

Winter 2019

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*Winter edition*

# The Talented Mr. Heiti

Actor, writer, director,  
teacher and nice guy

by ELLA JANE MYERS

**W**hen Sudbury Theatre Centre's artistic director John McHenry asked Matthew Heiti if he'd like to play all the parts in *A Christmas Carol*, he was in. But not without some hesitation.

"I was like, 'Yes, that sounds amazing and scary and are you sure you want to take that risk on me?' I haven't been on a stage of this size for a while," says Heiti.

"It's been a lot of dusty old basements and small stages, but the confidence John has in me is amazing and I love this kind of challenge." ▶

Sudbury Theatre Centre creates holiday magic in *A Christmas Carol* with Matthew Heiti, puppets, and a chorus of carolers from the Students on Stage program.



► With McHenry's direction, Heiti plays Scrooge, Marley, Tiny Tim, and everyone else in this one-man play adapted for the stage by Jeremy Webb, artistic director at Neptune Theatre in Halifax.

Home schooled until Grade 9, Heiti got his first taste of theatre as a 'tween when he saw *Bye Bye Birdie* at Sudbury Secondary.

When he became a student at Sudbury Sec, he started in visual arts but quickly realized his talent was elsewhere.

"I remember being so nervous in my first play, I blacked out. I have no memory of it, but I knew something cool had just happened," he says. "You just get hooked on that rush."

He studied theatre at Ryerson University in Toronto for four years. During the summer, he headed back home to run a small theatre company.

After a short stint in arts administration, he moved out east for grad school at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton. He loved it there but found himself pulled back to Northern Ontario.

"I don't remember how I made the decision but I came back," says Heiti. "I think I always knew I was going to... Sudbury needed people."

Heiti plays a major role in the arts community and was one of the first artists to win a Mayor's Celebration of the Arts Award in 2014.

He worked with the STC as the playwright in residence, and launched Playwright's Junction in 2011— a lab for playwrights to develop their work.

The co-writer of the script for the film *Son of the Sunshine*, Heiti was nominated for a Gemini in 2012 for Best Original Screenplay.

His play, *Mucking in the Drift*, the story of a former star of the Nickel Belt Ball League, was produced by the STC in 2013. *Black Dog: 4 vs the World*, about teen issues and mental health, was produced by the Young(ish) Theatre Company in 2013 and 2014.

Another milestone was getting involved with Pat the Dog, a Kitchener-Waterloo theatre company. In May 2013, they ran their first Play Smelter Festival in Sudbury, a week of plays that is now an anticipated annual event.

That same year, Coach House published his first novel, *The City Still Breathing*.

"They're the only publisher I sent it to," says Heiti. "But I never followed up. They called me a year later."

A career in the arts is rewarding if not attached to a large pay cheque. Heiti works a "patchwork of contracts," and is a sessional instructor in theatre arts at Thorneloe University.

For those who know or have worked with him, it might seem incongruous to cast the ridiculously friendly and humble Heiti as a bitter old humbug, but Heiti says he's drawn to the inner Scrooge.

"We all have darkness to draw on. But what's so interesting about Scrooge is that he's a child," says Heiti. "In the end, it's all about joy and this place of naiveté."

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Heiti celebrates the holidays with a respectable amount of holiday spirit. "I drink a litre of eggnog and watch Christmas movies every night."

Heiti's parents went all out for the magic of Christmas. He remembers them leaving hoof prints on the roof and piles of glitter by the furnace. That magic, he suspects, informed his entire career.

"Why I'm so obsessed with

writing is chasing the possibility of magic, that there are things bigger than you and me," says Heiti. "That, and I believe in the possibility of this place still. I've loved Sudbury my whole life and it's informed everything I do."

"Part of me is chasing magic, the other part is chasing an idealized city."

Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carole* opens Dec. 5 and runs to Dec. 14.

## A note from the director

I'm excited I'm going to be directing Matt in this unique version of *A Christmas Carol* this holiday season where he will play the narrator and 24 other characters.

*A Christmas Carol* also features a puppeteer, Adam Francis Proulx (originally from Sault Ste. Marie), who is designing, creating and operating the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future, and I'm adding a chorus of carollers from our Students On Stage program - Eric Belanger, Kieran Jenzen, Kevin Kelly, Kaylee Ross and Mackenzy Zatylny.

It's the traditional telling of *A Christmas Carol*, and Matt and I are both fans of the old black and white film version starring Alistair Sim. (We don't like the colourized version.) Sim's Scrooge is classic.

There have been other versions of *A Christmas Carol* on our stage over the years but none as creative as this one created by Jeremy Webb, artistic director at Halifax's Neptune Theatre, who himself performed this play over 650 times.

John McHenry