

Ghostlight Theatre Takes on a Movable "Christmas Carol"

Written by Jill Walsh

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Preparing for a show in the location the set pieces are constructed, rehearsals held, and technical adjustments made is the easiest way to ensure the fluidity of all theatrical aspects as performance time approaches. But often a single working space is not at the disposal of theatre groups without permanent performance residence.

Such is the case for Ghostlight Theatre's holiday undertaking, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. The play has been rehearsed for weeks in hallways and on-stage at Davenport North High School but will be produced during the next two weekends at the Capitol Theatre in downtown Davenport. While the set (which director Melissa Coulter describes as a "big honkin' one") was constructed at North, the pieces were hauled and re-assembled at The Capitol on November 22 by five union workers and about one-third of the *Christmas Carol* cast. That same afternoon, lighting and sound technicians, as well as the stage manager and director, conducted a dry technical run, testing all lights and sound effects without actors on stage. In the evening, actors and technical crew ran a Q to Q (cue to cue), in which lighting and sound cues are tested for timing coordinated with actors' lines.

As complicated as this might seem, Coulter says this quick transition occurs quite often in theatre. She said she finds this process fascinating and explained that while watching a set being constructed and moved, she is often "intrigued by the techniques used to create that theatrical magic." That's why Coulter decided to trace it through digital photography. She recorded images of the building, painting, raising, disassembly, moving, and re-assembly of the set so "even non-theatre folk would be delighted to be taken on this backstage tour and let in on the trade secrets."

Set designer Mike King and technical director Jason Gabriel have previously participated in the building and moving of set pieces from one location to another. With *A Christmas Carol*, though,

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the biggest roadblock was the limited time and space the crew had to build, since shop hours at North High were limited and priority was given to the school's theatrical projects.

King's and Gabriel's previous experience contributed to the success of the construction of small set pieces because they were aware those sections would have to be fairly compact and easy to move. "So," King explained, "we built them like jigsaw puzzle pieces that could be taken apart and put together fairly quickly."

In addition to a quick move and re-assembly of the set, actors had to adapt and familiarize themselves with the new acoustic levels and performance stage of the Capitol. It was also difficult for the lighting and sound designers, who were not familiarized with the Capitol's technical capabilities or level of accessibility until the Saturday before the show opened.

Everyone appears optimistic, despite the time squeeze and stress levels, and Ghostlight is even undertaking the same set construction/transportation task with the spring musical, *Gilligan's Island*

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A Christmas Carol will be performed on November 26, 27, and 28, and December 2, 3, 4, and 5. For tickets or more information, visit (<http://www.ghostlighttheatre.org>).