

A Christmas Story

A favorite holiday film gets the Broadway treatment at Paper Mill Playhouse.

[Hayley Levitt](#) • [New Jersey](#) • Dec 1, 2015



Hudson Loverro (Randy), Colton Maurer (Ralphie), Elena Shaddow (Mother), and Chris Hoch (The Old Man) in *A Christmas Story*, directed by Brandon Ivie, at Paper Mill Playhouse.
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If its Tony-nominated Broadway run and megasize return engagement at Madison Square Garden weren't enough, the endlessly delightful production of [A Christmas Story: The Musical](#) at [Paper Mill Playhouse](#) proves that the screen-to-stage adaptation is more than just an appeal to the low-hanging fruit of holiday nostalgia — with the right cast, it's simply a great show.

Anyone with a worn-out copy of *A Christmas Story* on VHS will get what they came for. The icy flagpole, the pink bunny pajamas, the tacky leg lamp — all of the iconic images of the classic 1983 film make it into the musical like a list of greatest hits. Some even get their own showstopping production numbers (cue the kickline of glowing fishnetted statuettes).

But for those who have miraculously navigated every holiday season without channel-surfing through one of its 24-hour marathons, here's the story in a nutshell : Christmas is just a few weeks away when we meet 9-year-old Ralphie Parker, played for the opening-night performance by the impressive Colton Maurer, who carries the show on his small shoulders with a big voice and bigger smile. Ted Kōch serves as our amiable host, narrating Ralphie's (which are presumably his own) childhood trials as the character Jean Shepherd, author of the short stories from which the film was adapted.

Shepherd follows Ralphie through his small town in Indiana where he lives with his finicky little brother, Randy (a fantastically charismatic Hudson Loverro), his cantankerous "Old Man" (an excellent Chris Hoch channeling the comic acerbity of the great Paul Lynde), and his nurturing "Mother" (Elena Shaddow, radiating an idyllic maternal warmth through her flawless soprano). With Christmas approaching, Ralphie has to play his cards perfectly if he has any hope of landing the ultimate gift: a Red Ryder Carbine Action BB Gun "with a compass in the stock and this thing that tells time" (in Ralphie's eloquent words). Unfortunately, the universe seems to be conspiring against him as disaster after disaster pulls him farther and farther from his dream present.

A Christmas Story is the definition of crowd-pleasing in the sense of old-fashioned musical theater. A sparkly company wrapped in winter garments fit for a post-Depression Macy's ad (designed by Elizabeth Hope Clancy) sing and dance through Ralphie's catastrophic countdown to Christmas, with director Brandon Ivie infusing the traditions of the Great White Way with both camp and compassion: You've got your *42nd Street* tap number in the nightmarish "You'll Shoot Your Eye Out" (choreographed by Mara Newbery Greer and led by the hilarious Danette Holden as the sexually frustrated schoolteacher Miss Shields); your *Oliver!*-esque ensemble of persecuted playground kids singing to the infectious rock beat of "When You're a Wimp" (performed by a group of Broadway-caliber tykes); and your classic heartwarming ballad in Shaddow's beautiful rendition of "What a Mother Does" — all on the backdrop of a white winter wonderland encasing a house built for storybook suburbia (a re-creation of Walt Spangler's Broadway design). Add a few dogs that can bark on cue and it's a recipe for grade-A musical theater (shout-out to the stellar Pete and Lily as the Bumpus Hounds, who would put any Sandy to shame).

Everything about the musical is an appeal to tradition. Yet, underneath all of its conventions is a sharp book by Joseph Robinette and a score with notes of the film's offbeat charm by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, performed by a company that rivals the original Broadway cast. Unlike most holiday offerings that are forgotten about by the spring thaw, both the book and score were nominated for Tony Awards during the show's first New York run in 2012. When you can keep the Christmas spirit alive in June, you know you've got something special.