

HOW THE GRINCH IS STEALING BROADWAY

BY ERIN HARRINGTON

Bringing the cherished Dr. Seuss classic *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* to Broadway is one of the coolest Christmas gifts theatre-goers could hope to receive this holiday season. Heck, it's better than *Who*-pudding and even that rare *Who*-foast-beast.

It's a treasured tale, and testament to conversion, to someone's capacity to change for the good. It's heartwarming and indicative of what we all need sometimes – a heart capable of growing three sizes. Especially at this time of year.

Sad to say, we all have a little Grinch in us sometimes. And we could all take a page from this character *who's* been called a heel, as cuddly as a cactus and as charming as an eel. How charming are *we*, really, when we're standing in long lines, tired and stressed from last minute shopping and convinced that

Christmas perhaps *does* come from a store? Although his head may not be screwed on just right, or perhaps his shoes are a little too tight, the Grinch isn't, really, when you get right down to it, all that different from many of us *who*, particularly at the holidays, get fed up with the NOISE! NOISE! NOISE! NOISE!

Too often, we fail to recognize that a little Grinch can lurk inside each of us. Thankfully, Patrick Page, the gifted actor bringing the Grinch eloquently to life in the Broadway musical, does. Page, who played Scar in *The Lion King* for three years and brought in more than 1,000 performances as Lumiere in *Beauty and the Beast* "gets it." He knows how to stand in the Grinch's too-tight shoes. And it's that capacity for empathy and for change that brings the house down at the Hilton Theatre.



The Grinch is sort of right," Page contends. "They should stop the big commercial noise fest. I think one of the reasons the Grinch has been so popular all these years is because all of us, even those who love Christmas, can feel pretty Grinchy when we're stuck in a crowded store or mall or in traffic on the 24th. Even though there's a lot of exploitation, that's not what Christmas is about. But everyone has felt like him at some point. So it's wonderful when he comes around, when the Grinch gets it and sees the *Whos* celebrate without presents. At that point he concedes and says 'That's something I might not mind being a part of.'"

That simple but profound message is what resonated in the original story written by Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel) back in 1957. Under the supervision of two-time Tony Award® winning director Jack O'Brien the A-list production team of *The Grinch Musical* is not messing with that perfection. Director Matt August says, "We have some of the most talented people on Broadway working on this and we are all keeping true to what Geisel (Dr. Seuss) intended with this story. That's been our guiding principle, to keep it true to his spirit and not change his intention. There's not a single part of this show where you look at the stage and don't know that you're looking at Dr. Seuss' Grinch."

It's a *Who*-ville extravaganza alright. From the designers to the choreographers to the actors that breathe life so believably into the *Whos*, everyone on this production team is making some holiday magic happen on the Hilton Theatre stage. Not the least of which are 26 little dynamos portraying the *Who* children. "These kids are so talented," August says. "We've got the cream of the crop. And, they're

so real without being show-bizzy kids. They're very grounded and focused and they're very *Who*-ey!"

Not to mention energetic. They have to be. The *Grinch Musical* is delivering more performances during its special limited engagement (Oct. 25 – Jan. 7) than any other show on Broadway. There are 12 shows a week, including eight performances on weekends, and an 11a.m. matinee on Thursdays for school field trips, another first.

The kids are broken into two teams, and 12 perform in any given show. "They're each doing six shows a week, so they can keep up with their schoolwork," August explains. "As for the adults, we have a bunch of great veterans up there who know how to pace themselves and have the stamina to run that marathon." One of those veterans is acting legend and two-time Tony Award winner John Cullum, *who's* graced Broadway stages

with Richard Burton in *Camelot*. Cullum narrates the Grinch powerfully as Old Max, the dog *who* had to don those antlers and help the Grinch steal Christmas. Rusty Ross plays Young Max, and together with the rest of the cast, takes the audience to the heart of *Who*-ville. Central to that heart has always been little Cindy Lou Who. She tugs away at even the Grinch's heart when she says those classic words "*Santa Claus, why, why are you taking our Christmas tree? WHY?*" Two actresses are alternating fabulous performances as little Cindy Lou – Caroline London, a 3rd grader from

Montville, N.J., and Nicole Bocchi, a 5th grader from Jamaica Estates, Queens.

Anyone *who* loves the Grinch story should gift themselves and get down to Times Square this holiday season to catch this moving musical. When asked how he feels, personally, when the Grinch's heart grows and grows, Patrick Page admits, "It's great. It's a wonderful feeling. I think it's that sense that people like to have that we're all redeemable and there's hope for everybody. I think that both the kids and the parents, *who*-ever, walks out of the theatre, are going to feel differently and better about Christmas, and loving each other a little more."

And maybe that's exactly what the beloved Dr. Seuss hoped for when he extended these holiday wishes: Fah *who* for-aze! Dah *who* dor-aze! Welcome Christmas, Christmas Day.

**FOR TICKETS TO
THE GRINCH MUSICAL
CALL 212.307.4100.**



Patrick Page

