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Review:

Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol' puts fresh perspective on old favorite

By EVANS DONNELL

For *The Tennessean*

Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol has become a modern yuletide tradition in other cities.

Tennessee Repertory Theatre's excellent production argues for making Tom Mula's play a Christmas staple in Nashville, too.

Director Scot Copeland brings his masterful touch for fantasy from Nashville Children's Theatre to the Rep. And the play's mix of comedy and sentiment is perfect for the four gifted actors who perform it.

Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol does for Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* what Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* did for William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It views a familiar dramatic world from a new point of view. That fresh perspective creates entertaining discoveries about the world we only thought we completely knew.

Chain-wearing Jacob Marley (Henry Haggard) wants a better afterlife. The Record Keeper (Sam Whited) offers him a chance, but that opportunity involves getting Scrooge to abandon his wicked ways. Will Marley work a miracle aided only by the sprightly imp Bogle (Peter Vann)?

The outcome is no surprise given the story's well-known source. The genius of Mula's script lies in creating dramatic tension with plot twists large and small while peppering the piece with plenty of humor.

Russell, Haggard, Whited and Vann shine whether the moment is comedic or serious. It's hard to say any of these talented players outshines the others, but if there's a first among equals, it's arguably Vann. His energy and sheer delight in the proceedings are infectious.

Gary C. Hoff's set is a marvelous mixture of chains, large ledger books, street lamps and a clock-face backdrop reminiscent of London's Big Ben. The objects in this playing space reinforce setting and character. Their scale emphasizes the show's fantasy element.

Robert Neuhaus' sound fills the space with spectral noises and Larry Schanker's whimsical music. Trish Clark's costumes and Chris Wilson's lighting design are perfect parts of this play's world, too. They've created the right character-enhancing shapes and colors, particularly in Clark's design for the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come and Wilson's floor-based green lighting when Marley tries to scare Scrooge.

Copeland's well-paced presentation of *Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol* is a very entertaining Christmas present. Hopefully, it will be the gift that keeps on giving in years to come.