

Holiday Fun From STAGE RIGHT and TEXAS REP

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A short trip to Montgomery County’s theatrical crown jewel, the **Crighton Theatre**, can get your holiday season off in a merry way with the **STAGE RIGHT** production of Christopher Durang’s oft-times amusing comedy, “**Mrs. Bob Cratchit’s Wild Christmas Binge.**” In this case “wild” is the operative word, and presiding over the nutty nonsense is Crighton comedy favorite, Carolyn Wong. Even her hilarious first costume could have gotten laughs if simply left alone on the stage. You will have to see it to believe it. (Costume designs by Kathleen Zaritski). To add to the fun, director, Jeff Elkins, explained to the audience beforehand that choreographer, Angela Graves, had been instructed to choreograph everything badly. Mission accomplished on that!

With a few cute songs (lyrics by Durang, Music by Michael Friedman) the show is a parody of Dicken’s “A Christmas Carol.” When everything is working it is hilarious, though there were a few barren stretches that seemed to repeatedly cause a woman seated near me to doze off. Nevertheless Miss Wong was very capable of keeping the laughs coming. In her multi-role as The Ghost of Christmas Past, Present, and Future, it is her comical task to guide miserly old Ebenezer Scrooge (a fine comic turn from Thomas Lockhart) toward the love of his fellow man. Along the way the ghost bungles their journeys through time and space so badly that one minute we may be meeting Enron scoundrels, Ken Lay (Tony Knepper) and Jeff Skilling (Charles Williams), and the next we find ourselves amongst the Dickens characters in Oliver Twist, or meeting Clarence, the angel from “It’s a Wonderful Life.” Sound crazy? You bet, but it’s fun much of the time, especially at the lively Christmas ball of the Fezziwigs (Ryan Willingham & Meredith Zaritski in eye-popping orange costumes).

Central to the story is the hilariously dysfunctional family of Bob Cratchit (deliciously timid Katt Gilcrease). Cratchit youngsters, Little Nelle (Kendra Kelly) and Tiny Tim (Mackenzie Goode) bring the art of being pathetic to riotous

new heights. With exaggerated enunciation and comical facial expressions, Mr. Goode really “nails it” as his Tim revels in “poor me” syndrome. As the title implies, Mrs. Cratchit (Melissa Singleton) is central to the zany plot. With emerging selfishness, she is depressed and in rebellion against her thankless life of housework, poverty, and child rearing. She decides to drink heavily and jump off the London Bridge, but a chance meeting finds her and Scrooge really hitting it off as the two meanest characters in this farce. Stop by the Crighton to enjoy this large cast and see how it all works out (performance details below). You’ll also enjoy the festive pre-show and intermission singing of the April Sound Church carolers. You’re bound to have some fun, even if the ghost’s final caution is true: “Frankly the whole story doesn’t make much sense to me!”

Meanwhile, at the nearby **TEXAS REPERTORY THEATRE**, Woodlands resident and Mitchell Intermediate 5th grader, Alana Johnson, is stealing the show as young Susan Walker in Craig A. Miller’s stage adaptation of the George Seaton screenplay for, “**Miracle on 34th Street.**” Based on the original story of Valentine Davies, this edition is skillfully directed by Joshua Estrada. Starring as one of the best Santa Clauses ever is Texas Reps’ Associate Artistic Director, Steven Fenley, in the role of Kris Kringle. If you have forgotten that Santa is real, Mr. Fenley will convince you. With its familiar tale of a girl who doesn’t believe in Santa and a man who claims to be the jolly fellow, if this show doesn’t put a holiday smile on your face, consult your physician. Blithe Kirkwood warmly portrays Susan’s mom, Doris, while Matt Wade smoothly plays her eventual love interest, attorney Fred Gailey, and also doubles as the show’s narrator between scenes. Talented Elliot Jordan is elegant as Dr. Pierce, David Walker plays frustrated Macy’s supervisor, Mr. Shellhammer, and Ted Doolittle lights up this comedy as the explosive psycho-analyst, Mr. Sawyer, who seems to need therapy himself. Delano Stepp, III, gives a pleasant portrayal of the kindly young custodian, Alfred, while the District Attorney (Sapha Arias) puts Santa on trial in the courtroom of Judge Harper (talented Jan Saenz could take over for Judge Judy). Janie Stewart and Max Maisonneuve round out the fine cast. Have you guessed the happy ending? Don’t let that stop you from attending this Christmas gem!

“MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET,” continues at Texas Repertory Theatre, 14243 Stuebner Airline Rd. in Houston

thru Dec. 23rd. Performances will be at 8pm on Friday & Saturday, 3 pm on Sunday, with two special added performances at 7:30 pm next Tuesday and Wednesday. For reservations and information call 281-583-7573, or visit the website at www.TexRepTheatre.org

MRS. BOB CRATCHIT continues at the Crighton Theatre thru Dec. 20th with Friday & Saturday performances at 8 pm and a Sunday matinee Dec. 20 at 2 pm. Tickets are \$17 for adults, \$15 for seniors and groups, and \$12 for children and college students with ID. Nonperishable food items will be accepted for the county food bank.

Bentley's columns, featured in newspapers from the East Coast to the Gulf Coast, may be viewed on the website at www.ThePeoplesCritic.com while E-mail may be addressed to ThePeoplesCritic@earthlink.net