

TAKE THE STAGE

A Dickens of a Classic Morphs Into Kean's Hilarious *Humbug*



By SUSAN M. DOUGHERTY  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

UNION - The perennial Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is done to death at this time of year.

Freshness to the rescue: John Wooten, producing artistic director of Premiere Stages, the professional Actor's Equity Association theater-in-residence program at Kean University, offers his own contemporary adaptation called *Humbug*.

The twist on the Victorian classic hinges on a modern day setting with Eleanor Scrooge, a ruthless, ambitious Wall Street executive working late on Christmas Eve.

"I started writing it [*Humbug*] non-stop in November," Mr. Wooten said. "Anytime you're trying something for the first time," he explained, "you have to be ready to rewrite."

Watching the creative exchange between director and actors proved to be quite enlightening when I sat in on a recent rehearsal.

Playwright as well as producer/director, Mr. Wooten is a man who listens to his actors. "I'm confused about this one line, John," one actor confesses and together they tweak it on the spot.

A director—a good one—explains motivation and reaction to his actors. If he is the "adaptor" of the original work as well as the director, he's interpreting his own words.

Mr. Wooten is considerate and respectful of the 13 equity and non-equity actors in the show.

"I feel disconnected from her [Eleanor] over here," states one ghostly character. "Can I move to the corner of the desk?"

"Sure, the desk will have a big lip

on it," Mr. Wooten responds. There's no big ego thing here: the director listens, assesses the suggestion or comment and then makes a decision for the good of the work.

"Start from 'Boo,'" instructs the writer/director/producer of *Humbug*, which will run for five performances, December 14 to 17 at the Wilkins Theater at Kean University on Morris Avenue in Union.

The "ghosts" in Wooten's version of the oh-so-familiar play are called "advisors."

The Ghost (advisor) of Christmas Present, Andrea Biachi, offers Eleanor a cup that "makes all who drink it charitable and generous." In her perfect cockney accent, Biachi quips in an aside, "It's going to take more than a couple of sips for you, love."

I suspect that the adult audiences will giggle with delight at much of the fast-paced, witty dialogue and the children will be enthralled by the clever theatrical presentation.

Oh yes, there IS a diminutive Tim in this adaptation. No limping here, though. Timmy needs his heart (his "tick tock") fixed. And this Bobbie Cratchet's son is not just dreaming about a roast goose for Christmas.

Like most kids today, he wants Santa to get him a trip to Disneyworld.

The play's contemporary setting is a recognizable world with single parenting, poor health insurance plans and even a catastrophic corporate takeover.

"Through it all, it's an uplifting story for the whole family," Mr. Wooten explains.

And that's no humbug.



G-RATED...Dan Higgins as Jacob Marley and Jean Toller as Eleanor Scrooge confer with writer/producer/director John Wooten, right, of Premiere Stages' Christmas special *Humbug*. The modern day adaptation remains true to the heart of Charles Dickens' classic, "A Christmas Carol." The family oriented show runs in Wilkins Theater at Kean University from December 14 to 17; Thursday and Friday nights at 7 and 2 p.m., respectively, and 8 p.m. on Saturday, with the Sunday matinee at 3 p.m. For ticket pricing, call (908) 737-SHOW.

PGNJ Breaks Records At Recent Mtside Sale

By MARYLOU MORANO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

MOUNTAINSIDE - Decorative and functional vases, bowls, pitchers and platters were just a few of the ceramic items offered for sale recently at the Potters' Guild of New Jersey (PGNJ) Holiday Show and Sale.

The event, which was held at the Community Presbyterian Church in Mountainide, broke all previous sales records, according to PGNJ president, Judith Musican, of Mountainide.

"Our customers, old and new, recognized the phenomenal quality of the work offered, and pieces just flew off the shelves," said Ms. Musican.

"We are most appreciative of our loyal customers, and of the [Community Presbyterian] church, which has been our home for the past several years," she said.

"The PGNJ's Bi-annual sale provided the means for 25 artisans to publicly exhibit their work and show the world what they're made of," said Nancy Zarbock, Director of Marketing for the PGNJ, and proprietor of "Art and Antiques" in Pittstown.

"Sales are up as more people continue to invest in the arts."

Ms. Zarbock showed her collection of raku pottery at this year's Holiday Show and Sale. Raku is pottery created by a firing process that deliberately produces unique surfaces.

One of the highlights of this year's show was a demonstration of the use of the potters' wheel by DeBorah Goletz, co-secretary of the PGNJ and proprietor of "For Love Of Mud Pottery" in West Milford.

In addition to being a potter, Ms.

Goletz, the author of "Ceramic Art Tile" is a ceramic muralist whose work has been featured in pottery publications and private collections for more than 20 years.

Her public art murals appear throughout the country, including the New York subway system.

River Edge potter Itsuko Ishiguro, showed contemporary artwork infused with a sense of her Japanese background.

Her pottery consists of interesting and unusual shapes and surfaces, which she accomplishes by employing a unique technique of cutting off and adding on to the original thrown pieces.

Potter Ilene Olanoff of Randolph showed functional pottery that boasted a southwest feel in color and texture. Her pottery has been exhibited in Michigan as well as New Jersey.

According to Ms. Zarbock, PGNJ was founded in 1987 to promote the development of New Jersey's ceramic artists.

Its current membership of approximately 75 individuals is committed to serving the ceramic artists and potters in the greater New Jersey area, while raising the awareness of the ceramic arts within the communities of the state through education, networking, sales and marketing opportunities. The PGNJ membership includes professional and recreational potters, as well as educators and students.

The organization also helps obtain scholarships and provides other educational services to its members.

For more information about PGNJ, or to become a member, go to pottersguildnj.org.



Nancy Zarbock's raku pottery



BO-ZONE DEFENSE...Pictured are the participants in "The Seventh Annual Turkey Day Bozo Bowl" played in the mud Thanksgiving Day at Washington School. Pictured, from left to right, are the following Bozos: Nick Fusaro, Claire Bennett, Brendan Berkowitz, Luke Grandstrand, Gus Gibbons, Matt Shaeffer, Nick Brennan, Evan Eisenberg, Vince FitzPatrick (co-organizer), Jimmy Bender, Neil FitzPatrick (co-organizer), Mike Tannenbaum, Kaitlyn Burke, Lauren Brachman (hidden), Max Lazar, Ian Devaney, Jimmy Boyle, Andy Castararo, Liam McIlheney, Henry Kaye, Evan McIlheney, Dan Markowski, Mark Reimlinger, Greg O'Brien and Benny Maimon.

PUBLIC NOTICE

UNION COUNTY BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS NOTICE OF CONTRACT AWARD Date Adopted: 11/30/06

Public Notice is hereby given that the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders has awarded a contract without competitive bidding as a Professional Service pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40A:11-5(1)(a)(i). This contract and the resolution authorizing it are available for public inspection in the Office of the Clerk of the Board.

RESOLUTION NO: 2006-1120 AWARDED TO: Specialty Medical Consultants.

SERVICE: to provide services to the patients/residents of the at Runnells Specialized Hospital

PERIOD: January 1, 2007-December 31, 2007

COSTS: for in an amount of \$6,500. Nicole L. DiRado Clerk of the Board of Freeholders 1 T - 12/7/06, The Leader Fee: \$21.42

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RESOLUTION NO: 2006-1131 AWARDED TO: Greenman-Pedersen, Inc., Lebanon, New Jersey.

SERVICE: for the purpose of providing the final phase (PHASE III) of the ongoing Bridge Management and Culvert Inspection Project

PERIOD: December 1, 2006- November 30, 2007

COSTS: in an amount of \$286,000 for a new contract amount of \$586,000 Nicole L. DiRado Clerk of the Board of Freeholders 1 T - 12/7/06, The Leader Fee: \$22.95

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PUBLIC NOTICE

BOROUGH OF FANWOOD PLANNING BOARD

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that on Wednesday, December 20, 2006, at 7:30 P.M. in the lower level meeting room of the Fanwood Borough Hall, located at 75 North Martine Avenue, Fanwood, New Jersey, Fanwood Plaza Partners, LLC and The 313 South Avenue Condominium Association, Inc. will apply to the Fanwood Planning Board for final site plan approval with variances for a branch bank and child care center on property located at 314, 324 & 328 South Avenue, Fanwood, New Jersey, being Block 91, Lots 3, 4 & 5 and to authorize a parking plan that also involves the existing office building and assisted living facility at 295 & 313 South Avenue, being Block 66, Lots 6 & 9.

Preliminary site plan approval was granted by the Board on September 27, 2006 and memorialized on November 15, 2006.

Documents pertaining to this application are available for public inspection at Borough Hall during normal business hours.

Any interested party may appear at said hearing and participate therein in accordance with the rules of the Fanwood Planning Board.

Attorney for Applicants: Robert H. Kraus, Esq. Leib, Kraus, Grispin & Roth 328 Park Avenue, PO Box 310 Scotch Plains, New Jersey 07076-0310 1 T - 12/7/06, The Times Fee: \$31.62



POPCORN™

Déjà Vu: Have Time Machine, will Travel

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

By MICHAEL GOLDBERGER  
3 popcorns

If you think you've seen *Déjà Vu* before, odds are you're referencing any of several science fiction films produced over the years, all positing the same theoretical question. It's a venerable favorite of the genre: If we were to go back in time, could we alter events, twist the hands of fate, so to speak?

Given a new coat of paint by writers Bill Marsilli and Terry Rossio, filmmaker Tony Scott's durable variation on the theme entertainingly proffers its answer by shipping ATF agent Doug Carlin (Denzel Washington) into the past. He's to thwart a terrorist from blowing up a ferry carrying 543 folks...a few days ago. We root him on as if our own destiny depended on it.

And we do it at seat's edge, chomping on our popcorn for dear life. The action-packed, one-two punch provided by producer Jerry Bruckheimer and director Scott practically makes us forget that the adventure is entirely fanciful. Last time we checked, journeying into yesterday was still the stuff of fiction.

Not that the geeks at the FBI who recruit Denzel's super sleuth care to admit their cutting edge breakthrough. True, everything on their magical monitors seems to resemble the way things were exactly four days and six hours ago. Still, they're all hush, hush about it, preferring euphemisms and techno-speak to explain the unfathomable images they're able to channel.

In fact, they've no initial intention of making Doug a time traveler. That's a no-no. Rather, agent Pryzwarra (Val Kilmer) and his elite nerd colleague, Denny, whimsically etched by Adam Goldberg, just want the detective to piece together clues from their pictures; they'll take it from there.

But then, through whatever wizardry his newfound pals are wielding, Doug meets Claire Kuchever (Paula Patton), in a manner of speaking. She's counted among the fatalities. Curious thing is, her untimely

death is, well, just that. The chronology doesn't make sense. It could be a key to the whole shebang.

Reminiscent of the way Dana Andrews's detective Mark McPherson became obsessed with "Laura" (1944), Doug is clearly smitten. Practically a voyeur in his phantasmagoric examination of Paula's apartment, an overwhelming angst takes hold.

So, being the perspicacious pro that he is, Doug politely calls out his new pals on their gobbledygook. They're clearly looking backwards, and he's getting more nostalgic by the minute. If anyone deserves saving, it's this perfect apple of his eye. In other words, just give me the ball, coach. Of course, he'll save the other 542 souls while he's at it.

The usual moral/scientific tug of war takes place. Meanwhile, adding another hackneyed convention for those whose cinema proclivities lean more toward love than war, the evolving romance supplies *Déjà Vu* with an appealingly gooey center.

What better way to woo a gal than to rescue her from oblivion? That could put him in her good graces for, oh, at least two weeks.

Not that it's going to be easy. The adventure yarn that ensues is touch and go all the way. Adding a synergistic tension to the excitement, Doug must not only locate and stop the terrorist (James Caviezel), but also convince incredulous parties of his impossible mission.

Hence, faith and fate engagingly intertwine in the unfolding of the tale's big supposition. But it all relies on this question: "What if you had to tell someone the most important thing in the world, but you knew they'd never believe you?" In keeping with the movie's inherent irony, you'll hear it asked twice.

Sure, it's all chimera. But in the case of this particular chimera, the sci-fi philosophy combined with the time-defying intrepidity presents the conjecture with such sweepingly optimistic sentiment that a suspension of disbelief is established in, well, practically no time at all.

Playing no small part in this captivating formula is Mr. Washington's long-established credibility and confidence-inspiring repute. As with great leading men before him, we've little doubt of his altruism and competence.

A solid supporting performance by Miss Patton as the winsome gal seals the deal. While Messrs. Kilmer and Goldberg as Doug's unconventional corner men provide just the right note of whimsy.

But just in case non-stop excitement and the predestination paradox aren't quite enough to occupy your gray matter, there's the microcosmic metaphor to mull. You see, like the Black Plague and the wrath of the Norsemen before him, the villain is frighteningly real, right down to the frustrating, self-righteousness of his mangled reasoning.

Granted, vicariously fighting this latest scourge won't end the threat he represents. Nonetheless, as an exercise in hope, *Déjà Vu* reminds that civilization has been challenged before and, in each instance, stood the test of time, time and time again.

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*Déjà Vu*, rated PG-13, is a Touchstone Picture's release directed by Tony Scott and stars Denzel Washington, Paula Patton and Adam Goldberg. Running time: 128 minutes.

Christmas Luminary Sale Begins Saturday, Dec. 9

FANWOOD - The Fanwood-Scotch Plains Rotary Club will begin its annual luminary sale on Saturday, December 9, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Fanwood Municipal Garage on Manfra Way, across from Fanwood Memorial Library at Tillotson Road and North Avenue.

Luminary candles are contained in paper bags that are placed outdoors along a sidewalk or driveway on Christmas Eve to symbolically light the way to Bethlehem.

The Fanwood-Scotch Plains Rotary Club volunteers will sell candle kits on the weekends of December 9 and 10, December 16 and 17 and December 23 and 24 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Each candle "kit" costs 50 cents and contains one candle, a paper bag and sand.

The public can join neighbors in lighting homes on Christmas Eve with the candlelight display that adds beauty to this season. All proceeds from the sale of candles will go to charities supported by the Fanwood-Scotch Plains Rotary Club.

The club also will accept non-perishable, packaged food for distribution to the local food pantry.

For more information about the luminary sale, call Neil Schembre at (908) 889-9500.

Workshop Offers Gift Certificates for Holidays

WESTFIELD - The New Jersey Workshop for The Arts (NJWA), this holiday season, offers gift certificates that could be given to initiate a new musical interest or foster a talent that already exists.

Gift certificates can be issued in any financial amount. They may be used for instrumental or vocal music lessons, for both children and adults, at the Music Studio. Another option is enrolling in a four or five-year-old in the Kids "n' Arts program, where youngsters can experience art, music and theater crafts.

Budding pianists may be excited to begin piano lessons in Kids on Keys, a program which helps children learn the fundamentals of playing the piano, using the Musique Rapide system.

The gift certificate can also be used for lessons, for those ages 10 to adult, in the Westfield Fencing Club or for children, from pre-school to grade 12, to attend the Westfield Summer Workshop, where they can participate in arts, crafts, communications, dance, drama, music and musical theater.

This gesture may be used to give students a positive stage experience in one of the two NJWA drama workshops, Musical Theater and Creative Drama and Performance.

Gift certificates are available year-round at the NJWA studios at 150-152 East Broad Street in Westfield. Those interested can call (908) 789-9696 for more information and visit NJWA, at njworkshopforthearts.com.

Due Sorelle a Big Hit At Juxtapose Trunk Sale

By MARYLOU MORANO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD - Westfield's Juxtapose Gallery recently held a trunk sale featuring one of its most stylish and fashionable jewelry lines, Due Sorelle designs.

As with previous trunk sales, Due Sorelle's long, wrap-around necklaces were one of the most popular items.

The necklaces are 38 inches long and can be worn singly or wrapped around the neck for a double-stranded look.

This year's designs included necklaces studded with coin pearls and semi precious stones in smoky-topaz and quartz colors.

Also featured at this year's trunk sale were new designs of large and small earrings, as well as zipper pearl bracelets in coppers, browns and grays.

Due Sorelle, when translated from the Italian, means "two sisters," is owned and run by Gina and Tania Spil.

All of the semi-precious stones used to produce Due Sorelle's jewelry are handpicked by one of the Spil sisters at national jewelry shows.

Each individual piece is made by hand, resulting in jewelry that is one of a kind.

Gina Spil kept busy assisting customers at the Trunk Sale, playing the role of a personal shopper, as she made suggestions and showed clients how to coordinate different pieces of jewelry.

"It's great to interact with my clients person-to-person," said Ms. Spil. "It helps me assess what they are looking for."

Juxtapose Gallery proprietor, Gerri

Gildea, herself a Due Sorelle client, was pleased with the outcome of the Trunk Show, which was held on October 7.

"We attracted some of our regular customers, but also some new people who were in town for just a day or the holiday weekend," she said, adding, "it was a wonderful fun day!"

Those who missed Juxtapose Gallery's October Due Sorelle Trunk Sale will have an opportunity to attend the next one, which will be held on December 16.

"The December Trunk Sale will feature a whole line of Due Sorelle designs especially selected for the Christmas season," said Ms. Gildea.

Due Sorelle jewelry is also always on display at Juxtapose Gallery, which is located at 58 Elm Street in Westfield. For more information about Due Sorelle jewelry, contact Juxtapose Gallery at (908) 232-3728.

Washington Hosts Annual Bozo Bowl

WESTFIELD - The "Bozo Bowl" began with fifth-grade classmates at Washington School in 2000 and has continued and expanded to the present with the same group, plus other Westfield High School classmates from the Class of 2008.

Luke Grandstrand won the famous Bozo Bowl Game Ball as outstanding player. Matt Shaeffer, Claire Bennett, Greg O'Brien, Liam McIlheney and Gus Gibbons were also recognized for outstanding play. Andy Castoraro was named best wrestler, and Mark Reimlinger was honored for muddiest uniform.

Due Sorelle Jewelry Trunk Show



Saturday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2006  
11am to 5pm

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