

# Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol

STEPHEN DAVENPORT | 18 DECEMBER 2014



**THEATRE REVIEW** | The Bakehouse Theatre is full of Victorian Christmas spirit.

The ghosts of Christmases past, present and future haunt the stage in *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol*.

For the last 17 years of his life, Dickens trod the boards and performed his own work while acting out each character in a one-man show. Such was his success that he received great critical and public acclaim.

In this modern production, Phil Zachariah plays the part of the great novelist. He takes to the stage to present Dickens' ghostly little book concerning the plight of the tight-fisted, grasping and covetous old sinner Ebenezer Scrooge.

For nearly two hours, Zachariah delivers an absolute master-class as he tells a compressed version of the yuletide classic. It is, if nothing else, a magical feat of recollection. He masters Dickens magnificently, elating in the part, the patois, the ire, the hilarity and the munificence of spirit that once held Victorian audiences mesmerised.

The style belongs very much in a bygone tell-tale tradition. But due to understated staging, love of the story and superb acting, Zachariah powerfully adapts the familiar ghostly parable and makes it seem fresh again.

What matters most in this production is the written word, and it is brought to life with such delight that it's impossible not to be dragged into the account. The performer brings every one of the diverse characters into existence, from the cynical Scrooge to the agreeable Bob Cratchit and the trio of terrifying spectres.

Under Zachariah's guidance, this authoritative story of redemption is renewed. With good timing, great delivery and fabulous words, most of the images are painted in the audience members' heads. This is both entertaining and effective. When Zachariah speaks with conviction, it is as though one is hearing the story for the very first time.

For anyone interested in immersing themselves in a truly Victorian style of Christmas entertainment, *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol* is as rich as figgy pudding and as stuffed with goodies as a gluttonous beadle after a feast.

*Retrospect Arts is presenting Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol at the Bakehouse Theatre again tonight (Thursday).*