

Actor transforms into entire cast of characters in ‘One Christmas Carol’

Jana Peterson
Pine Knot News

Imagine one person, alone on a stage with three chairs and not much else, playing more than 30 characters in a two-hour performance of Charles Dickens “A Christmas Carol.”

That’s exactly what actor Rick Breuer will do starting tonight at Cloquet’s County Seat theater, as he opens a two-weekend run of “One Christmas Carol,” a one-man version of the classic tale of selfishness and selflessness and one man’s redemption.

Although it is billed as a one-man-show, that number should probably be “two,” as the director — Breuer’s wife, Ruthie — plays a hugely important role behind scenes. Breuer said he knew he couldn’t do it unless Ruthie agreed to direct.

He didn’t have to work too hard to sell her on the idea.

No. 1 - she’s already a huge fan of Dickens.

No. 2 - she believes in her husband.

“I thought if anyone can do this, it would be him,” said Ruthie. “Because it is truly like memorizing a book.

“It might be difficult at first for the audience to grasp — the idea that this person is going to change into all these



Actor Rick Breuer transforms himself into more than 30 different characters in the one-man-show “One Christmas Carol” at the County Seat Theater in Cloquet, which opens tonight. *Contributed Photos*



characters,” she added. “But he does it so flawlessly, whether it’s a male or female role, he transforms into 30-plus characters. Not just what he says, he physically changes into the characters. I’ve got goosebumps just thinking about it.”

County Seat General Manager Joel Soukkala explained that the one-man show is the beginning of a different style of offering for the community theater, called Seat of Your Pants Productions.

“These will feature and challenge our veteran performers in a different type of setting,” Soukkala said. “They are lower-budget and rehearsed off site and will expose our audiences to different styles of theater but of the same quality you have come to expect.”

A big part of the challenge and the fun of “One Christmas Carol” is the fact that there is only one actor on the stage.

“The difficulty of this is that you’re holding a conversation with an imaginary character,” explained Ruthie. “So the tendency is to want to do side to side. We had to tweak that a lot to make sure the audience will get the best visual of him delivering a line, every time.”

Rick said Ruthie helped him perfect the different voices and characters, and figure out where to move on the stage.

“If a line is said wrong, that’s easy to change,” he said. “We spent more time talking about [where he was on stage].

Because we’d have to think of the ripple effect. The whole thing is really one big long dance so if you change a step, you have to eventually get back to where you were.”

Husband and wife agree it’s been a fun collaborative effort; they’ve been working on it since August, about twice as long as a normal production. Until this week, they did every rehearsal at home.

“She’s sitting on the sofa and I’m up there doing my thing in our living room,” he said. “We do it like a regular show where she’s giving me notes, which are basically constructive criticisms and ataboys and everything else in between.”

Performances of “One Christmas Carol” begin at 7 p.m. tonight and tomorrow at 2 p.m., Dec. 14-15, with next week’s shows at 7 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, Dec. 19-21, at 10 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 19-21, at 10 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 22 and at 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 23. Breuer is also doing two afternoon performances next week for the Cloquet Middle School seventh grade, which has been studying “A Christmas Carol” for school.

Ruthie said she was very pleased that the play stays true to Dickens’ writing, and figures the kids will have no problem following the show, even though Breuer plays every single character.

“You sort of forget you’re watching one man on stage,” Ruthie said. “You feel like you’re watching a whole cast of people appear before your eyes. I’m lucky because I’ve gotten to see it night after night.”

Go and Do

Performances of the one-man tour de force “One Christmas Carol” begin at 7 p.m. tonight and tomorrow at 2 p.m., Dec. 14-15, and at 7 p.m. again next Wednesday through Friday, Dec. 19-21, at 10 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 22 and at 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 23. To reserve seats at \$18/\$20 call the box office at 218-878-0071 or visit www.countyseat-theater.com.

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