

A Christmas Story Shines at Paper Mill Playhouse

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Date: Tuesday, December 1, 2015

in: [ENTERTAINMENT](#), [FAMILY](#), [Family](#), [Headliners](#), [HOME](#), [Out of Town](#), [Theatre](#)



Chris Hoch with the leg lamps

I have seen 4 different productions of *A Christmas Story The Musical*. I adore the music by the brilliant team of Pasek and Paul and I cry every time the father gives Ralphie the much wanted Red Ryder BB Gun. The fact that a man whose life is not exactly a bed of roses can see his son needs tears at me every time. The most amazing part of this is I was never a big fan of the 1983 movie, based on the late Jean Shepherd's stories about growing up in 1940s Indiana.

Using the Broadway sets and a lot of the props and costumes Paper Mill Playhouse production looks and sounds great.



Hudson Loverro,

Colton Maurer, Elena Shadow and Chris Hoch

The story is simple. Jean Shepherd (Ted Koch) is reliving those moments you tuck away like a gift and remember all your life. 9-year-old Ralphie (Colton Maurer) (Judah Immanuel on Thursday and Sunday Matinees) wants one thing and one thing only for Christmas: a Red Ryder carbine-action BB gun. He dreams about it, fantasizes about it and comes up with a variety of ways to make his parents see his needs. His Old Man (Chris Hoch), is victimized by his next-door neighbor's dogs, as everything he owns falls apart and as he's left to deal with it, cursing up a storm. All he wants is respect and to be thought of as smart. When he wins a leg lamp in a contest, his wife (Elena Shadow) is mortified. Her job is to keep the family together and care, which she does in spades. His little brother Randy (Hudson Loverro) can only eat when he is pretending to be a piggy. In Ralphie's world, his teacher Miss Shields (Danette Holden) has the power to make his dreams succeed or fail.

In Chris Hoch's capable hands the Old Man, becomes more real and flawed. Ms. Shadow, captures the love of a mother. As Ralphie, Mr. Maurer has some powerful lungs. The standouts in this cast are Ms. Holden, as the tap dancing scene-stealer, shinning in "You'll Shoot Your Eye Out" and the adorable Mr. Loverro, as Randy the baby brother.

Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, who brought us the impressive Dogfight, have brought a score to the stage that I haven't stopped singing since I first heard it. This music is infectious, joyous with that old fashioned flair that made me love musicals in the first place.

Joseph Robinette's book is funny, poignant and loving. Director Brandon Ivie has put his stamp on this piece and has made it his own in a caring and loving way. Choreographer Mara Newberry Greer

also brings her own spirit to the stage with the fabulous leg lamp number, the grumpy Santa display and the tap dancing numbers. All were creative and fun.

Be it Christmas, Valentine's Day or Easter, this is not just a holiday show, but an everyday feel-good show that makes you remember the joys of the season.

A Christmas Story The Musical: Paper Mill Playhouse, 22 Brookside Drive, Millburn, through Jan. 3rd.