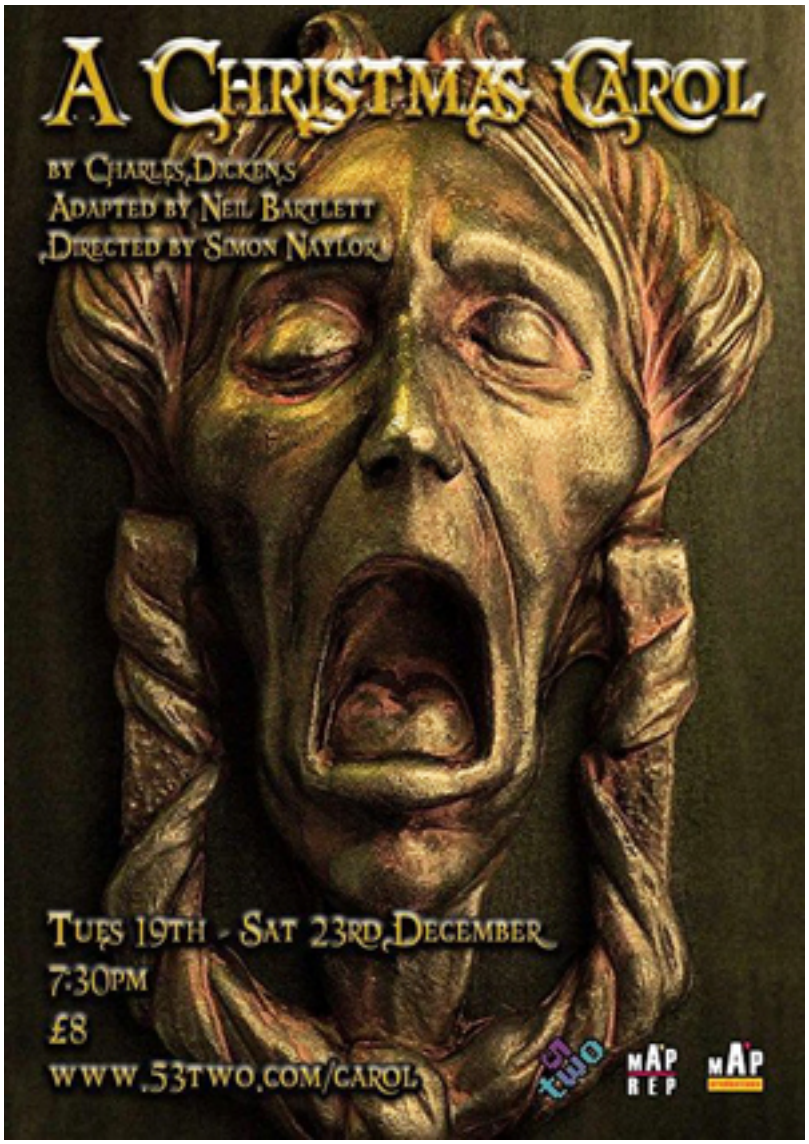

A Christmas Carol

at 53TWO, Manchester

Reviewed by Matthew Dougall December 2017

With pantomimes aplenty in almost every theatre, and countless other children's shows to chose from this festive season, MAP Rep Company decided to present their own version of

something a little more classical, Dickens' perennial favourite, A Christmas Carol.

With an age advisory label of 8 years and over, this is still very much a children's show, and their self-effacing, deliberate-mistaking acting style struck a lovely balance between realism and pantomimic.

The production took place not in the theatre as I had expected, but on a specially built platform at one end of the bar area, and so this added greatly to the intimacy and immediacy of the piece. Further, with some rather adept directing by Manchester Actors' Platform founder, **Simon Naylor**
, the use of space was both innovative and interesting as the entire bar space was used to excellent effect without the need for audience to strain their necks or move their seats.

A good balance between the down-right scary and the hilarious was also struck this evening too, as the silent and other-worldly creation that was The Ghost of Christmases Yet to Come balanced beautifully against the chirpy and brash fun-loving Ghost of Christmas Present. There were many verbal and visual gags too, but not too many. I adored the idea of using self-made sound effects, and sometimes 'forgetting' them and then being prompted to do them. However, for this to have worked to maximum effect, then the whole audience should have been able to have seen them being made, and stuck in a corner behind the actual bar itself only made this visual gag possible for a few.

There were several youngsters in the audience this evening, and the actors did not ignore them, instead made sure they were part of the story and they loved it.

The most important parts of this well known and classic tale were all kept intact and with the show running at less than one hour through, it was a lovely and perfectly timed diversion for young and old to enjoy a little seasonal magic

For their adaptation, their energy, and of course their characterisations, credit must be given to the MAP Rep company actors in this play. **Simon Hallman** was our very personable narrator, Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim's puppet manipulator;
Dave Howell
was a very pleasing Scrooge;
John Trueart
was a powerful and believable Marley's Ghost and second narrator among other things;
Gemma Brodick
pulled the short straw this evening as she metamorphosed into several different characters including all three Christmas Ghosts. Her characterisations though were flawless and all different.

A small ensemble of **Elizabeth Peace**, **Lucy Ross-Elliott** and **Abraham Tiyamiyu** filled in all the gaps in between. The whole company sang well chosen songs throughout as the scenes and moods changed, finishing of course with a full chorus rendition of We Wish You A Merry Christmas.