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All is right with the world in SMP's 'A Christmas Story'

Posted by Carl Kozlowski | Nov 22, 2017 | 0 🗨️ |



There are few pop culture phenomena that have placed such a unique hold on the American radar as the classic 1983 film "A Christmas Story." Following a young boy named Ralphie growing up in 1940 Indiana who is obsessed with owning a Red Ryder BB gun, yet faces unimaginable comedic obstacles along the way, the movie has become an annual tradition for millions watching it during its annual 24-hour marathon on the TBS cable network each Christmas Day.

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DEC

4

Mon

(https://www.pasadenaweekly.com/calendar/action~oneday/exact_date~12-4-2017/)

7:00 pm

Book Signings at Vroman's @ Vroman's Bookstore (https://www.pasadenaweekly.com/event/book-signings-vromans/?instance_id)

The film's improbable fate as a beloved classic is a surprising result for a movie that was only a minor hit upon its initial release, earning just \$19 million in theaters. But with its annual TV showings propelling it to monster popularity, the simple story — based on the real-life misadventures of humorous essayist Jean Shepherd — has gone on to be adapted as a hit Broadway musical and now, as a non-musical stage play by the Sierra Madre Playhouse.

“It’s actually a show that I’ve been trying to get for awhile, and the reaction since we announced we were going to do it has been tremendous,” says Playhouse Artistic Director Christian Lebano, who helms the production. “People have been buying tickets since September, because they’re really excited about the show. It’s a huge show, with the biggest set we’ve ever made, crafted by a terrific set designer named Charles Ervin. There are so many different locations in the production, and we’ve solved it all for our little theater.”

“Christmas” was selected as part of the Playhouse’s annual tradition of producing a holiday-themed show. Lebano loves the film, but made it clear to his cast that they were not attempting to recreate the celluloid incarnation of the tale.

Rather, Lebano was attempting to help audiences experience “the longing we all have for the holidays of our youth.” This adaptation, by Philip Grecian, creates a framing device for the play by showing Ralphie as a grown-up narrator throughout the show.

“What attracted me to ‘A Christmas Story,’ and what I want the audience going away having experienced, is the longing we all have for the holidays of our youth,” explains Lebano. “I want the audience at the end to be wiping away a tear as they think of their best Christmases, Hanukkahs or holidays with their family. I’m building a show that’s nostalgic for a time that may never have existed.

“I was a boy in the 1960s, but this play is set in 1940 and I want people younger than me to be nostalgic for the ’70s and ’80s, for those moments where you were together with the family and all is right with the world,” he continues. “And it’s wildly funny. Every favorite moment from the movie is in this stage adaptation, from the flagpole to the ‘Oh, Fudge!’ moment to the soap to ‘You’ll shoot your eye out, kid.’ Every moment that people loved is in the stage adaptation.”

There were a couple of particular challenges to the production, as Lebano had to double-cast all seven of the child characters in the show to avoid overworking them during the production’s 30-show run. In addition, Ervin had to figure out how to include such iconic set elements as Higbee’s Department Store and the Santa leg lamp, a feat that Lebano hopes will help the Playhouse earn a repeat win for the Ovation Award for Best Set Design, following its 2016 triumph for “Deathtrap.”

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DEC

6

Wed

(https://www.pasadenaweekly.com/calendar/action~oneday/exact_date~12-6-2017/)

10:30 am

Book and Holiday Events at Vroman's @ Vroman's Bookstore (https://www.pasadenaweekly.com/event/book-holiday-events-vromans/?instance_id=2836)

8:00 pm

Earnest C. Watson Lecture at Cal... @ Caltech's Beckman Auditorium (https://www.pasadenaweekly.com/event/earnest-c-watson-lecture-caltech/?instance_id=2835)

DEC

7

Thu

(https://www.pasadenaweekly.com/calendar/action~oneday/exact_date~12-7-2017/)

10:00 am

Pasadena History Discussion at P... @ Pasadena Senior Center (<https://www.pasadenaweekly.com/event/pasadena-history-discussion-pasadena->

“Charles came up with this very ingenious idea that there’s this wonderful element in the set that will open up and transform to create Higbee’s and the lamp,” says Lebano. “I’m very excited about it. I’ve always tried to do something that will cause our audience to walk through the door and go ‘Wow’ with our sets.

“I think this will elicit a lot of response. It’s important for me, that a lot of the play is happening in the house so the audience area will be as decorated as the stage,” says Lebano. “It’ll be a very immersive experience. It’s something that’s really important to me, and it’s part of our mission that we put shows in a historical and cultural context — so as you walk in, there will be really wonderful, fun, interactive lobbies and that will continue into the house. This will be the ultimate Christmas experience for our patrons.”

“A Christmas Story” runs through Dec. 31 at the Sierra Madre Playhouse, 87 W. Sierra Madre Blvd., Sierra Madre. Tickets are \$25 to \$36. Call (626) 355-4318 or visit sierramadreplayhouse.org.

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