

Review

SCROOGE Liverpool Empire

CHRISTMAS seems to get earlier every year.

Valentine cards and Cadbury's creme eggs have only just hit the stores, and yet here is the scourge of Christmas past, Ebenezer Scrooge, rubbing his misery hands together and reminding us there are only 319 days to go until the next.

But just as Scrooge finds out, resistance is futile - let go of the bah-humbugging and immerse yourself in a little festive spirit.

Liverpool favourite Tommy Steele portrayed Scrooge in a triumphant visit to the Empire two years ago.

Now housewives' favourite Shane Richie has taken on the miserly mantle, complete with rats-tall hair and Steptoe sneer.

While he strives hard to be nasty Mr Scrooge, bane of the carolling classes, beneath the make-up and the nightshirt it's still nice Mr Richie, more cantankerous old rogue than mean old man.

And he could look a little more

By
**Catherine
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afraid when his ghosts catch up with him.

Still, minor quibbles in a production where everyone is having such evident, irrepressible and hammy fun and you want to throw on a Rentaghost costume, grab some roasted chestnuts, and join in.

From the opening verse of Sing A Christmas Carol to the reprise of Thank You Very Much, Scrooge shows why it's so important to have an ensemble cast with strong, melodious voices.

Among the standouts are Robyn North as Isabel, Scrooge's nephew Harry (Stephen Weller) and any number of guests at Harry's Christmas party.

While in the character stakes James Earl Adair's Jacob Marley, and the Brian Blessed-esque Ghost

of Christmas Present (Anthony Stuart Lloyd) are worth half the ticket price alone.

They appear and disappear in the blink of an eye thanks to the wizardry of Harry Potter illusionist Paul Kieve.

Designer Paul Farnsworth's sets are first-rate, as are the Christmas card costumes - although Bob Cratchitt seems a little too well-dressed for a lowly clerk.

But Richie is ultimately the man who puts bottoms on seats, and love him or not he certainly knows how to entertain a family audience.

A touch Rex Harrison in My Fair Lady, a touch Michael Ball in anything, he keeps Scrooge rolling towards its inevitable conclusion - and a standing ovation - with consummate skill.

RATING:

9/10

Ebenezer good

Did you see ... ?

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