

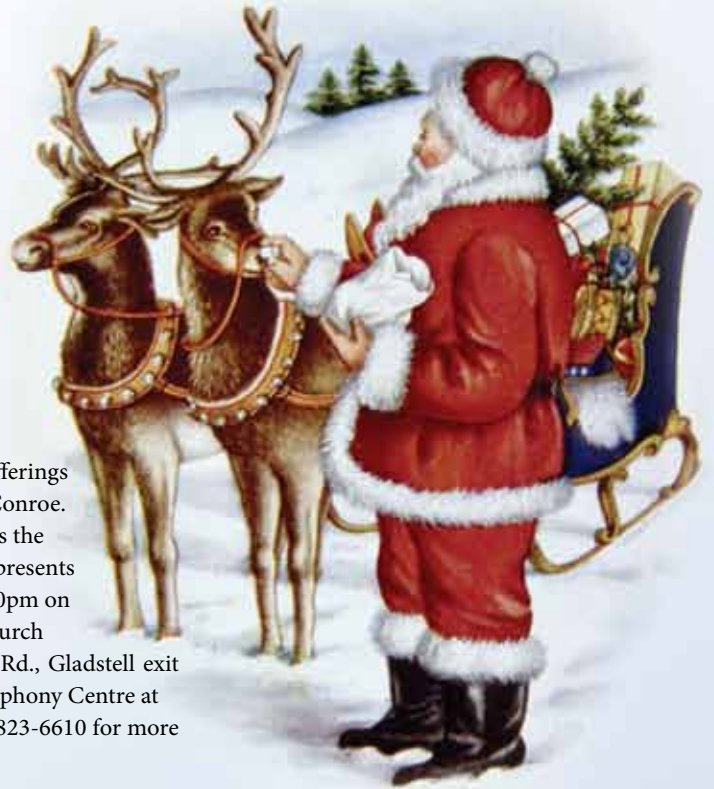
Christmas at the Crighton and Conroe Traditions

By: Patrice Kentimenos

HO, HO, Holy mistletoe Batman! It's Christmas time already?! Well, ready or not, the holiday season is about to pounce on us and our wallets. Stores are filled to the brim with holiday displays, decorations and gift items to get the shopping season started. Thoughts of meals spent round the table with family and friends are filling our heads. Calendars are starting to overload with plans of travel to destinations that help make this time of year special for us.

But before you call that travel agent, be sure

to explore the various - and reasonably priced - seasonal offerings available to you right here in Conroe. Starting off the lineup of events the Conroe Symphony Orchestra presents "A Holiday Celebration" at 7:30pm on November 30th at The Ark Church located on 450 Humble Tank Rd., Gladstell exit off I-45, Conroe. Call the Symphony Centre at 936-760-2144 or toll free 888-823-6610 for more information.



Mr. Scrooge and some hungry kids



Mr. Scrooge bullying Bob Cratchit (Tom Lockhart & Katt Gilcrease)



Mr. & Mrs. Bob Cratchit (Katt Gilcrease & Melissa Singleton)

For you theatre buffs, there's nothing like a nice, juicy Christmas show to get you into the holiday spirit. Conroe's crown jewel, The Crigh-ton Theatre, recently named "Ultimate Venue-Outside The Loop" by the Houston Chronicle, presents STAGE RIGHT's production of "Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge," written by Christopher Durang, directed by Jeff Elkins and beautifully costumed by Meredith Zaritski and Amy Sowers.

The pace is lively and upbeat at the theatre

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these days what with all the holiday preparations and a show in rehearsal incorporating 22 actors! Many of these actors include very young, but very talented persons who will grace the stage during the run of "Mrs. Bob." The theatre itself is gracefully adorned with beautiful wreaths, lights and Christmas trees. If you've never visited the Crighton before, now is the time to do it; the historic building lends itself to the magic of the season as no other theatre in the area does.

Director Jeff Elkins has extensive acting, voiceover and directorial experience across the country including areas such as Hollywood, CA, Pensacola, FL, Houston, TX as well as his native island of Kaua'i, HI. While this is the first time that Jeff has directed at the Crighton, audience members may remember him from Player's productions of M*A*S*H as General Hammond or as the radio announcer Hipockets Duncan from "The Buddy Holly Story." Jeff's talents behind the scenes are well known and respected at both the Owen and Crighton Theatres. Directing a show at the Crighton has been an early Christmas present for Jeff.

However, this ain't yo momma's Christmas show. Dubbed a light-hearted parody of Christmas classics, the premise of this performance is the question, "What if Dickens' Mrs. Cratchit wasn't so goody-goody, but instead was an angry, stressed-out, modern-day American woman who wanted out of her harsh London 1840's life?" Huh? You'll delight in the whirlwind turn of events as the Ghost of Christmas Past/Present/Future escorts Ebenezer Scrooge through a series of botched attempts to get him to the Fezziwig Christmas party in Christmas Past. The Ghost's faltering magic gets Scrooge mixed up in the present-day household of Mrs. Bob Cratchit where we find her crabbily bemoaning her lot in life with her very hungry, yet eternally sunny children ... all 21 of them!

Many veterans of the Crighton stage have come to celebrate the parody of Christmas classics. Katt Gilcrease and Melissa Singleton - the motion study experts in STAGE RIGHT's Cheaper by the Dozen - return as Mr. and Mrs. Bob Cratchit - only this time their large family runs a little less efficiently. Tom Lockhart - who has played Kris Kringle in Miracle on 34th Street and Raynerd Chisum in Christmas Belles - finally gets to play a character everyone loves to hate: the irascible Mr. Scrooge. Mackenzie Goode, last seen in M*A*S*H, Arsenic and Old Lace, and Romeo and Harriet, becomes a very different but unforgettable "Tiny" Tim. Mac Johnson - seen in Christmas Belles waiting for Santa - returns to the stage as an unruly Cratchit kid. Sally Johnson and

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*Clarence the Angel and Zuzu Bailey
(Dan Tippen & Amber Navarra)*

Rayne Brown - no strangers to the stage - play an unconventional young Jacob Marley opposite young Ebenezer Scrooge.

The newcomers to the Crighton stage keep the Christmas spirit alive. Amber Navarra makes her debut on the Crighton stage as an enchanting Zuzu Bailey with her lost petals (that's right of "It's A Wonderful Life" fame). Meredith Zaritski, a versatile singer/comedienne, plays multiple roles in this piece as Mrs. Fezziwig, Hedwig, Mrs. Beadle and Monica from Touched by an Angel. Oriana Lee - Melissa's daughter - gets to join her real mother on stage as a precocious maid. None of these characters make sense in one story without Durang's sense of humor.

The many characters in this Christmas parody - both real and imagined - will keep you in stitches. Kids will enjoy the physical comedy while the adults will enjoy the modern day references to other shows and current events as uproarious allusions are made to pop-culture references such as when Scrooge winds up in the lives of Oliver Twist and Leona Helmsley (I warned you this would be twisted).

"Mrs. Bob" will be presented from December 4th through the 20th. For more information about the show please visit our website

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Tiny Tim and some other Cratchit kids wonder 'what's for dinner'

www.stage-right.org . For those that would like to mingle with the cast and crew after the show, a special holiday party, hosted by Lyn Hawthorne, owner of Classic Consignment & Auction, will take place after the performance on Saturday, December 5th. For more information about the party and to RSVP please send an email to info@stage-right.org.

As always this season, STAGE RIGHT encourages its patrons to bring non-perishable food items to be donated to the Montgomery County Food Bank. We are hoping to hit the 1,000 lbs mark to close out the year. We can all make a difference in helping to make this holiday season a good one for others.

What's Christmas without a parade? Come join the fun in downtown Conroe starting on Friday, December 11th through Sunday, December 13th. The Conroe Christmas Tree lighting will kick off the city's "Christmas in Conroe Celebration!" on Friday at 6pm and the party will last until 10pm. On Saturday, December 12th, the Kiwanis Children's Christmas parade will take place at 1pm in downtown Conroe on Heritage Place to 500 Collins & Metcalf Street, where you'll find Santa Claus, snow ice on the hill, tube sledding (only on Saturday), carriage rides, carnival reindeer games for kids, balloonists, face painters, merry minstrels, dancers and food vendors. All activities will be offered all three days with the exception of the snow and sledding, to be offered on Saturday only. Admission to this event is free, but there will be cost for certain things such as food, carriage rides and caricature artists.

For more information about this event please call the City of Conroe at 936-522-3014 or visit www.cityofconroe.org.

Whatever your preference, there is sure to be an event to please everyone in the family. So here's HO, HO, Hoping that you have a wonderful, safe and blessed Christmas and a very Happy New Year! ♦

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and Safe Holiday**

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