



## CurtainUp

The Internet Theater Magazine of Reviews, Features, Annotated Listings

### A CurtainUp New Jersey Review

### *A Christmas Story, The Musical*

By [Simon Saltzman](#)

And there I am with my December issue of Open Road For Boys, itchingly, nervously, obsessing over a 3-colored framed full page back cover advertisement of the greatest gift a boy could ever hunger for, and realizing that time was my enemy.

— Jean Shepherd



L to R. Hudson Loverro, Colton Maurer, Elena Shaddow, Chris Hoch (Photo credit: Billy Bustamante)

Whatever excuse is needed to give your family a temporary break from seeing yet again any of the various stage productions of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, you can't go wrong picking *A Christmas Story, The Musical* as an alternative. This very entertaining diversion is the holiday season offering at the Paper Mill Playhouse. Except for the casting, director and choreographer, this is basically the same bright and boisterous production that was seen on Broadway during 2012 holiday season.

If I am not predisposed to automatically feel the same degree of warmth and nostalgia as many when it comes to commemorating the autobiographical stories of former popular radio host and author Jean Shepherd, this two and a half hour musical version of the much shorter 1983 film has as its main reward fourteen extraordinarily talented child performers. I am not using that adjective frivolously as these young talents do dance in some rather difficult routines as well as sing up a storm on the stage and with more vim and vigor than any of the otherwise quite adequate adult performers.

The nicely integrated, easy-on-the-ears score by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul is no

more than serviceable, and the same can be said for the book by Joseph Robinette as it adheres to the film's plot (if memory serves.) The standout production element is the clever and often very funny choreography by Mara Newbery Greer that serves to showcase the large company in some fantastical production numbers. One of these gives an adult Danette Holden, who plays the school teacher Miss Shields, a chance to shimmy and shine in her own fantasy.

All aspects of the production are slick and polished with credit due to director Brandon Ivie who keeps the action going from calamity to calamity and towards a happy ending. Most happily front and center is the terrific bespectacled Colton Maurer who certainly owns the stage as Ralphie. Judah Immanuel is Ralphie at matinees in the role that both have performed before.

As my reaction is not too far from that expressed by *CurtainUp* critic Elizabeth Ahlfors to the Broadway production, her concise recap of the story should suffice ( [Click here to read](#) ) It involves Ralphie (playing author Shepherd as an eight-year old) in his attempts to get an Official Red Ryder Carbine-Action 200-Shot Range Model Air Rifle for Christmas from his parents. . . whom he suspects are not inclined to fulfill his wish.

Set in the family home and other locations during the few weeks leading up to Christmas in 1940 in Hohman, Indiana, we get the message of everyday suburban life for children as well as the images of parental guidance as it is recalled by the show's narrator (Jean Shepherd played with an effortless congeniality by Ted Koch).

Eleana Shaddow is the epitome of the sweetly compliant stay-at-home mother of that generation and Chris Hoch portrays The Old Man with all the attributes of a disagreeable, ill-tempered father. A very talented Hudson Loverro makes an adorable impression as Ralphie's younger brother Randy. The scene of his mother stuffing him into a snow suit that allows him almost no mobility is a hoot.

It is, in fact, the mobility factor in *A Christmas Story, The Musical* that will keep all members of the family glued to every one of Ralphie's fast-paced misadventures, as it also invites new fans into the childhood world of the now legendary Jean Shepherd.

#### A Christmas Story, The Musical

Book by Joseph Robinette based on the motion picture A Christmas Story written by Jean Shepherd, Leigh Brown and Bob Clark

Music and Lyrics by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul

Directed by Brandon Ivie

Cast of Principals: Ted Koch (Jean Shepherd), Colton Maurer, Judah Immanuel (Ralphie), Elena Shaddow (Mother), Hudson Loverro (Randy), Chris Hoch (The Old Man), Danette Holden (Miss Shields)

Scenic Design: Walt Spangler

Costume Design: Elizabeth Hope Clancy

Lighting Design: F. Mitchell Dana

Sound Design: Randy Hansen

Animals: William Berloni

Production Stage Manager: Gary Mickelson

Music Director: Ben Whiteley

Choreographer: Mara Newbery Greer

Running Time: 2 hours 20 minutes including intermission

Paper Mill Playhouse, 22 Brookside Drive, Millburn, NJ

973 - 376 - 4343

Tickets: \$37.00 - \$130.00

Performances: Wednesday through Sunday at 7 pm. Matinees Wednesday December 23 at 1:30; Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sunday matinee at 1:30.

From 11/25/15 Opened 11/29/15 Ends 01/03/16

Review by Simon Saltzman based on performance 11/29/15