

# White Heron's "Christmas Carol" a dazzling retelling



Photo by Cary Hazlegrove

From left, Patrick Halley, Chris French, Wynn Harmon, Caitlin Clouthier and Gabi Van Horn on stage in White Heron Theatre's "A Nantucket Christmas Carol."

## Theater Review

**By Jim Sulzer**  
Contributing Writer

One of the qualities of Charles Dickens' genius was his ability to present human nature in all its variety: the cruelty as well as the kindness. Most of his characters are archetypes, exaggerated for effect, and are static.

Fagin remains brutish, Oliver innocent. But in his holiday classic "A Christmas Carol," Dickens explores the possibility of redemption, looking deep into the human heart and stirring the embers of love and regret in a storyline that remains fresh almost 180 years after it was first written.

White Heron Theatre's "A Nantucket Christmas Carol" features a dazzling ensemble cast of five actors who retell the familiar story with a winning blend of verve and heartfelt emotion. Resetting the story on Nantucket in 1843, playwright Mark Shanahan cleverly introduces local details (whaling ships at the wharf, humble fishing cottages in Scon-

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set) while wisely preserving much of Dickens' brilliant dialogue. The result is delightful, a holiday treat not to be missed.

No production of this play can work without a well-drawn Ebenezer Scrooge. He must be flinty and hard-hearted in early scenes, yet imply a touch of humanity beneath the surface so the supernatural explorations of his past can discover the goodness that was jaded by childhood trauma and buried by decades of greed.

Actor Wynn Harmon is a strong and subtle Scrooge. He is adept not only at displaying Scrooge's shrewd covetousness in the opening scenes, but also his despair and horror as the three ghosts of Christmas reveal to him the error of his ways. We feel every turn of emotion, and Scrooge's redemption at the end erupts with genuine joy, a frozen fountain bursting to life.

The four talented actors who surround Scrooge take on a variety of roles with skill and success. Patrick Halley adds humor and pathos to his many portrayals: the good-hearted Bob Cratchit and the benevolent Ghost of Christmas Past, as well as a hilarious depiction of the servant Mrs. Dilber. Halley is especially effective in the final scene, when Bob Cratchit initially doubts the sincerity of Scrooge's transformation but comes to accept its genuineness.

Caitlin Clouthier shows finesse and grit in depicting Mrs. Cratchit as well as a host of other characters, including a charity woman and Ebenezer's young love Belle. In the crucial scene



Photo by Cary Hazlegrove

**Caitlin Clouthier and Patrick Halley in White Heron Theatre's production of "A Nantucket Christmas Carol."**

when Belle accuses the young Ebenezer of allowing a "golden idol" to displace her, Clouthier gives a fine portrait of sorrowful renunciation.

Chris French brings us not only the chain-bound, tortured Marley and the upbeat, personable Fred (Scrooge's nephew), but also many other varied characters, all of whom he depicts with style and presence. He and Halley give a particularly comic rendition of two whaling captains sucking at their pipes and shuffling about on the street.

Gabi Van Horn (familiar to Nantucket audiences for her incandescent performance as Mary Coffin Starbuck in "Nantucket! the MusACKal") adds humor and energy to the show. She plays the tyrannical Mrs. Creakle with creepy edginess, Mr. Fezziwig with wonderful bounciness, and the Ghost of Christmas Present with lightness yet vulnerability.

Director Graydon Gund has staged all this pageantry to great effect. The scenes flow smoothly from one to the next, and every character change works well. Samuel Vawter has designed an attractive set, deceptive in its simplicity, and Christina Watanabe's lighting design gives us all the brightness and shadows a show like this deserves.

At times the actors step back from their characters to offer narration, and throughout the performance they sing snippets from a number of familiar Christmas carols. The night I attended, the audience seemed to leave the theater with songs firmly planted in their hearts.

*"A Nantucket Christmas Carol," 7:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, White Heron Theatre, 5 North Water St. [www.whiteherontheatre.org](http://www.whiteherontheatre.org) for tickets*