

British Theatre Guide

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A Christmas Carol

Book and lyrics by Ben Horslen and John Risebero based on the novel by Charles Dickens,
music by Christopher Peake

Antic Disposition

Middle Temple Hall

22–30 December 2012

The City of London's magnificent and venerable Middle Temple Hall is an especially fitting setting for an adaptation of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. It's not just because of the pertinence that Dickens himself would have sat working where we sit to watch the performance, but because the very walls of the place seem to ooze the loftiness and plenitude which we see in Ebenezer Scrooge.

In a book that often borrows directly from the original text, this Scrooge is not victim to expurgation or Disnification but curmudgeonly in extreme: uncharitable both to the needy in practical terms and to everyone in spirit, he wishes humourlessly that anyone who says 'Merry Christmas' "should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart".

Acutely aware of the plight of the destitute, and no doubt with a view to pricking the conscience of the wealthy as well as to entertain them, Dickens engineers an uncomfortable redemption for Scrooge, first with the visit of the ghost of his business partner who tells him of the "incessant torture of remorse", and then the revelatory manifestations of Christmases Past, Present and Yet to Come.

In Antic Disposition's musical adaptation of this classic tale, lyrics are almost exclusively set against the music of traditional carols, immediately providing a Christmas setting and comforting familiarity as well as an occasional nugget of wit, with adaptations like "tidings of humbug and gloom". On the whole the mix of old and new comes off to very good effect, and musical director Carole Carpenter gets some lovely sounds from the ensemble, whose singing is generally more successful than individual vocal performances in a venue that, although stunning, brings with it some issues of sound balancing.

Co-directed by Ben Horslen and John Risebero, who also designs, and well-lit by Howard Hudson, this Christmas Carol has some atmospheric moments as well as the predictably affecting ones such as Tiny Tim singing to his family, and of course their mourning his passing in a Christmas Yet to Come.

Tony Bell gives an equally enjoyable performance as niggardly Scrooge as he does post-transformation and a strong performance too from Haydn Oakley as Bob Cratchit. Tiny Tim was played on press night by Ewan Guthrie making a charming professional debut.

This is Antic Disposition's third production at Middle Temple Hall, following [A Midsummer Night's Dream](#) earlier in this year and *The Tempest* in 2011, and I hope they will be back. It's a terrific venue and the company has the knack of presenting this very well known tale without dumbing it

down or finger wagging, so it makes a point about poverty and wealth that resonates today, which is all the stronger for not being played.

Reviewer: [Sandra Giorgetti](#)