

FEELING CRABBY?

Check out a show designed to ‘cheer up even the grumpiest of grumps’

Courtesy of the Wortham Center for the Performing Arts

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At a time when it's easy to feel disheartened by the world, Joshua Holden is a ray of sunshine. Clad in a brightly colored bow tie, blue suit and sporting a neatly curled mustache, Holden exudes the charm of a young Mr. Rogers as he makes his entrance on stage. But, unlike Mr. Rogers, Holden's uplifting message is, this time, designed specifically for adults.

"There's a lot in the world right now that feels scary and hopeless, especially in these past few years," Holden said. "But there's also so much good — and that good lies in all of us."

Holden's award-winning production, "The Joshua Show," invites and encourages its audiences to find that good, using live music, puppetry, physical comedy and tap-dancing in a fantastical mission to "cheer up even the grumpiest of grumps."

"It's about finding the good in yourself and using that to make the world a better place — in whatever way you can," Holden said.

And though it may sound like a plot straight out of children's programming, Holden said he firmly believes that, sometimes, it's adults who need to hear his message the most.

"The last thing I want is to create a show where adults in the audience think, 'Oh no. I've made a mistake,'" Holden explained. And while the original production was designed to entertain adults and children alike — infused with nostalgic nods to children's TV of the past — Holden's two evening performances in Asheville, March 4 and 5 at the Wortham Center for the Performing Arts, are an adults-only adaptation of "The Joshua Show," aptly named "The Grown Up Special."

"It's the same content as the family show, but it's specifically made for adult audiences, with some language that may not be appropriate for kids," he



"The Joshua Show" will be at the Wortham Center on March 4 and 5.

PROVIDED BY DEV KHALSA

said. "It allows us to dive deeper into certain topics and open up a bigger conversation with some moments that are really geared toward adults."

In fact, Holden admitted, he never set out to make a production for kids. "My whole career (with 'The Joshua Show') feels a bit like a series of accidents," he said, laughing. The original iteration, a 10-minute piece written for a puppet slam in Chicago, was a spoof of a children's show.

"I wrote it at a time when I was feeling kind of hopeless about the world, so the whole piece was about how to cheer yourself up when you're feeling down and out," he said. "It was this cute little thing that was only written for this one

evening." But the audience loved it — and so did the Puppeteers of America, who invited Holden to expand the piece into a full-length show, to premiere at the organization's 2013 National Festival.

Though Holden was terrified by the thought of expanding his piece, he pushed through all his self-doubt — and, in fact, used those themes in his final full-length production.

"We left the festival having won the 'Best Performance' award, and we were voted 'Fan Favorite,'" he said. "After that, people kept calling and asking to book my show. And now we tour it all around the world."

"The Joshua Show" centers around



Joshua Holden says he believes adults as well as children need to hear an uplifting message. PROVIDED BY BRENDAN BURKE

IF YOU GO

What: "The Joshua Show: The Grown Up Special."

When: 8 p.m. March 4 and 5.

Where: Wortham Center for the Performing Arts, in the Tina McGuire Theatre.

Tickets: \$25 at worthamarts.org.

Holden's right-hand man Mr. Nicholas, who, overwhelmed by gloom, is planning an escape to outer space. But, with help from a cast of zany puppets, Holden tries to convince him to stay.

"The thing is: Mr. Nicholas is part of me. He represents the cynic in all of us," Holden said. "I'm an optimistic person, but I watch the news and see how people are treating one another — and I get really disheartened sometimes. But it's important to turn that around and look at all the good too. It may sometimes feel like throwing tiny rocks in a pond, but it's important to remember those ripples have big effects."