



IN CONVERSATION WITH JAMES BLACK



Skyler Gray, The Alley Theatre's Literary Manager, sat down to speak with James Black, the Alley Theatre's Associate Director and director of **A Christmas Carol**.

SKYLER GRAY: You played Scrooge off and on from 1993-2007 before taking the helm as director to recreate Michael Wilson's production. What was it like to transition from actor to director?



JAMES BLACK: I have to admit, I was a bit trepidatious about directing another actor in a role I had performed for so long. I had a very definitive view of Scrooge's journey through the story and I wasn't certain how receptive I would be to other interpretations. Luckily, I was given the opportunity to work with two tremendously talented performers who were also my friends and colleagues in the acting company: David Rainey and Jeffrey Bean, both of whom taught me about a character I thought I knew inside out.

SG | What excites you most about Michael Wilson's adaptation?

JB | I had the pleasure of working on Michael's inaugural production of this piece here at the Alley in 1990, playing the role of Bert/Spirit of Christmas Present. He has created an imaginative take on the classic story that remains faithful to Dickens yet appeals to the younger members of our audience. Its profound message speaks to people of all ages.

Photo: James Black in *A Christmas Carol*. Photo by T Charles Erickson

SG | **There have been countless adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* for film, stage and television. What do you think it is about *A Christmas Carol* that draws people to the story year after year?**

JB | It's a story of compassion and redemption that is as relevant today as it was in 1843. It touches on what it means to be a human being. Dickens reminds us that a society is made up of individuals, but that society can't thrive or even survive without acknowledging and accepting responsibility for one another.

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SG | **Last year you remounted the production in the newly renovated Hubbard Theatre. Were there aspects of *A Christmas Carol* that changed in the new space?**

JB | I was very excited to remount this production in the new Hubbard Theatre last year. There is a new energy and intimacy in that room that I'm certain will only enhance the audience's experience with this timeless and most human of stories.

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SG | **What is it like to be a part of such a rich Alley tradition?**

JB | It's a wonderfully rich and rewarding experience to be involved with this production each Christmas. Its themes resonate stronger with each subsequent holiday season. It's a rare thing to have this kind of continuity in the theatre with a particular play. This has been a part of my holiday tradition for more than 25 years now. Luckily, it's a story that grows with you, that reveals a bit more each passing year.

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SG | **Do you still learn things about the piece each year?**

JB | An actor's pallette is his life. We have company members who have been a part of this production for many many years. We've had cast members pass away. We've had children born to cast members. We've had those children grow and become cast members themselves. All of that "life" seeps into the performances and the production itself, keeping it refreshed and alive.