



CITADEL THEATRE

# ONCE



You may know him as Ebenezer Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol* – or from any number of other various Citadel productions he’s been involved with over the years. But you’ve never seen **Julien Arnold** like this. In the Citadel’s season opener, the romantic musical *Once*, Arnold plays Da, a rough-around-the-edges Dubliner who struggles to communicate with his sensitive, artistic son, Guy. Arnold gave us insight into the role and everything he’s done to prepare for it – learning to play the mandolin expertly, for starters.

**Citadel Theatre:** What character are you playing and how would you describe him?

**Julien Arnold:** I’m playing the character of Da, which is just short for Dad in Ireland, so he doesn’t actually have a name. He’s just called Da. He’s the father of the lead guy, Guy - he doesn’t have a name either. He’s a vacuum repairman, so he owns his own shop and his son works in the shop. They both live in a little flat above the shop.

**CT:** What is their relationship like?

**JA:** It’s a really interesting, complex relationship because I think the Dad is a bit gruff and isn’t good at communicating his feelings. The son is very sensitive and artistic. He’s a songwriter, obviously - that’s why it’s a musical. Also, the wife passed away about a year ago, so I think the son feels that he has to stick around and take care of the dad. And the dad is a little worried about the son, because the son has feeling low, depressed lately. He’s had a bad breakup and it seems like he’s a little bit stuck in his life. So they’re both kind of worried about each other but they’re not very good at expressing that worry.



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**CT: You'll be playing guitar and mandolin in the show. How long have you been playing those instruments for?**

**JA:** I've been playing guitar for a long time. I started playing when I was 15 - classical guitar. I've sort of dabbled with other instruments along the way, played in plays and this and that. I picked up a mandolin - I had fiddled around a bit - but I learned it seriously for the audition, so that was kind of exciting. When they offered me the role, I was like 'Ok, I better *really* learn the mandolin now!' so I've been practicing all summer. The mandolin has very sharp, little strings and they're very tightly wound so you get these really thick calluses on your left hand.

**CT: How would you describe *Once* to someone who's never seen the movie or the play?**

**JA:** It's kind of a wonderful combination of a low-key family drama and a love story that's kind of quirky. It reminds me a little of *Lost in Translation*, that movie where two people meet and you can tell that they feel something for each other but they have their own lives so you're hoping that they'll get together but there's complications. It's an unusual musical because it's very subdued in a way - a lot of the songs are quiet, gentle songs so you don't have the 'om-pa-pa' of a regular musical but there are some big production numbers as well. I'd say, overall, it would please people who like serious drama and it would please people who love musical theatre as well.

**CT: Do you have a favourite song from the show?**

**JA:** My favourite song is the big song that ends Act One. It's called *Gold*. Interestingly, it was the only song in the play that wasn't written by the two writers of all the rest of the music. It was a friend of **Glen Hansard** who wrote that song but it's a wonderful version that Glen Hansard has adapted. It's a wonderful ode to love, and some people say that it's an ode to Ireland as well. It's a beautiful, uplifting love song.

*"It's very clever, fun, touching - and there's a lot of humour in it as well."* -Julien Arnold

**CT: What has been the most challenging part of rehearsals so far?**

**JA:** I've never been in a musical where I have to play, dance, and sing at the same time. Usually, you just have to dance and sing at the same time, and that's quite difficult, so adding that third element happens a few times in the play - and that's a little tricky. You're playing, thinking about what your feet are doing, and thinking about the harmonies. Also, I would say that it's unusual for me to play with a whole band. I've played guitar and sung by myself and with a few other people but to have to coordinate musically with a base guitar and other instruments has been a big challenge - but an exciting challenge.



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**CT:** What scene are you most excited to work on?

**JA:** There's a lovely scene at the end of the play, where the father learns that **[SPOILER ALERT]** his son is leaving for New York and it's really well written. All the feelings and doubts are underneath but it's not really expressed so you have to find a way to show the audience what's going on underneath but it's not really written in the words. You can tell from the situation what's going on, so I'm really looking forward to tackling that.

**CT:** What has it been like working with a dialect coach?

**JA:** It's been great. **David Ley**, who works at the University, I get the feeling that Irish is one of his favourite dialects, and the one he does the best. He's wonderful at all dialects. So working on the dialect has been fascinating because it's very specific - northern Dublin. Dublin is in southern Ireland but it's the northern part so it's not quite as lilt-y - it's has a little more urban roughness quality. So to find that Irish sound but the hard edge to it has been a really fun challenge.

**CT:** Is there anything else about the show that you'd like to share?

**JA:** I would like to invite everyone to come see it. It's very wide in its appeal. It's very clever, fun, touching - and there's a lot of humour in it as well.



*Once runs September 22 to October 14, 2018, at the Citadel Theatre. For more information or to purchase tickets, call the Box Office at 780.425.1820 or visit [www.citadeltheatre.com](http://www.citadeltheatre.com).*