report by : Gordon Bird, NODA Representative, Area 14

I was invited to watch the start of the second week of the run of Scrooge. The show was a slick production that entertained and amused in equal measure.

The well known Charles Dickens classic had all the usual characters plus some additional ones to fit in with the pantomime structure. The script was packed with one-liners that kept everyone laughing (or groaning) whilst keeping true to the atmosphere of the Victorian classic.

In this well rehearsed production, we were treated to some wonderful singing, a confident production with some fine acting performances and some polished dance routines.

JOHN AHERNE (Jan Butty) A lovely performance as the dame. Make up and costumes appeared just right. John gave a very confident performance and produced some good moments of comedy. All the comic lines were well delivered and received the appropriate groan or laugh. Well done.

JOHN WESSON (Bob Cratchit) John played the part of Scrooge's accountant very well. He played the part dead straight which made for the laughs or appropriate audience response to his predicaments. The night I watched their appeared a moment when John "corpsed" on stage with the Dame. I missed the reason, but once John recovered from the fit of the giggles he produced an assured, composed performance.

SUSAN BELL (Dough) &

JILL DADY (Nut) Dough and Nut, workers at Scrooge's chocolate works, were the comic duo of the piece, an addition to the original Christmas Carol Story. Both Susan and Jill looked comfortable in all their scenes and the slapstick "messy" scene looked very well rehearsed. I am not sure if the line "white men in coats" was deliberate or part of the script, but the audience appreciated the "gaff".

ALAN PAYN (Ebenezer Scrooge) An excellent performance as the miserable miser. Alan's characterisation was sublime, some wonderful facial expressions and excellent line delivery. The transformation to the charitable character was believable and entertaining – with a lovely moment when the audience shared the joke that he was winding Bob up about losing his job. An excellent performance.

ROGER BLACKMAN (Charles Dickens) Roger only appeared very briefly as Charles Dickens, in which he gave a solid and convincing performance as a Victorian writer. Roger also appeared in several further scenes with the carol singers with good effect.

JENNY BENNETT (Faith) & **SUSAN PICKLES** (Hope) Constantly appearing to raise money for "charity", this pair had some fine lines that were well delivered. Their song, "*Step in Christmas*", was sung with enthusiastic confidence and gusto. I particularly congratulate Jenny who, despite suffering from a cold, continued to deliver an admirable performance. Well done.

NATHANAEL PAGE (Jacob Marley) An excellent and enjoyable performance as the part of Scrooge's former partner. The make-up and costume added to the characterisation. Nathanael performed his songs very well, particularly the opening number of Act 2 "*Thriller*". An outstanding performance.

TREVOR BEGLEY (Fred) Trevor has good volume and diction that ensured every word was heard. The character of Fred, Scrooge's nephew, is a little un-interesting, but Trevor worked hard to produce a solid performance.

LORNA COTTRILL (Elizabeth) Looked like the well to do young wife of Fred. Lorna delivered her lines well and kept in character throughout. Despite a bit of an age gap between them, their relationship looked convincing because of the strength of their acting.

VICKI ARNOLD (Mrs Cratchit) Vicki produced a thoroughly convincing Mrs Cratchit – looking like a Victorian Maria Von Trapp. The song "*Price Tag*" with Susan and Katy was very well performed.

ISABELLE WROTH (Susan), **SARAH MCGILLICUDDY** (Katy), **WILLIAM FRATER** (Tiny Tim) The trio performed the Cratchit children very well. They each had their own character that was very convincing. Tiny Tim used his one line "*God bless everyone*" to excellent comic effect.

SAMANTHA SOMERVILLE (Belle) Although Samantha was busy in all the chorus scenes, she had time to don a wig and appear as Belle, a young Scrooge's love interest. Samantha performed this role splendidly and her solo on the song "*Forget You*" was excellently sung and superbly delivered. Her confident singing and dancing were also noticeable during the chorus numbers.

SIMON ARNOLD (Ghost of Christmas Present) A wonderful cameo part! Was it Russell Grant or Louie Spence? Either way, a wonderful interpretation! Simon had excellent rapport with the audience. One very noticeable scene was when he was seeking advice from the audience, on how to wake up Scrooge. Given some the suggestions, Simon adapted or used the remarks to superb comic effect. A brilliant and memorable performance.

CHORUS The chorus can sometimes be overlooked but everyone knew their part very well and looked like they were enjoying the show. They sang enthusiastically and danced energetically. The opening number "*Footloose*" set the pace for show – one of slickness and enjoyment.

Director (SIMON ARNOLD and JONATHAN STACEY) The show was very well cast and there was a clear, well defined understanding from all the performers.

Musical Director & Choreography (VICKI ARNOLD) All the musical numbers were well chosen to meet the society strengths. The songs were accompanied by backing tracks rather than a live band or orchestra but this did not distract from the performances. The evening I watched the singers seemed perfectly in time with the music. The choreography was fairly simple but evidently well rehearsed and as such, was pleasing to watch.

Stage management & crew – The set changes were slickly performed. The special effect of the moving chair was very well delivered.

Set The set was well designed and the back-drops were very effective. But what enhanced the production was the excellent use of back projection. From the turning cogs in the workhouse, to the grave stones in the graveyard and the furniture in Scrooge's bedroom; they all added interest and ambience to the scenes. I particularly liked the idea of the changing time on clock to indicate the passing of time. The backdrop of Scrooge's house was very well designed. The set was completed by large bows DSR and DSL to indicate large presents. I also notice not one but two projectors, the other

showing the words for the audience participation song as well as a welcoming gobo showing the name of the production.

Lighting design & operation The lighting was very well designed and all the cues appeared on time. I liked the idea of the back projection adding to the lighting plot – for example, the moon and clouds in the grave yard scene.

Sound design & operation All the cues seemed well executed and delivered. The singing and backing music was very well balanced indeed.

Costumes Excellent care to detail has been taken to the costumes. The dame looked suitably attired, and there were many Victorian costumes on display. The zombies looked excellent but the star of the piece is Jacob Marley's costume, complete with chains. The costumes were clearly well thought out adding much needed colour when required.

Makeup The make-up was very well designed and applied. With hair added to Dickens, head piece to Scrooge and excellent ghost white appearance for Marley. Obviously a lot of time, thought and effort had been made to produce convincing characters requiring make-up.

Front of house Front of house were warm and friendly on the night I visited.

Programme An eight page programme with a colour exterior and cast photographs. Although the photos were small, their images were of sufficient quality to be clear. I welcomed the list of songs (as my memory and song knowledge is not so good!) and editor clearly thought of the younger audience with an interesting panto-themed word search.

I thoroughly enjoyed Riverside Players production of Scrooge, with some fine singing and acting from a talented society. I relish the opportunity of seeing their next production, "Holiday Snap", in March 2012.

Gordon Bird