

IN CONVERSATION WITH DAVID RAINEY



Several weeks before the start of rehearsals for *A Christmas Carol* the Alley's new Scrooge, David Rainey, sat down with Literary Intern Christian Gill to discuss the play and what it means for him to step into the beloved role.

Christian Gill: How often have you appeared in the Alley's production of *A Christmas Carol*?

David Rainey: I've been in it every year that we've performed it and this is my 19th season at the Alley.

and play them fully, it's a terrific journey. It's a great story of redemption. People have been brought to tears. I've been told by a number of people that they've genuinely been inspired to clean up their lives and be more generous. It's a great story, so that's what I go after.

CG: Is this the first time you've played Scrooge?

DR: A long time ago, I played Scrooge a few years in a row, around 2006-2007. At that time James Black and I alternated playing the role. I've understudied the part most of the years that I've been here and, as an understudy, I've played it a couple of times. I've enjoyed playing Scrooge, I've enjoyed playing Jacob Marley, and mostly I've played the Ghost of Christmas Present.

CG: What is your approach to playing Scrooge?

DR: The way I've always dealt with most acting challenges has been to really look at what the author is trying to do and to put that on the stage. I look at plays like puzzles: it's already complete and now I've got to take all the pieces apart and put them back in order. I did not know this until I played the part, but I think that Scrooge is one of the best roles out there. If you take everything you see in this script, all the places that he goes,

CG: Are there any versions of Scrooge that you've been inspired by?

DR: I'm not the kind of person that ever goes out and tries to find other performances to imitate. Growing up, I knew the general story of *A Christmas Carol*, but I never saw a version of it until I was in the play 19 years ago. I didn't get into acting because I saw other people doing it and felt I wanted to be just like them. I got into acting kind of by accident. I fell in love primarily with the process, I like the idea of taking this puzzle that's already constructed and trying to fill in the blanks. I like getting into the psychology of the character, stepping into their shoes and looking around. So as far as other adaptations go, I still haven't seen a full version of *A Christmas Carol* anywhere other than here. I've certainly watched it here a lot.

CG: Do you have a favorite part of the play?

DR: At the end, after Scrooge has been redeemed and he's on the street,

he runs into Fred and his wife, and asks them to forgive him. He is genuinely remorseful about how he's behaved and he's truly asking forgiveness. That is a moment I personally connect with.

CG: **As the Spirit of Christmas Present you interacted with a lot of our young cast. Do you have any fond memories?**

DR: Well, every year when you do the play, you have kids that come back to perform again. It doesn't always happen, but it's always nice when the kids are really, really thrilled to see you. I remember one year when, and I won't say who it was, she was a tiny little thing and first day of rehearsal she started running all the way across the room to give me a huge hug. And those moments feel good. The kids don't know how important that is to reach out and hold your hand. When you can see that they're thrilled to be here, that they're having so much fun being a part of this process, well, that makes a person feel good. That makes me feel good.

CG: **Can you talk about the relationship between Mrs. Dilber and Scrooge?**

DR: Different people play it different ways. Most of the time people play it that Dilber just likes the dude badly. So, I always try to treat Dilber a lot like Bob Cratchit, somebody who stuck with Scrooge because they cared about him. Maybe she felt sorry for him, maybe she felt a sense of responsibility for him. Who stays with people that are really horrible? Usually people that are trying to help them. So, then, it kind of makes sense when the tables turn and Scrooge becomes a very open, generous person, that this person can say "this is what I always wanted you to be." She's played by David Mantranga this year. I haven't had a chance to do any

acting with David because he's been an understudy and the times that he's gone on I haven't been in any scenes with him. So, it'll be exciting to see him. For both of us, it'll be a new adventure.

CG: **Why do you think *A Christmas Carol* continues to resonate with audiences?**

DR: I would say the reason people keep coming is because it's just really well constructed and it tells a terrific story about redemption. It's endured because of how impactful the story is, in so many ways, to an audience. I have to say this, too. *A Christmas Carol* often gets treated as this cash cow show and I'm proud of the fact that the Alley doesn't do that. When people come to see a version of *A Christmas Carol*, this really is one of the best. I think that's a testament to the professionalism of this organization and the people that are part of it. I just think that, here, they value stories, they value what the story can do for people. I'm really proud of my part in all of that. It's not only a big production with great costumes and a great set and a great concept, but it's also meaningful. It's not just a holiday tradition. So, if there's any way I can help strengthen that, that's what I'm going to do.



David Rainey as the Spirit of Christmas Present. Photo by Lynn Lane.