

Students bring adaptation of Dickens' classic to life

For Brad T. Cox, portraying Ebenezer Scrooge's nephew in the Lied Center's production of "A Christmas Carol" this weekend is an exhilarating opportunity.

The freshman theater performance major has experience doing dinner theater and high school shows, but he has never performed for a crowd of more than 500.

"When you get out there and are on the other side of 2,500 seats, you can be nothing but awestruck," Cox said of being on the Lied Center's stage.

Jeffery Scott Elwell, a professor and chairman of the Department of Theatre Arts, said in the early days of the Lied Center for Performing Arts, some people who were supportive of both it and the theater department thought it would be nice to have cooperation between the two units.

This year is the 13th time the theater department and the Lied Center have collaborated for "A Christmas Carol," but this year's production is a little bit different.

Elwell was commissioned to write a new adaptation of the classic tale by Charles Dickens about the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge who hates Christmas.

Elwell said he tried to keep the play as true to Dickens' original intentions as possible by keeping the main character's transformation slow and realistic.

Some of the royalties Elwell receives as a playwright will go toward the creation of two university scholarships.

Elwell said students performing on the Lied's stage get to experience professional theater firsthand.

"They get to work with Broadway-size scenery," he said. "They get to work with body mics, which ... mirrors reality in a large professional theater."

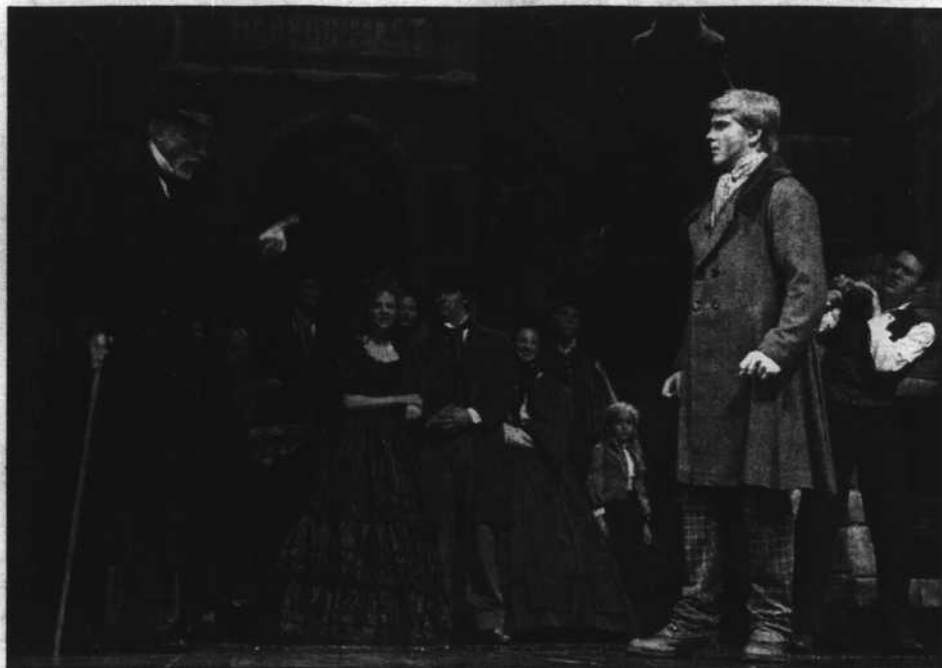
Freshman theater major Jennifer Ward (Ghost of Christmas Past) was in Lied productions of "The Nutcracker" when she was younger and is happy to return to the professional stage for "A Christmas Carol."

"The technical aspect is more developed and the crew backstage and dressers and everybody is so professional," she said.

Yale graduate David Ackroyd plays the part of Scrooge in the show.

Senior theater performance major Kyle Johnston said the chance to work with professionals like Ackroyd and Director Rob Urbinati is one thing he has enjoyed about this show.

"It's nice to see their process because it's significantly different from what you see in an academi-



ABOVE: Scrooge, taken to the Cratchit family by a spirit, sees the family at a sullen moment that helps him realize the difficulty of living on a meager budget.



ABOVE: Scrooge spends a late night reviewing his business books before the spirits visit him. The spirits reveal to him his uncaring character.



LEFT: Ebenezer Scrooge makes a dreamy decent into his own grave, an act that frightens Scrooge and helps instill in him a new perspective on life.

PERFORMANCE PREVIEW

A Christmas Carol

Where: Lied Center for Performing Arts, 12th & O

When: Thurs. & Fri. @ 7:30 p.m.
Sat. @ 2 & 7:30 p.m.
Sun. @ 2 p.m.

Cost: \$28, \$24, \$20, half-price for students

ic setting," Johnston said.

Johnston has previously performed in productions of "A Christmas Carol" and "Oklahoma!" at the Lied. He said the composition of the audience is different at the Lied than places like the Howell Theatre.

"(You play to a) general public audience instead of a more academic one," Johnston said.

Ackroyd, who has much experience both on stage and in film, said he has enjoyed working with a young cast.

"They are uncynical," Ackroyd said. "It's fun to see the kind of joy these kids throw into acting."

Elwell's script, which has been revised throughout the rehearsals, may provide a challenge for the young actors, Ackroyd said. There are 11 versions of the script, including the original, which was finished in midsummer.

RIGHT: Ebenezer Scrooge makes an unexpected visit to the Cratchit family at Christmas. Scrooge, who received successive visits by spirits, changed his miserly ways and granted financial benefits to his employee Mr. Cratchit.

The many script changes prompted freshman theater performance major Brett Waldon to joke: "Whatever you learned the day before - forget it."

But Waldon said he appreciates the extra lines he received as a result of the changes, which added depth to his little-known character of Peter Cratchit.

Elwell cited many reasons for the revisions including Urbinati's "unconventional concept" for the show. But, Elwell said, some changes are inevitable with adaptations.

"On stage you don't have to describe things (such as) how someone is reacting because an actor is doing that," he said.

Story by Crystal K. Wiebe, Photos by Steven Bender

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