

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

A Play For Youth

by
Charles Dickens

Stage Adaptation by Sandra Nordgren



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A Christmas Carol

By Charles Dickens

Stage Adaptation by Sandra Nordgren

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The first production of **A Christmas Carol** was performed during the winter of 1996/1997 at
New York City's
Thirteenth Street Repertory Company

First production:

Directed by Eric Conner

Cast in Alphabetical Order:

Karen Allen
Karey Butterworth
Michael Calderon
Michael DeRosa
Jan Gelberman
Philippe Hartmann
Jack Kahan
Gavin Morris
Mark Wallace

A note from the playwright:

*A loving thank you to Thirteenth Street Repertory Company's founder and Artistic Director, Edith O'Hara,
for her support and love without which this adaptation would not have been written.*

A special thank you to the actors and to Eric Conner for his creative insights, suggestions, and humor.

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Sandra Nordgren

SCENE 1

LOCATION: Various locations in and around London, England, including SCROOGE'S home and office and the CRATCHIT home.

TIME: The action of the play takes place on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and the morning after Christmas, 1843.

(SR - Two desks, one larger than the other, two chairs, candles in holders, and a fireplace. Each desk has an accounting ledger, a feather pen in a holder, and an ink well. SCROOGE'S desk has a large amount of money on it. SL - A made up bed with a pillow and a folded blanket at the foot of the bed, a night table, a clock, candles in holders, an armchair, and a young woman's framed portrait hanging on the wall. SR-SCROOGE and CRATCHIT are motionless. SCROOGE is seated at the larger desk, holding money. CRATCHIT is seated at the smaller desk writing in a ledger. TINY TIM is seated on the stage steps holding crutches. SPOTLIGHT ON TINY TIM.)

TINY TIM: Hello everybody. My name is Tiny Tim. I was just about to go out to meet my father. We're going to church to have the priest say a prayer for me. You see, I'm sick. The priest says that God will answer our prayers and make me well. I just wish he would do it soon, 'cause my legs hurt a lot and I get tired so fast. Sometimes kids call me names and make fun of me. That really hurts my feelings. I wish they wouldn't do that. They can run and play and I can't. So when they make fun of me, that hurts twice as much. But tonight is a very special night. It's Christmas Eve! After church we're going to the pond to watch kids ice slide! I can't wait! Well, I better go. I don't want to be late. I'll see you later!

(TINY TIM exits. SPOTLIGHT off. LIGHTS FADE UP. SCROOGE and CRATCHIT come to life. SCROOGE counts money. CRATCHIT walks to the fireplace, blowing into his hands and rubbing his arms. HE is shivering.)

SCROOGE: Cratchit! Get away from that fireplace.

CRATCHIT: *(HIS teeth chatter from the cold.)* I was just going to throw a little more coal on the fire.

SCROOGE: *(Annoyed. HE points to his head.)* Cratchit, do you know what this is?

CRATCHIT: *(Puzzled. HE looks at the audience.)* Your head?

SCROOGE: And what is inside my head?

CRATCHIT: *(Puzzled. HE looks inside SCROOGE'S ear. HE picks up a magnifying glass from the desk and uses it to look inside SCROOGE'S ear.)* Your brain?

SCROOGE: And what does my brain do?

CRATCHIT: *(Shrugs, pauses.)* It thinks?

SCROOGE: Very good. It thinks, Mr. Cratchit. Now think! If you are cold, what can you do to keep warm? Something that does not cost extra money.

CRATCHIT: *(Looks around and shrugs.)* Put more clothes on?

SCROOGE: Precisely.

CRATCHIT: I put on my jacket, but I was still cold. Then, I put on my coat. When that wasn't enough, I put on my scarf. There's nothing left.

SCROOGE: *(sighs)* Where are your mittens, earmuffs, and hat? Put them on. Surely, they should keep you sufficiently warm until it is time to leave. Think Cratchit. Think! Use *your* brain!

CRATCHIT: *(Puts on mittens and struggles with earmuffs. They keep collapsing when he tries to put them on. HE speaks in a whisper to himself.)* My brain is too cold to think.

SCROOGE: What was that?

CRATCHIT: *(timidly)* Nothing sir. I was just saying my brain is... on hold... I think.

SCROOGE: Well, take it off "hold" and get back to work. And no more sneaking coal in the fire unless you want to lose your job. When you burn coal it is the same as burning my money and you do not want to do that now, do you Mr. Cratchit?

CRATCHIT: No sir.

SCROOGE: Good. Then get back to work. You are wasting both my time *and* my money.

(NEPHEW enters the office.)

NEPHEW: (**NEPHEW addresses CRATCHIT.**) Merry Christmas.

CRATCHIT: Merry Christmas to you too, sir.

NEPHEW: (**cheerfully**) Uncle! God save you! Merry Christmas.

SCROOGE: (**Does not look up from his work.**) Humbug!

NEPHEW: Christmas a humbug? Surely you don't mean that, Uncle.

SCROOGE: Of course I mean it. Anyway, what reason do you have to be merry? You are poor.

NEPHEW: Come then. What reason do you have to be gloomy? You are rich.

SCROOGE: What else can I be when I live in a world of "Merry Christmas" fools? If I had my way, every idiot who says "Merry Christmas" would be boiled with his own pudding!

NEPHEW: (**in disbelief**) Uncle!

SCROOGE: You keep Christmas in your way and let me keep it in mine.

NEPHEW: But you don't keep it.

SCROOGE: Let me leave it alone then.

NEPHEW: I cannot. I have come to invite you to celebrate Christmas with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE: Never!

NEPHEW: You know Uncle, I will never tire of asking you. That's because my mother loved you.

SCROOGE: And I her. Ah! Fanny. My precious little sister. I loved her so. She died so young. A fragile, beautiful child. So loving. So caring.

NEPHEW: The love she felt for you is still strong, even after her death. That love now lives in me. There will come a day when you celebrate Christmas with my family.

SCROOGE: Nephew. Look at me closely and watch my lips. I will say it one more time... NEVER!

NEPHEW: It saddens me that you are so firm about that. But, I'll continue to remain cheerful and optimistic! Merry Christmas, Uncle. God save you.

SCROOGE: Good afternoon, Nephew.

NEPHEW: And a happy New Year!

SCROOGE: Happy New Year. Bah! Humbug!

CRATCHIT: (**CRATCHIT walks NEPHEW to the door.**) Do not take offense. He can be very harsh for no apparent reason. There are days, though rare they be, when his kind heart reveals itself. It is a pity how quickly it retreats. Instead of being with people, he spends much time alone, daydreaming. You should hear some of his stories. If not for you, he would have no one.

NEPHEW: Ah, Mr. Cratchit, the choice to be alone is his. He edges his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance. He has succeeded except for you and me! It is because Uncle Ebenezer is my mother's brother and because she loved him that I am resolved to keep the bond with him alive, no matter how much he resists. She saw that he is lovable and I am convinced that he must be too. I thank you for your kind words. Good day. God bless. And Merry Christmas to you and yours.

CRATCHIT: God bless you too. Merry Christmas.

(NEPHEW exits. LADY enters.)

LADY: Good day sir. Is this the establishment of Ebenezer Scrooge and Jacob Marley?

SCROOGE: It is. However, my partner, Mr. Marley, died seven years ago on this very night.

LADY: (**SHE addresses SCROOGE about SCROOGE and MARLEY.**) Oh, how awful for you both.

SCROOGE: Not really. I am still alive. What is it you want madam? I am a very busy man.

LADY: (**SHE is perplexed, but determined to get a donation from SCROOGE. SHE speaks in a practiced voice.**) I am from St. Anne's Homeless Shelter and at this time of year we are asking for donations so we may give the children a beautiful Christmas filled with toys, laughter, and a delicious, hot meal. What shall I put you down for sir?

SCROOGE: You can put me down for nothing. Where are their parents? Why do I have to feed them? No. I pay taxes to help these so-called homeless, helpless children. And anyway, it is not my business. It's enough for a man to understand his own business and not to interfere with the business of others. Mine occupies me constantly. Their fathers should go out and get jobs.

LADY: Pardon me, Mr. Scrooge. You know that jobs are hard to find. There are just too many people looking for work and... their children suffer.

SCROOGE: Humbug. Then I say they should all starve and who cares if they get sick and die. Less mouths to feed. That will help rid us of the excess population. My father taught me to make money, save it, and never ask anyone for anything. Let them do the same. Good day, madam.

LADY: (**in disbelief**) Starve? Die? Excess population? Do you know what you are saying? Where is your humanity?

SCROOGE: (**puzzled**) I said, good day?

(LADY leaves. CRATCHIT looks out the window)

CRATCHIT: Might I leave a little early today, it being Christmas Eve and all?

SCROOGE: Christmas Eve! Do you know that Christmas was invented by merchants to make people buy presents they cannot afford, presents that will never be used? Oh! How I hate Christmas.

CRATCHIT: I am truly sorry you feel that way Mr. Scrooge. But, my little boy, Tiny Tim, is outside, right there... **(CRATCHIT points out the window.)**...and it's very cold out and quite dark already. He is not well. We're going to church so the priest can say a prayer for him.

SCROOGE: I am sure your son will be just fine. You can go to church after you finish work at seven o'clock and not a minute sooner. Christmas! Prayers! Priests! Bah! Humbug!

(Christmas music. Lights fade.)

SCENE 2

(MUSIC FADES OUT. LIGHTS FADE UP. SCROOGE enters. HE takes off outer clothing and prepares for bed. SOUND OF CHAINS RATTLING startles him. MARLEY speaks from off-stage.)

MARLEY: Scroo - oo - ge. **(pause.)** Scroo - oo - ge.

(MARLEY enters behind Scrooge. SCROOGE turns and shrieks.)

SCROOGE: How did you get in here? Who are you?

MARLEY: You do not recognize me? Ask me who I was!

SCROOGE: All right then. Who *were* you?

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

SCROOGE: But Marley is dead. Has been these seven years hence.

MARLEY: That is true. I am dead! Dead as a door-nail! But nevertheless, I have been sent to warn you.

SCROOGE: **(laughs)** What prank is this? Warn me of what?

MARLEY: **(MARLEY in a thunderous voice.)** Look at me Scrooge! This is not a joke. **(SCROOGE backs up in fear.)** I have been sent to tell you that there is more to life than running a business and making money.

SCROOGE: Well, *that* is news to me. Marley would never say a thing like that. Why, he taught me everything I know about business.

MARLEY: Sadly so. In life, my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole. If I had the chance, I would not be as concerned with making money. We both made money at the expense of other people. Every one deserves a good life, Ebenezer. But we were tightfisted, overcharged whenever possible, and sometimes took people's last bit of money for food.

SCROOGE: **(HE waves off MARLEY'S words.)** Humbug! You exaggerate.

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