Mr. Toad is really not a bad guy. A little conceited, yes. A little carried away with the joy of possessions, like his fast cars and all the beautiful things in his grand home, Toad Hall. But considering that he is the richest creature in town, he is surprisingly lovable. And as played with enormous presence and easy style by Tituss Burgess, he is the comic center of “A Wind in the Willows Christmas,” the sweet, expertly staged holiday offering at the Two River Theater Company in Red Bank.

This production is the world premiere of a musical, but its characters and situations are likely to be familiar to children and plenty of former children in the audience. Based on Kenneth Grahame’s book “The Wind in the Willows,” published in 1908, it is the journey of Mole (Tom Deckman), who decides that he has been missing out on things by living underground, as he always has, because that is what moles are supposed to do.

But one day a piece of paper floats into his life — one’s impression is that it is a fragment of some sort of flier for an idyllic community — containing the words “Harmony Creek.” Mole sets out to reach this enchanted place in time for Christmas because even though he has never been there before, he senses that it is his home.

Mr. Deckman plays Mole, a.k.a. Molie, as an endearing self-described “everyday geek,” who is quite smart but knows nothing about the world. Molie wears eyeglasses, a sweater vest, a bow tie, jeans and, on his head, a miner’s-cap light, the only acknowledgment that the actor is playing a certain furry mammal
rather than a human. Philip Witcomb used similar restraint in costume design for most of the characters, but he does put Mr. Burgess in a bright-green suit, presumably to emphasize his toadness.

Mr. Witcomb also designed the set, which has a fanciful English-country-garden feel, dominated by a rotating, winding wooden path and an elevated, upstage section of Toad Hall, where Dr. Badger (John Jellison) always seems to be looking something up in a big book. For a show with Christmas in the title, this one does not look very holidaylike — no Fraser firs or wreaths or stars or nutcrackers or store windows filled with electric toys. But it does snow, on both cast and audience, at the end. In a talkback last weekend, at which almost all the questions were from children, young audience members learned how that stage magic was achieved.

Mike Reid’s music and Sarah Schlesinger’s lyrics are pleasant if predictable (songs include “That’s What Good Friends Are For,” “Have a Little Faith” and “Whenever I Think of You”). Mindi Dickstein’s book takes some contemporary liberties with Edwardian source material. For instance, one of the Rabbits (John Garry) complains, “Hey, dude, he’s no fun this year.” (He and his fellow Rabbit, Kathy Connolly, also play the thieving Weasels.) And I’m pretty sure that in the original work, Water Rat, a.k.a. Ratty (Nick Choksi), never said, “We’re staging an intervention.”

The show rarely transcends its genre as children’s entertainment, but Two River has pulled together a gifted cast, directed with liveliness and affection by Amanda Dehnert.

“A Wind in the Willows Christmas” is filled with positive messages, particularly about the value of being yourself and not the person (or animal) that others expect you to be.

Mrs. Otter (Farah Alvin) insists that her son, Little Portly (played in overalls and a baseball cap by a woman, Dana Steingold), become a fisherman like his father before him. But Portly has a talent and a passion and knows what he wants to do with his life — become a chef. Mrs. Otter finally supports that plan, despite her Act I number “You Were Born to Fish.” Ratty, it turns out, is a talented poet. Molie really likes the sun.

Dr. Badger, however, remains true to character: pedantic, smug and disdainful. Because he is played so well with mature professorial flourish by Mr. Jellison, a Broadway veteran, we wouldn’t have him any other way.

“A Wind in the Willows Christmas,” by Mike Reid, Sarah Schlesinger and Mindi Dickstein, based on the novel by Kenneth Grahame, is at the Two River Theater Company, 21 Bridge Avenue, Red Bank, through Dec. 30. Information: trtc.org or (732) 345-1400.