

Stephen Griner as Scrooge and Christopher Sauerbrey as Tiny Tim in the South Carolina Children's Theatre production of "Ebenezer." OWEN RILEY JR./STAFF

11-27-11

Message of 'Ebenezer' rings true

SCCT stages musical version of 'A Christmas Carol'

By Paul Hyde
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It's the powerful message that makes Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" a perennial favorite with audiences, says Betsy Bisson, with South Carolina Children's Theatre.

Bisson sums up the familiar story of the stingy Scrooge in one word: "redemption."

"The whole idea is that we can make choices to create the life we want, and not regret it in the end," says Bisson, who's directing the Children's Theatre's production of "Ebenezer: A Musical Christmas Carol."

"People love the show because the message is so great," she adds.

"Ebenezer," featuring a local cast of 14 adults and 18 children and teens, opens Friday for nine performances at

See CAROL, Page 6D

YOU CAN GO

What: "Ebenezer: A Musical Christmas Carol," produced by the South Carolina Children's Theatre
When: 7 p.m. Friday; 1:30 p.m. Saturday; 1:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. on Dec. 4; 7 p.m. on Dec. 8 and 9; 1:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. on Dec. 10; 1:30 p.m. on Dec. 11
Where: Peace Center's Gunter Theatre
Tickets: $26 for adults; $17 for children 18 and under
Information: 864-467-3000 or www.peacecenter.org

CAROL

Continued from Page 1D

the Peace Center's Gunter Theatre through Dec. 11.

This production marks the first time the Children's Theatre has staged an adaptation of "A Christmas Carol," the tale of the miser who has a change of heart thanks to the intervention of three spirits.

In choosing among the many stage adaptations of the Dickens short story, the Children's Theatre gravitated toward a version by a tried-and-true playwrighting team the company had successfully featured in the past: Janet Yates Vogt and Mark Friedman.

Vogt and Friedman wrote the musicals "Anne of Green Gables" and "How I Became a Pirate," both seen in recent Children's Threatre seasons.

Bisson believes she also has a winner with "Ebenezer."

"This version of 'A Christmas Carol' is really quite charming," says Bisson, the artistic and education director for Children's Theatre. "It has a lot of humor in it and the songs are quite lovely."

Actor Stephen Griner takes the role of Scrooge.

Two musical productions of "A Christmas Carol" will be running this holiday season in downtown Greenville: In addition to S.C. Children's Theatre, Greenville Little Theatre is reviving its popular stage version of the tale, beginning on Dec. 9.

To set the mood for S.C. Children's Theatre production, Bisson will have her actors, in full Dickensian character, greet audience members as they arrive.

All Children's Theatre productions have a strong educational component, and Bisson has been working on accents to help her young cast understand class differences in Victorian England.

"The class distinctions are fairly critical to the play," Bisson says. "You have the upper class and lower class. It's an important part of Dickens' writing. It's difficult to show that unless you use dialects to define the characters."

She has her cast adopting three different accents: standard British, cockney and even Irish-tinged.

Her young actors are having little trouble with the dialects, Bisson says.

"They're quicker than adults," she says.

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