



Terry Prince and some of the cast of A Christmas Carol

Company planning a mean Scrooge

DICKENS' classic tale of human redemption and festive joy **A Christmas Carol** is the Company of Ten's Christmas production at the Abbey Theatre in St Albans.

One of Dickens' greatest creations, Ebenezer Scrooge, lurks tight-fisted, avaricious and miser at the start of

the story to become transformed into a generous open-hearted benefactor who has learnt the great lesson of life by the end.

The mean old money-lender is played by Company of Ten stalwart Terry Prince who has acted and directed for the Company of Ten since 1968

and has directed a number of Dickens' plays including *Nicholas Nickleby*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and last season's successful production of *David Copperfield*.

He will be supported by a cast of more than 20 playing the rich mix of characters which are instrumental in the

story of A Christmas Carol.

The show, dramatised by Anthony Peters, runs from December 16 to 28 and tickets are £8-£10 with under 16s £5. Performances are at 2.30pm, 5.30pm and 7.30pm and for further details go to 01727 857861 or online at www.abbeytheatre.org.uk

Lightening the gloom of Sisters

HAVING seen Chekhov's **Three Sisters** several times on the local stage, I have always come away with the view that while it is a stunning piece of writing, it is unremittably gloomy.

But the latest version performed by OVO at their new theatre in Pudding Lane, St Albans, actually has a stab at bringing some humour into the darkness.

And for that if nothing else Imogen de la Bere, who directs and adapts the play, should take a bow because it is a play which benefits from being lifted in places.

The story of the eponymous Three Sisters who yearn to return to Moscow is well known and regarded by many as Chekhov's masterpiece.

As Imogen says in her programme notes, there is a strong sense of ambivalence in Chekhov's script and we never really know whether or not they achieve their wish although the presumption is that they don't.

She has amassed a strong cast who capture that uncertainty about the future of the sisters perfectly. Anna Franklin, one of St Albans' best actresses, takes the pivotal role of Masha who is married to Kuligin - played by Kieran Cummins who brings the much-needed element of humour into the production - and in love with David Widdowson's dashing Vershiin.

Alison Wright as Olga and Jo Mills as Irina are both good value in their roles and the trio dominate the play as they should, playing their parts particularly strongly as they react to the fire which destroys so much of their town.

By contrast to the sisters, Jo Emery is a strong-willed and determined Natasha, married to their brother, Will Franklin's wishy washy Andre.

I also particularly liked Dewi Williams in the role of the drunkard Chebutikin and the strait-laced Soliony, played by Edmund White.

It is hard to write confidently about an adaptation unless you know the original well enough to contrast the two but there is no doubt that Imogen has succeeded in producing a version of the classic which Chekhov would have approved of. She has certainly succeeded in making it far more timeless than the original which was set in nineteenth century Russia and although it is still clearly a Russian play, it feels far more applicable to the human condition in general rather than just in a particular time and place.

Tickets are still available for performances tonight (Thursday) and tomorrow. They are £12.50 with concessions £7.50, available from the box office on 07807 521436 or online at www.ovo.org.uk

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