

# Orlando Sentinel

## Theater review: 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer' from Orlando Repertory Theatre

November 25, 2013 | By Matthew J. Palm, Orlando Sentinel Theater Critic

I never know from year to year what's going to ignite my Christmas spirit. Sometimes it's an early [holiday](#) card, sometimes a carol on the radio. This year, all it took was the opening scene of Orlando Repertory Theatre's utterly charming, top-notch production of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer."

Based on the now-classic 1964 TV special, "Rudolph" is, of course, aimed at kids. But adults will feel a thrilling [glow](#) of nostalgia as the stop-motion animated characters of their own childhood come to life on the stage.

The show is a technical dream: Marcy Singhaus's camera-ready costumes, Cindy White's clever scenic design, George Jackson's evocative lighting and John Valines' striking sound design combine to bring the beloved cartoon to [glorious](#) life.

Seeing actors relay the story's message — "Maybe misfits have a place, too," narrator Sam the snowman says — makes it resonate more strongly, putting more heart in a Christmas tale that had plenty to begin with.

For "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" is a story about misfits. In these more sensitive days, we'd say it's about bullying or diversity or acceptance. But no matter how you describe it, the plot is more powerful than you might expect from simple holiday fare.

Rudolph's bright red nose makes him different. Hermey the Elf's desire to be a dentist instead of a toymaker makes him different. And because they're different, they're unjustly shunned.

Interestingly, Santa is a primary bully in the story, along with Rudolph's father, Donner, and reindeer games [coach](#) Comet. In the TV version, Santa's downright obnoxious — at the Rep, Wesley Slade gives Saint Nick more dimensions than his animated counterpart; he's more distracted than rude in his dismissal of young Rudolph.



At the performance I attended though, the bullying was not lost on the young audience. "That's not nice!" one tot behind me shouted after a taunt. "That's mean," his companion agreed.

Rudolph, as played by chipper Nick Mazzini, is easy to root for — even if you somehow don't know he's going to save Christmas in the end. Singhaus's reindeer costumes smartly let the audience see the actors' faces, so every dashed smile or hurt look on Mazzini's expressive face registers.

Directors Jeffrey M. Revels and Steve MacKinnon stage the big musical numbers Broadway-style, with light-hearted choreography by Spencer Morrow. As Rudolph's love interest, Clarice, Ali Haselden sings "There's Always Tomorrow" with a particularly poignant purity.

One other visual treat: The residents of the Island of Misfit Toys are portrayed by puppets you would swear just burst through the [TV](#) set. Designed by Vandy Wood and Casey C. Blanton, they embody all the love and attention to detail that obviously went into this Christmas treat.

### **'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer'**

- **What:** An Orlando Repertory [Theatre](#) production of a musical based on the animated Christmas special
- **Length:** 1:20, including intermission
- **Where:** Orlando Repertory Theatre, 1001 E. Princeton St., Orlando
- **When:** 2 and 5:30 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays, through Dec. 29
- **Tickets:** \$18; \$16 seniors and students; \$12 children age 3-17
- **Call:** 407-896-7365
- **Online:** [orlandorep.com](http://orlandorep.com)