

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

as told by Jacob Marley (Deceased)

Adapted and Directed by James Hyland

Brother Wolf Productions

Performed at the White Bear Theatre, Kennington, 23 December 2023.

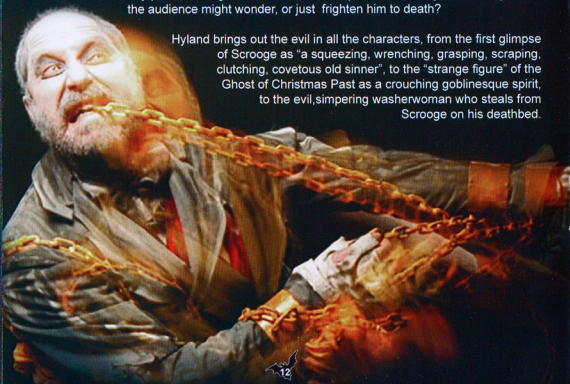
James Hyland gives a masterly one-man portrayal of the much-loved Charles Dickens Christmas classic as a livewire, otherworldly performance.

Far from a cosy tale of festive redemption, this is Charles Dickens in ghost story extraordinaire mode. Our 2022 Hamilton Deane Award winner, James Hyland, who also directs and produces; plays every character with no other prop than a wooden chair on a bare stage, and gives full range to all the disturbing characters Dickens created in the 1843 novella.

Costume and make-up designer Nicki Martin-Harper ensures Hyland's dramatic entrance as Jacob Marley's Ghost is made in true Gothic spooktacular style. Coloured a deathly grey,

Marley sports white contact lenses, which give an accurate representation of the book's description of the phantom's glare at Scrooge, delivered with "the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes". His outfit is a triumph of Victorian decayed grandeur; he is harnessed with a chain which Dickens imagined as being made from "cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds and heavy purses wrought in steel". Has Marley arrived to enlighten Scrooge, the audience might wonder, or just frighten him to death?

Hyland brings out the evil in all the characters, from the first glimpse of Scrooge as "a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner", to the "strange figure" of the Ghost of Christmas Past as a crouching goblinsque spirit, to the evil, simpering washerwoman who steals from Scrooge on his deathbed.



He portrays the protagonist as not just the famous caricature of grumpiness, but a human. Scrooge first weeps to see a vision of himself as a lonely boy and pities his "poor forgotten self"; and then later sees himself as a young man enjoying his work party, surrounded by former workmates who were "very much attached" to him.

Hyland also draws the audience into the play rather than simply performs to them (as when a front row patron accidentally dropped their iPhone, and got a cheerful wink from Hyland as acknowledgement for the inadvertent interruption).

This is the famous festive tale by Charles Dickens re-told as a frantic, funny, and livewire performance, with James Hyland glittering through milky irises at a spellbound audience.

Nina Romain

