

ALLEYWAYTHEATRE

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RELEASE

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Scrooge Returns For The 29th Season!

Alleyway Theatre and sponsors M&T Bank, WKBW-TV Channel 7, Mighty Taco and Paragon Advertising, will present the 29th annual production of Charles Dickens' **A CHRISTMAS CAROL**, adapted and directed by Neal Radice, December 8-18, 2011. Alleyway Theatre is located at 1 Curtain Up Alley in the heart of Buffalo's Historic Theatre District. The holiday classic is the second production of Alleyway's thirty first season of theatre.

SCROOGE RETURNS

British actor John Smeathers will return to Buffalo from his home in England, to portray Ebenezer Scrooge. The infamous miser will be joined by Bob Cratchit, Tiny Tim, and the traditional Alleyway Carolers. They've been trodding the boards at Alleyway Theatre and warming holiday hearts of Western New Yorkers for over a quarter century. Adaptor, director and actor Neal Radice observes, "I am more convinced than ever that audiences want of A CHRISTMAS CAROL on stage, the same thing they want of the carols we sing: to be unchanging, timeless, as familiar as the memory of a favorite Christmas morning past. And there is no better place to experience the stage production than at the intimate Alleyway Theatre. Our audiences clamored for us to return the show to the Alleyway when, for a few years, we moved it to a larger venue. At Alleyway Theatre, Dickens' characters are practically sitting next to you and shaking your hand."

ACTOR JOHN SMEATHERS

Mr. Smeathers revisits Buffalo for another year as Ebenezer Scrooge in the Alleyway Theatre perennial A CHRISTMAS CAROL. A native of the UK, he lives just south of Manchester and acts and directs for two English theatre companies. Most recently he appeared in Alan Bennett's A QUESTION OF ATTRIBUTION playing the real-life character of Sir Anthony Blunt (both "Surveyor of The Queen's pictures" and Russian spy!). More recently he directed the UK premiere of Neil Simon's HOTEL SUITE and returns home to begin rehearsals for the part of Henry Preece in DISPOSING OF THE BODY by noted British author Hugh Whitmore. He may be glimpsed in the 2012 movie release THEATRE OF DREAMS.

A LONG TRADITION

The Alleyway production of A CHRISTMAS CAROL is one of the longest running annual productions in the country and has become one of this area's favorite holiday traditions playing to over 100,000 people during its 28 year history. Multiple generations of families attend each year, typically arriving early so as not to miss a note of the traditional carolers as they perform in the minutes before Dickens' famous ghost story of Christmas begins. Surprise entrances shrouded in mist highlight the staves (chapters) of the story. Younger audience members in the intimate 100 seat Alleyway Theatre never fail to let out a squeal as the ghost of Jacob Marley, rattling his chains, appears in a red glow rising up through the floor.

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THOUGHTS ABOUT A CHRISTMAS CAROL FROM ACTOR JOHN SMEATHERS

“Long before Alleyway Theatre even existed I was already more than familiar with many of Dickens’ famous characters, David Copperfield, Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby and, of course, the old miser himself, Ebenezer Scrooge, but had never played one on stage. Dickens did write one or two little-known plays but it was as a writer of fictional novels that he became famous and it has been left to others to adapt his stories for the stage. I have no proof, but I suspect that there are more stage adaptations of A CHRISTMAS CAROL (not to mention movie, comic book, etc.) than any other piece of fiction in the English language. Neal Radice’s faithful adaptation of A CHRISTMAS CAROL cannot be bettered.”

“Like Shakespeare, Charles Dickens is ingrained in the British psyche. Just as “Now is the winter of our discontent...” is instantly recognized as the opening line from Shakespeare’s RICHARD III, so too are “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” instantly recognized as the opening words of A TALE OF TWO CITIES. Not far behind those are “Marley was dead: to begin with.” - the opening words from the most famous Christmas story (outside the Bible!) of all time, A CHRISTMAS CAROL.”

“A chance meeting with Neal Radice, now Executive Director of Alleyway Theatre, at a theatre event in New York in 1978 and my choice of Christmas gift to him a couple of years later – a copy of A CHRISTMAS CAROL containing a facsimile of Dickens’ original manuscript – led to Neal writing his own stage adaptation of this wonderful story. Neal Radice directs the production and narrates – as Dickens – and plays some of the characters along the way. In 1998, I was finally able to take up his long-standing invitation to play Scrooge in Buffalo and for the past 13 years the two-week run of A CHRISTMAS CAROL has been an essential part of my run-up to the festive season.”

“There is some irony in the fact that theatre productions of A CHRISTMAS CAROL are far more thick-on-the-ground on this side of the Atlantic than at home in England. Possibly it’s because that so many Canadians and Americans trace their roots back to ‘the old country’ and for the brief time it takes to read the book or watch the story unfold on stage they can immerse themselves in the intimacy of the narrow streets and alleys of 19th century London.”

“Perhaps the operative word is ‘Intimacy.’ Why has Alleyway Theatre’s annual production of A CHRISTMAS CAROL run for 28 years? Why on earth do audiences keep coming back? What is the attraction? What is the secret? Of course the story itself is one that bears repeating and it has the ability to put the most hardened soul into a celebratory frame of mind. And the setting: Alleyway Theatre is a cosy, compact, intimate 99-seat auditorium. As the house lights dim and the London fog swirls round the Alleyway Carollers who have spent 15 minutes singing traditional carols to their traditional tunes in the most beautiful harmony, the audience can’t help but be transported back to those narrow cobbled streets and the counting house of Scrooge and Marley, bereft of warmth on Christmas Eve, save for that in the heart of Scrooge’s clerk, Bob Cratchit. And so the story unfolds again and we all know that this is one story that will end happily. Nobody will play any tricks on us. It will be just like it was last year, and the year before that, and the year before that, and..... unchanging and unchangeable. Where else in this day and age can you guarantee that?”

-John Smeathers
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THE CAST

In addition to Mr. Smeathers **A CHRISTMAS CAROL** will feature Syndi Starr, Katy Clancy, Roger Van Dette, David C. Mitchell, J. K. Hudson, Joyce Stilson, and Neal Radice as Charles Dickens. Young actors in the cast include Gayle Petri, Charlie Hearn and Andrew Hearn as Tiny Tim.

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

December 8-18, 2011. Thursdays and Fridays at 7:30 PM, Saturdays at 5:00 PM and 8:00 PM, and Sundays at 2 PM.

TICKET PRICES

\$30/general admission; \$20/students and children.

TICKET AVAILABILITY

Avoid service charges and purchase online at alleyway.com. The box office will open 30 minutes before each performance, but advance purchases are recommended since most performances will be sold out. Alleyway Theatre Box Office: 716-852-2600x0.