

Designer Q&A: Ben Stanton on *A Christmas Carol* Live

Ever wonder what it's like to work on a theatrical production during the COVID-19 pandemic? We talked to [Ben Stanton](#), the Lighting Designer behind *A Christmas Carol* Live, which is scheduled to have its world premiere live capture on November 28, 2020, from the United Palace Theatre in New York City, with replay video streaming on demand through January 3, 2021. Here's what we learned about his experience.



City Theatrical (CTI): When did you start working on this production of *A Christmas Carol*?



Ben Stanton (BS): We first built this production at the Geffen Playhouse in LA for the 2018 Holiday season. It's a unique production in that the entire piece is performed by one person: the phenomenal Jefferson Mays. He, along with his partner Susan Lyons and the director Michael Arden, adapted Dickens' original text so that it could be performed and narrated by a single actor.

CTI: How is this production of *A Christmas Carol* at the United Palace Theatre in NYC different than the one you worked on at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles in 2018?

BS: The most obvious difference is that we're making this version of the production in an empty theater. Jefferson will never play to a live audience, but we will be filming this version for release later this year.

CTI: What has your process been like, day to day?

BS: Mostly the process has been wonderful. All of our crews, staff, assistants, directors and producers have been amazing and it's been a pleasure to be back working in a theater with such a great team. There are many new protocols to follow, including wearing masks, social distancing, and weekly testing, but that's the easy part. What makes it complicated are the personal and logistical decisions we have to make in order to work right now - like arranging enough childcare for our two small children, (my wife Lucy is the projection designer for *Carol* so we're both on the same schedule); navigating online school for our 4 year old, and figuring out how to get to and from the theater safely, are all issues that get more difficult and expensive during a pandemic.

CTI: Are there any COVID-19 related restrictions that you've encountered while working on this show?

BS: The theater is divided into protective zones so there are a lot of areas of the theater where I'm not allowed. This includes going up on stage when the actor is in the building.

CTI: Have you been able to work with the other creative teams effectively?

BS: Yes - we're able to use the com system and social distancing to communicate safely. God mics are helpful too.

CTI: Knowing that the production in NYC will be filmed, have any aspects of your lighting design or process changed?

BS: We've started this process with the goal of re-creating the stage design, but we'll be altering the lighting extensively in the final weeks of the process in collaboration with the DP and the film team to create the right conditions for the camera.

CTI: Any shout outs to key members of your team who have helped make it possible?

BS: I think everyone associated with this production feels deeply indebted to Jefferson Mays. His performance is jaw dropping and deeply moving and it's an honor to be able to contribute to this piece. I would also like to thank my Associate Alejandro Fajardo, my assistant Jocelyn Girigorie, our production electrician Eric Norris, programmer Colin Scott, and everyone who is taking extra risks to be out in the world with us right now.