A Christmas Carol

Adapted by L. Don Swartz
From the novel by Charles Dickens

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Dedication

For Debby, Emily, Rosemary, Donald James, Michael,
and a cat named Ellard.
With eternal love.

STORY OF THE PLAY

This faithful yet unique adaptation of the Charles Dickens' holiday story begins in "another world" where Tiny Tim appears. More than just an employee's crippled son, he is a symbol of Scrooge's own infirmity. Scrooge's deceased business partner, Marley, is granted permission to return to Earth with a small but powerful army of holiday spirits on his adventure to convert the covetous old sinner into a Yuletide saint. The most popular scenes of the novel are dramatized, but especially powerful is a scene in the future of Bob Cratchit's gut-wrenching loss of his beloved Tim, as is the moment in reality when Scrooge hugs the boy's small form. The play is fast moving and works well on a unit set with one scene flowing into another. Appropriate carols may be used as transitions between some scenes.

SCENE SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

Scene 1: Christmas Present, the street and Scrooge's office.
Scene 2: Christmas Present, Scrooge's office.
Scene 3: Christmas Past, Scrooge's office, a field, a schoolhouse and a warehouse.

ACT TWO

Scene 1: Christmas Present, Scrooge's office and the Cratchits' living room.
Scene 2: Christmas Present, Fred's living room, the streets.
Scene 3: Christmas Future, the streets, Old Joe's parlor, Cratchits' living room.
Scene 4: Christmas Present, Scrooge's office and the streets.
Scene 5: Christmas Present, Scrooge's office and the streets.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(11 m, 11 w, 2 flexible, 8 boys, 6 girls.
Much doubling possible.)

TINY TIM CRATCHIT: Also the boy in Scene 1. Young, kind-hearted child of the Cratchits'.
EBENEZER SCROOGE: Old, angry, and bitter man.
JACOB MARLEY: Deceased partner of Scrooge, damned to hell.
BOB CRATCHIT: Works for Scrooge, Tiny Tim's father.
FRED: Nephew of Scrooge.
MRS. TINKER: A Woman of charity.
MRS. POTTS: Another woman of charity.
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST: She revisits Scrooge's youth.
LITTLE BOY SCROOGE: Lonely young boy.
BOY SCROOGE: Young and eager, not yet jaded.
LITTLE FAN: Scrooge's baby sister, pure of heart.
FAN: Mother of Fred, died during childbirth.
MR. FEZZIWIG: Kind mentor to Scrooge as a young man.
MRS. FEZZIWIG: Wife and mother.
DICK WILKINS: Also worked under Mr. Fezziwig.
BELLE: The love of Scrooge's life. Later marries Wilkins.
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT: A giant in a green robe.
MRS. CRATCHIT: Bob Cratchit's wife. Kind and gentle.
MARTHA CRATCHIT: A child of the Cratchits'.
PETER CRATCHIT: Another.
BELINDA CRATCHIT: Another.
CHARLIE CRATCHIT: Another.
HOLLY CRATCHIT: Another.
RUTH: Fred's wife.
NANCY: Friend of Fred's.
TOPPER: Bachelor, friend of Fred.
WANT: A young, sickly girl.
IGNORANCE: A young, sickly boy.
PHANTOM OF THE FUTURE: Ghost of Christmas yet to come.
FIRST BUSINESS: Down on his luck man.
SECOND BUSINESS: Another.
OLD JOE: Purchases Scrooge's belongings after his death.

MRS. DILBER: A laundress for Mr. Scrooge.
WIDOW FLIE: Maid for Mr. Scrooge before his death.
MR. ASH: The undertaker.
JOHN: About to be evicted by Scrooge for not paying rent.
CAROLINE: John's wife.
TURKEY BOY: Young boy.
EXTRAS: Shoppers, Carolers, Party Guests, Demon Voices, and Wilkins' and Fezziwigs' children.

Production Note on the Spirits

The effects of the three spirits are quite different. Past is like a living candle and is very still. It contrasts with the way Present pulls Scrooge around the stage, and is the opposite of Future, a towering black figure up on the bridge, looking down and judging Scrooge.

An effective way to portray the Spirit of Christmas Past (introduced on page 18) is through costume and lighting. In the original production she wore a white gown and her head and face were covered with a lace veil. A trap door was cut in the stage and a 2-inch sheet of plexiglass was placed for the actress to stand on. The lamp was under the stage, behind the glass. The same thing could be done with a battery-operated lantern. Lit from underneath, her features were visible beneath the lace. It is an easy, safe effect, and very dramatic. The essence of stillness, this "beam of light" never moves.

SETTING

The numerous locations within the play are served easily by three main platforms as well as playing areas extreme downstage.

A stage right platform (12 to 18 inches tall), includes two doors, two windows, and brick walls.

Stage left platform (12 to 18 inches tall) includes a fireplace, one door, and stone walls.

In both SL and SR platforms, sewer grates are imbedded in the downstage facing center. Extreme down stage is used for the street scenes. Eerie lights and fog machine under platforms make the sewer grates very atmospheric. To the left of SL platform is a lamppost and smoldering ash can.

The highest platform is upstage center. It is at least 6 feet high to represent an old wooden bridge. The space under the bridge is fashioned to look like a tunnel or dark street alley and is used for entrances and exits. A section of this wall is hinged and when lowered reveals a shroud-covered corpse, preferably a dummy.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: A foggy London Street. Christmas Eve, 1843. A small BOY on crutches stands beneath a solitary lamppost, singing.)

BOY: “God rest ye merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay....”

(SCROOGE enters. He stops, looks at the BOY, and with a grimace, turns his collar up to the humanity. Scrooge heads for his office building. A noisy crowd of SHOPPERS enters. Scrooge stops to glare at them. They eclipse his view of the boy. The Shoppers exit. Scrooge looks to the lamppost. The boy is gone. But his song is everywhere. Scrooge searches the street but cannot find the boy. Yet, the song continues to ricochet off the ancient buildings. Scrooge enters his office, SR. He slams the door. He listens. The singing has stopped, for now. MARLEY enters.)

MARLEY: Scrooge, where the devil have you been? It looks as if you’ve seen a ghost.

SCROOGE: It’s those idiots on the streets. This time of year they begin to whiff the hope of handouts and free eats. It should be outlawed, I tell you. Marley, I do believe that you and I are the only two sane people left in all of London.

MARLEY: Yes, and I’m beginning to wonder about you. Were you able to collect the rent?

SCROOGE: No, but right now Madam Pringle and her brood’s legal address is a dirty snowbank on the East side, and the new tenants are moving in as we speak. The woman said, “It’s not possible for a human being to throw a family out of their home on Christmas Eve!” I assured her that it was. *(THEY laugh.)* How did you fare at the warehouse?

MARLEY: Hawkins insisted that he could not afford to move his product at this time, nor to pay the storage fee at this time. It’s always “at this time,” isn’t it? These fools dream of a day when it will be their time and money will fall from the sky.

End of Freeview

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