

A Christmas Carol en La Frontera

Based on "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens

*Adapted by
Jay Stratton and Adriana Domínguez*

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DEDICATION

This production is dedicated to la comunidad de El Paso, Texas y Juarez, México. Thank you to the UTEP Department of Theatre and Dance for taking a chance on this new adaptation. We would like to acknowledge the following for their contributions and support: Joseph Fernandez, Jesus Amador, Howard Dallin, Saraya Amador, Judith Villalva, Alma Amador, Larissa Reyes Arzate, Georgina Cross and Family, & Cristina Goletti.

STORY OF THE PLAY

A timeless masterpiece told in the spirit of La Frontera! This holiday ghost story is filled with thrills and chills to delight young and old alike. But more than a yuletide spectacle, this play is a tale of family, solitude, and redemption. By transplanting the familiar Dickens' classic from Victorian England to the US/Mexican border, the story finds new life and cultural relevance. Though easily understood by English-speaking audiences, the play has a generous helping of español to add authenticity to the borderland story.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

A Christmas Carol en La Frontera was originally produced in 2018 by the University of Texas at El Paso. It was directed by Jay Stratton, with choreography by Leanne Rinelli.

Lighting Designer: Alex Ringering

Sound Designer: Ian Gilliam

Set Designer: Nicole Bianco

Costume Designer: Sofia Perez

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CAST LIST

7 m, 5 w, 5 flexible, and kids (doubling possible)

- SCROOGE:** Ebenezer or Benito Scrooge. Older, male, Mexican but lives in the north and never goes south. Native Spanish speaker but speaks perfect English.
- UNDERTAKER:** Flexible. American narrative voice. Native English speaker but bilingual.
- SEPULTURERO:** Flexible. Mexican narrative voice. Native Spanish speaker but bilingual.
- ROBERTO CRATCHIT:** Scrooge's clerk. Middle-aged male, Mexican, bilingual but much stronger in Spanish.
- FEDERICO:** Scrooge's nephew. Young male, Mexican but lives in the north, perfectly bilingual.
- MARLEY:** As a ghost and as a living being in flashback. American businessman speaks only English.
- MOTHER SUPERIOR:** The Ghost of Christmas Past. A Mexican nun and teacher. Bilingual.
- DON PELUCHE:** A bombastic older Mexican businessman. Bilingual.
- SEÑORA PELUCHE:** Middle-aged Mexican woman. Native Spanish speaker.
- YOUNG SCROOGE:** Scrooge ages 16-23. Bilingual.
- BELLA:** *(Spanish name pronunciation)* Young Mexican woman. Bilingual but stronger in Spanish.
- CHRISTMAS PRESENT:** Flexible. The Falstaffian spirit of Christmas. Mexican, but really a spirit. Bilingual.
- MRS. CRATCHIT:** Roberto Cratchit's wife. Adult Mexican woman. Spanish speaking but strongly bilingual.
- MARTA CRATCHIT:** The eldest Cratchit child. Late teenage or early 20s Mexican young woman. Native Spanish speaker but strongly bilingual.
- CATHERINE:** Young American woman. Wife of Federico. Native English speaker.
- JORGE:** Young Mexican man. Husband of Rose. Bilingual.
- ROSE:** Young Mexican woman. Wife of Jorge. Native Spanish speaker.
- PERCY:** Young American man. Bilingual.
- GHOST OF CHRISTMAS FUTURE:** This character does not speak and may be created to fit the aesthetic of a particular production. In the original production it was three simple puppets of a large skull and two skeletal hands upstage of a scrim.

(Cont'd.)

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ADULT ENSEMBLE:

Husband, Wife, Ricardo, María, Mayor, Sheriff, Piñatero, Carnicero,
Vendedor de Velas, Spectral Dancers

YOUTH ENSEMBLE:

Little Girl, Boy Scrooge, Esperanza, Pedro Cratchit, Belinda Cratchit,
Luisa Cratchit, Tomasito Cratchit, Ignorance, Want, Esteban

** Note, with the exception of Scrooge, all roles may be double cast.*

SETTING

The original set design consisted of three main configurations: a cemetery location, an in-town location, and bare stage location. Decoration and furniture were added to produce the many other specific locations seen throughout the play. (Counting House, Scrooge's door, Scrooge's home, Don Peluche's home, city streets, the Cratchit home, and Federico's home)

In keeping with the spirit of the Frontera, the design was inspired by the many architectural influences seen throughout El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico. The mountains at the back of the set included a lit star that was seen at the conclusion of the play. In El Paso, that star is a beacon of hope and home to many including the characters portrayed in *Christmas Carol en La Frontera*.

SFX

Various music (upbeat, joyful, slow), doorbell jangle, church bells, knock on the door

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**ACT I
Prologue
The Graveyard**

(AT RISE: Cemetery. Enter SCROOGE and a FUNERAL PROCESSION to bury Marley. SPECTRAL dance. When the ceremony is over the UNDERTAKER and SEPULTURERO move downstage.)

UNDERTAKER: Jacob Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that.

SEPULTURERO: Sin duda. Estaba Muerto.

UNDERTAKER: This must be clearly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story we are about to tell.

SEPULTURERO: Estaba más muerto que el Mar Muerto. Dead as a doornail.

UNDERTAKER: Scrooge knew Marley was dead?

SEPULTURERO: ¡Claro que sí! Scrooge fue el único de luto en el funeral. His only mourner.

UNDERTAKER: Scrooge and Marley were business partners for... I don't remember how many years.

SEPULTURERO: Muchos años.

UNDERTAKER: Scrooge never painted out Marley's name on the door to their business. There it stood, seven years after Marley's death. Sometimes people called Scrooge, Scrooge and sometimes Marley.

SEPULTURERO: He answered to both names por dinero. Siempre por dinero. To Scrooge, no había diferencia.

(During the above, SCROOGE has left the cemetery and is making his way to his office. He is stopped by a LITTLE GIRL.)

LITTLE GIRL: Por favor, señor.

SCROOGE: Bah!!!

(SCROOGE threatens GIRL and she runs.)

UNDERTAKER: He was the tightfisted hand at the grindstone.

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SEPULTURERO: Era un usurero codicioso que estrujaba, apresaba, y arrebatava.

UNDERTAKER: No warmth could warm him; no cold could chill him. And people called him "Old Turncoat."

SEPULTURERO: "Viejo Vendido."

SCROOGE: Eh?!?

SEPULTURERO: (*Sotto voce.*) ¡Pero nunca a su cara! Never to his face!

UNDERTAKER: Right! Shhhh... Scrooge liked to work his way along the edges of life warning all human sympathy to keep its distance.

(SCROOGE has entered his counting house and sets himself to work.)

UNDERTAKER: Once upon a time ...

SEPULTURERO: Of all days in the year, en Nochebuena...

UNDERTAKER: Scrooge sat busy in his counting house.

SEPULTURERO: It was tarde en el día. The sun - sinking over the desert...

UNDERTAKER: But even late on Christmas Eve, old Scrooge was hard at work.

**Scene 1
The Counting House**

(SCROOGE is seated at this desk. HUSBAND and WIFE, a young couple, are standing alongside.)

SCROOGE: ... 6... 7... and three is... ten... Very well, Mr. Galicia. That covers your first month's rent.

HUSBAND: Sí.

SCROOGE: However, as you have no worthwhile references, there is the matter of your security deposit.

WIFE: ¿Qué está diciendo?

HUSBAND: No estoy seguro.

SCROOGE: Security deposit! Depósito. De. Seguridad.

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HUSBAND: Ah! ¡Sí, sí!

SCROOGE: I can ill afford the risk of renting to...
disreputables, can I?

HUSBAND: No entiendo "disreputables."

SCROOGE: You are a risk, sir! (*Explaining in frustration.*)
¡Usted es un riesgo! ¿Entiende?

HUSBAND: Sí.

(*SFX: The doorbell jangles. ROBERTO CRATCHIT enters.*)

SCROOGE: Ah, Cratchit! Wait right where you are! (*Back to
HUSBAND.*) In addition to the rent, for you to move in, I
must have twenty dollars of security. Veinte dólares para
depósito de seguridad.

WIFE: (*To HUSBAND.*) ¿Veinte dólares?

HUSBAND: Por favor, es Nochebuena señor.

SCROOGE: I am well aware of the date, sir, and you do
yourself no credit to suggest that my good judgment would
give way to some absurd holiday mania. Twenty additional
dollars to move in, take it or leave it.

HUSBAND: Un momento, por favor.

(*HUSBAND and WIFE confer during the following.*)

SCROOGE: So, Cratchit, late as usual. Are the letters
delivered?

ROBERTO: Sí, señor... And here's your supper y el periódico
de la tarde.

SCROOGE: You've been gone thirty-seven minutes. I don't
pay you to dawdle.

ROBERTO: Perdón, señor Scrooge. I do my best.

SCROOGE: Your best? Staring into shop windows or
listening to carolers howling on every street corner?

HUSBAND: (*Interrupting.*) ¿Señor?

SCROOGE: One moment, Cratchit. (*To Husband.*) Yes?

HUSBAND: (*Handing SCROOGE money.*) Aquí está su
dinero. Your money.

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SCROOGE: So, you've come to your senses, have you? Let's see. (*HE counts quickly.*) 18... 19... and 20. Very well then, Mr. Cratchit, please give these two the key to number 3 on Olivas and send them on their way.

ROBERTO: Número tres. Sí, señor.

(*SFX: The doorbell jangles. UNDERTAKER and SEPULTURERO enter as businessmen. ROBERTO, HUSBAND, and WIFE get key, etc.*)

ROBERTO: Good afternoon, señores.

UNDERTAKER: Good afternoon.

SEPULTURERO: Buenas tardes, señor.

SCROOGE: Can I help you gentlemen?

UNDERTAKER: Have I the pleasure of speaking with Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE: Mr. Marley is dead. Died seven years ago, this very night.

UNDERTAKER: Ah.

SEPULTURERO: Mi más sentido pésame, señor.

(*HUSBAND and WIFE have their key and are exiting.*)

WIFE: (*To SCROOGE.*) Feliz Navidad, señor.

(*Awkward beat as SCROOGE reacts.*)

ROBERTO: (*Urgently guiding THEM out.*) Feliz Navidad, mis amigos.

UNDERTAKER: Well... we have no doubt his generosity lives on in you, Mr. Scrooge.

SEPULTURERO: En este tiempo sagrado, señor, we who are fortunate can do something for the poor and homeless who suffer with no shelter.

SCROOGE: Are there no prisons?

SEPULTURERO: Sí, señor, many prisons.

SCROOGE: And the workhouses? Are they still in operation?

SEPULTURERO: ¿Sí, señor?

SCROOGE: Good. I'm glad to hear it.

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SEPULTURERO: But those places give no esperanza – no...

UNDERTAKER: ...Christian cheer.

SEPULTURERO: Christian cheer! To mind or body...

UNDERTAKER: So a few of us are raising a fund to provide
the poor with some meat and drink and human comfort.

SEPULTURERO: Sí, y su negocio ha tenido buena fortuna.

UNDERTAKER: Yes, you have prospered!

SEPULTURERO: Entonces... How much shall we put you
down for?

SCROOGE: Nothing.

UNDERTAKER: You wish to remain anonymous? *(To
SEPULTURERO.)* Do you hear? *(To SCROOGE.)* What a
thoughtful regalo! In the true spirit of—

SCROOGE: *(Interrupting.)* I wish to be left alone! I don't make
merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle
people merry. If I have prospered, it is because I have
worked hard and have not been foolish with my money. My
taxes pay for the prisons and the workhouses. Those who
are badly off must go there!

UNDERTAKER: Many can't go there.

SEPULTURERO: ¡Y muchos preferirían morir!

SCROOGE: If they would rather die, they had better do it and
decrease the surplus population.

SEPULTURERO: Dios Mío!

SCROOGE: It is not my business, do you understand? It is
enough for a man to understand his own business and not
interfere in other people's. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

SEPULTURERO: ¡Viejo Vendido!

SCROOGE: What's that?

UNDERTAKER: *(Restraining SEPULTURERO.)* Nothing sir.
(To SEPULTURERO.) No vale la pena, mi amigo. *(To
SCROOGE.)* We'll be on our way.

SCROOGE: What a prudent choice.

UNDERTAKER: *(To ROBERTO.)* God bless you, young man.

SEPULTURERO: *(To ROBERTO.)* Sí. Dios lo bendiga.

ROBERTO: Feliz Navidad, señores.

*(SFX: The doorbell jangles. FEDERICO enters as
UNDERTAKER and SEPULTURERO exit.)*

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FEDERICO: *(To the exiting UNDERTAKER and SEPULTURERO.)* Buenas tardes, gentlemen.

(UNDERTAKER and SEPULTURERO shake their heads and hurry out the door.)

FEDERICO: *(Cont'd. To SCROOGE.)* Merry Christmas, Tío!

SCROOGE: Ah! So you're back again this year, eh nephew?

FEDERICO: What can I say? I'm a creature of habit.

SCROOGE: A silly habit, I might add. What right have you to be merry? You're poor enough.

FEDERICO: Come, come then, Tío. What right have you to be tan brusco? You're rich enough!

SCROOGE: Bah!

FEDERICO: *(To ROBERTO.)* Merry Christmas, Roberto!

ROBERTO: Merry Christmas, señor Federico.

SCROOGE: *(Mocking.)* "Merry Christmas."

FEDERICO: Don't be cross, Tío.

SCROOGE: What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools? Merry Christmas! What's Christmas to you but a time for paying bills without money? A time for finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer? If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" or "Feliz Navidad" on his lips should be boiled in a bowl of caldo and buried with a sharpened stick of canela through his heart!

FEDERICO: ¡Tío!

SCROOGE: He should! Keep Christmas in your own way and let me keep it in mine.

FEDERICO: Keep it? But you don't keep it!

SCROOGE: Let me leave it alone, then. Much good may it do you! Much good has it ever done you!

FEDERICO: But Tío, I have always thought of Christmas time as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time... A time when people are touched with sympathy and reach out a helping hand to the poor creatures below them. The only time I know of in the long calendar of the year when men and women open their hearts and look with compassion on their fellow travelers to the grave.

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FEDERICO: *(Cont'd.)* And therefore, Tío, though Christmas has never put a dollar or a peso in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good and will do me good and I say, "God Bless it!"

ROBERTO: *(Applauding.)* ¡Eso!

SCROOGE: *(To ROBERTO.)* Let me hear another sound from you and you'll keep Christmas by losing your job. Then you'd have a Merry Christmas, eh? *(To Federico.)* You're quite a powerful speaker, sir. I marvel that you don't go into politics.

FEDERICO: Don't be angry, Tío. Come! Dine with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE: Us?

FEDERICO: Yes. Me, my wife, and a few good friends.

SCROOGE: Ah, yes, your wife. Tell me, nephew, why did you marry?

FEDERICO: Because I fell in love.

SCROOGE: Because you fell in love! The only thing in the world more ridiculous than a Merry Christmas. Good afternoon.

FEDERICO: You never came to see me before I got married. Why give that as a reason for not coming now?

SCROOGE: Good afternoon.

FEDERICO: I want nothing from you. I ask nothing of you. Somos familia. Why can't we be friends?

SCROOGE: Good afternoon!

FEDERICO: I am sorry to find you so resolute. But I am determined to keep my Christmas humor to the last... and so... a Merry Christmas, Tío!

SCROOGE: Good afternoon!!!

FEDERICO: And a Happy New Year! *(Exits.)*

SCROOGE: Humbug! *(To ROBERTO.)* And you, Roberto... a clerk making four dollars a week with a wife and children to support talking about a Merry Christmas? I'll retire to a mad house.

ROBERTO: Lo siento. *(Approaches SCROOGE's desk.)* Ummm... señor Scrooge...

SCROOGE: You'll want the whole day off tomorrow, I suppose.

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ROBERTO: Sí, señor, si es conveniente.

SCROOGE: It isn't convenient, and it isn't fair. But I suppose you must have it.

ROBERTO: Gracias señor... (*Awkward pause.*) Also... ummm...

SCROOGE: Yes? Are you loitering at my desk for some reason, Cratchit?

ROBERTO: Es Nochebuena, señor.

SCROOGE: So I am given to understand.

ROBERTO: My youngest son, Tomasito – we call him Pequeñito– he loves Nochebuena, señor. ¡Es su día favorito del año! But Tomasito, no se siente bien, but I say a mi esposa that he grows stronger every day, but she says—

SCROOGE: Cratchit, is it your plan to bore me to death?

ROBERTO: ¿Señor?

SCROOGE: Are you going to stand here and elucidate for me the medical history of each member of your seemingly endless family tree or are you going to come to the point?

ROBERTO: Quiero salir temprano para llevar a Tomasito a la posada... Leave early, señor.

SCROOGE: "Leave early" Cratchit? And if I was to dock your wages for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, but you don't think me ill-used when I pay a full day's salary for only half a day's work!

ROBERTO: Pero solamente one time in the year, señor.

SCROOGE: A poor excuse for picking my pocket every twenty-fourth of December. Well... Even in a full day, your work is of little value, I suppose. Be here all the earlier the next morning.

ROBERTO: Gracias jefe! Good night, jefe! (*Exiting.*) ¡Feliz Navidad!

SCROOGE: Humbug!!!

SEPULTURERO: (*From the side of the stage.*) But Roberto did not hear this final word from his angry jefe. With a whoop...

(*ROBERTO whoops.*)

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SEPULTURERO: *(Cont'd.)* Roberto salió corriendo por la puerta...

UNDERTAKER: *(From the side of the stage.)* ...dashed through the city streets, crowded with holiday shoppers...

(ROBERTO does so, calling "Feliz Navidad" to strangers as he goes.)

SEPULTURERO: And across the bridge to la casa de su familia to celebrate Nochebuena.

**Scene 2
The Ghost of Jacob Marley**

UNDERTAKER: Scrooge, on the other hand, stayed late that Christmas Eve to read his newspaper and finish his lonely dinner. By the time he left, it was well after dark.

(SCROOGE leaves and is out on the street.)

SEPULTURERO: Un viento helado had whipped up out of the desert. Una tormenta terrible.

UNDERTAKER: The dust blew so hard that Scrooge had to fumble his way forward with one hand over his eyes until he made it home.

(SPECTRAL DANCERS create wind and steal SCROOGE'S hat from his head.)

SCROOGE: Blasted weather!

(SCROOGE reaches his townhouse.)

UNDERTAKER: Now it is a fact that there was nothing special about the door to Scrooge's townhouse.

SEPULTURERO: Sí. Puerta normal.

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UNDERTAKER: So then, explain to me, if you can, how it happened that when Scrooge stepped forward to unlock his door, he saw not his door, but...

(MARLEY's face appears on the door.)

SCROOGE: Marley's face!!!

SEPULTURERO: Sí, la cara de Marley. Scrooge's compañero de negocio de años pasados...

UNDERTAKER: Scrooge's business partner looked just the same as the day he died, seven years ago.

SEPULTURERO: ¡Igualito!

UNDERTAKER: Then as quickly as it had appeared, the face was gone.

(MARLEY'S face disappears.)

SEPULTURERO: Scrooge no era un hombre que se asustara fácilmente.

UNDERTAKER: Indeed, he was not a man easily rattled, but the appearance of his long-dead business partner shook him.

SEPULTURERO: Scrooge got to his feet and examined la puerta.

UNDERTAKER: But finding nothing amiss...

SCROOGE: Bah.

SEPULTURERO: Entró.

(SCROOGE enters his house.)

UNDERTAKER: Scrooge lived in the same townhouse that his old business partner had lived in seven years before.

SEPULTURERO: Las paredes estaban vacías.

UNDERTAKER: The furniture was old and drab...

SEPULTURERO: Cubierto en polvo, but Scrooge didn't care. He had no amigos to come for a visit anyway.

UNDERTAKER: The wind outside was so sharp that it had crept through the walls, chilling Scrooge's melancholy home down to the floor.

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(SPECTRAL DANCERS create cold.)

SCROOGE: Bah! I like the cold. Cold is cheap.

SEPULTURERO: The wind sacudió sus ventanas...

UNDERTAKER: ...and banged on his shutters, and at once...

SEPULTURERO: His vela was snuffed out!

(SPECTRAL DANCERS blow out Scrooge's candle.)

SCROOGE: Eh? Very well, then, I like the dark. It's cheap too!

(SCROOGE fumbles about and relights his candle revealing MARLEY.)

MARLEY: Ebenezer Scrooge!!!

SCROOGE: Aaaahhh!!! What do you want of me???

MARLEY: Much.

SCROOGE: Who are you?

MARLEY: Ask me who I was.

SCROOGE: Who WERE you then?

MARLEY: In life, I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

SCROOGE: Jacob? No.

MARLEY: You don't believe in me.

SCROOGE: I don't.

MARLEY: Why do you doubt your senses?

SCROOGE: Because a little thing affects them; a slight disorder of the stomach... You might be an undigested bit of barbacoa, a blot of salsa, some undercooked menudo, a crumb of tortilla. A ghost? Nonsense. Why, there's more that's chi-le than chi-ling about you! *(Scrooge begins laughing at his own joke.)*

MARLEY: *(Howling.)* OOOOOOOOaaaaaaaahhhhhhh!!!! Ebenezer Scrooge!!! In life did I not toil by your side amassing wealth without purpose? Do we not stand now in the baleful home I once called my own? Were you not the sole mourner at my graveside? Man of the worldly mind, do you believe in me or not?

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