

Ross Petty's Christmas Carol panto gives us a Scrooge we can cheer as well as boo

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A Christmas Carol: The Family Musical with a Scrooge Loose!



Cyrus Lane as Scrooge and Dan Chameroy as Plumbum, who portrays the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future in Ross Petty Productions' A Christmas Carol: The Family Musical With a Scrooge Loose! (RACHEAL MCCAIG)

Written by Matt Murray and Jeremy Diamond. Directed and choreographed by Tracey Flye. Until Dec. 31 at the Elgin Theatre, 189 Yonge St. RossPetty.com or 1-855-599-9090

The chorus of boos for the annual Ross Petty-produced pantomime were met by “Bah” as it returned to the Elgin Theatre for the 22nd time this week.

This year, the company has adapted Charles Dickens' [holiday favourite](#) *A Christmas Carol*, with villain Scrooge and his iconic "Bah humbug."

Since Petty retired from performing in the annual panto he seems more willing than ever to mess with tradition and the stories we think we know.

This adaptation, written by Matt Murray and Jeremy Diamond, is completely irreverent while sometimes veering into totally bonkers territory: Scrooge (a clownish Cyrus Lane, a wonderful comedic turn from this traditionally dramatic actor) runs a company that profits off virtually every element of Christmas.

In exchange for his release from his lifetime contract as Scrooge's assistant, Bob Cratchit (panto favourite Eddie Glen, in his 15th production) turns his invention of the highly addictive game Christmas Crush into another money-making scheme.

The move drives another employee, Jane (the ever impressive [AJ Bridel](#), returning after starring as [Sleeping Beauty](#) last year), to go on strike, where she meets the sweet wrapper (not be confused with rapper) with a secret, Jack (Kyle Golemba).

To save his soul from damnation, Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his former boss Jacob Marley (David Lopez, channelling the Jamaican vibes of Bob) and the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future, all played by perennial standout Plumbum (Dan Chameroy).

Murray and Diamond don't make it particularly easy to keep up between the A, B, and C plots while also commenting on screen addiction, modern politics and the gender wage gap, along with the odd Trump joke, Plumbum pratfall and infectious group dance number to a chart-topping pop hit (choreographed by director Tracey Flye).

The triple-threat talent from this cast is some of the strongest we've seen in a Petty panto across the board. Bridel consistently rocks with her vocal acrobatics and charm, and Chameroy continues to balance the ridiculous physicality and speech of Plumbum with a strong musical theatre performance.

It helps, also, to know that the cast is in on the joke. Alluding to previous productions, making self-aware jibes at plot holes or absurdities, and calling out actors who break or make mistakes is not only in keeping with the panto tradition; it makes for some of the most lighthearted, joyous moments onstage.

What's most interesting about *A Christmas Carol* as a Petty panto is not necessarily its twisting of the original story but the changing role of the villain. Instead of just gleefully booing his presence and rooting for his downfall — the kids at opening night knew by instinct that this was their main mission — we cheer on his redemption.

Morally complex characters are, clearly, not inherent hindrances to story. But in a form that plays with extremes between good and bad as pantomime does, it might take a little of the fun out of it. On opening night, there was one major signifier of Scrooge's transition from villain to hero: his decision to pay Jane as much as Bob drew the biggest cheers from the crowd across all ages, just as their unequal salaries had drawn the biggest boos.

This *Carol* might poke fun at kids' addictions to their phones, but at least they seem to be keeping up with the news.