

REVIEW

Tennessee Rep's 'A Christmas Story' Still Holiday Treat

By: Evans Donnell, *ArtNowNashville.com*

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The third edition of Tennessee Repertory Theatre's *A Christmas Story* still provides as much fun as those Bumpus hounds had chasing The Old Man every chance they got.

Director Lauren Shouse knows this show has quickly become a holiday touchstone for Nashville theatregoers. She and her colleagues have insured that Phillip Grecian's stage adaptation of Jean Shepherd's yuletide tale is just what folks have come to know and love.

As I noted when I reviewed the show in 2009, the memorable moments from the classic 1983 motion picture are part of the proceedings: Flick getting his tongue stuck on the telephone pole, The Old Man lighting the furnace and fending off those hounds, Ralphie's campaign for a Red Ryder BB gun and, of course, the embarrassingly funny pink bunny suit.

But there's more to it than just a live blow-by-blow of those familiar plot points. Grecian's script draws on Shepherd's inspiration to include a schoolgirl crush on Ralphie, a battle in ballet as The Old Man's major award creates conflict between him and Ralphie's mother and a python hunt.

Just as in past years the audience gets in to the fun with various responses and even a few onstage appearances. That's what really makes this theatre version click – it is interactive fun for children of all ages.

Samuel Whited is once again a terrific and believable combination of present-day adult narrator Ralph and Ralphie the 1940 child. Andrew Kanies remains a riot as Ralphie's brother Randy among other parts; Jamie Farmer's sweet Mother and (in another role) precocious classmate Helen Weathers is another return delight.

Tennessee Rep has been fortunate to have two wonderfully gifted actors play The Old Man. The first year it was Jeff Boyet; in 2010 and 2011 David Compton has played the part. Compton handles the bluster and fluster of his main part excellently, reaching his peak in the aforementioned ballet as The Old Man fights to defend his beloved leg lamp to the music of Tchaikovsky. I write "main" because he also has a very funny turn as Ralph's teacher Miss Shields.

Eric D. Pasto-Crosby deftly manages the transition between nasty bully Scut Farkus and romantically inclined schoolgirl Esther Jane Alberry; and David Wilkerson as Flick and Peter Vann as Schwartz, among their multiple roles, add to the enjoyment.

Goldblatt's Department Store comes alive again with the return of Gary C. Hoff's storefront set. Michael Barnett's lively lighting and Trish Clark's period costumes are welcome returnees as well.

So, if you haven't been to Tennessee Rep's take on *A Christmas Story* in the past three years, you should go. If you have, I encourage a return. The show remains a highly humorous and heart-warming way to celebrate the season.

Tennessee Repertory Theatre's presentation of A Christmas Story continues through Dec. 22 at Tennessee Performing Arts Center's Johnson Theater (505 Deaderick St.). Tennessee Rep will be collecting gift cards from PetSmart, Wal-Mart, and other pet-related stores to be donated to Nashville Humane Association for shelter supply needs throughout the year. Gift cards can be dropped in the designated location in the lobby of Johnson Theater. A portion of ticket sales will be donated to Nashville Humane Association when using the promo code BUMPUSHOUNDS. For times, tickets and more information please visit www.tennesseerep.org.