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Dramatic Publishing

The Spirit of Christmas

OR

The Story of Ernestina Scrooge

A Full-Length Christmas Play

By
TOM FULLER



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS)

ISBN 0-87129-349-8

*To my wife Carole, my daughter, Katie,
and my son, Nathan*

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

or

The Story of Ernestina Scrooge

A Full-Length Play

For Five principal characters and as few as Thirteen

or as many as Fifty-two actors

CHARACTERS

Ernestina Scrooge the great-granddaughter of Ebenezer

Bob Kravachic Ernestina's clerk

Bill McDougal Ernestina's former boyfriend

Joan Barley Ernestina's former business partner

Mr. Emtier (pronounced em-tee-a) a teacher

Mr. Kortiski Ernestina's first boss

Mrs. Kravachic Bob's wife

Little Bob Kravachic the Kravachic's crippled son

The Ghost of Ebenezer Scrooge

Seven Carolers

Two Narrators

Two Fund Raisers

Young Caroler

The Spirit of Christmas Past

Young Ernestina

Four Students

Six or Seven Employees

Belinda Kravachic

Martha Kravachic

Five Guests

Two Urchins

The Spirit of Christmas Future

Three Mourners

Two Undertakers

Woman

Man

The Spirit of Christmas Present

PRODUCTION NOTES

THE SET: Although the play calls for numerous scene changes, the play can be done simply on any proscenium stage. Elk River High School's production employed three basic acting areas. The DC area on the apron, or partial-thrust, was left bare and was used by the narrators and for "outdoor" scenes. The UR area was Scrooge's apartment and remained unchanged throughout the play. The third area was the UL area which served as Scrooge's office, the school, Mr. Kortjeski's office and the homes of Kravachic and McDougal. These scenes require a minimum of props and furniture to suggest the setting. A business sign, a desk or two, a portable blackboard, a table and a few chairs made set changes simple and non-distracting. The UL area does require a practical window. Both upstage areas were raised slightly on platforms. The UR area also has a door stage right and a large window center through which one of the spirits enters.

LIGHTING: Each of the three acting areas should be lit independently. Beyond that, the capability of the theatre will determine how elaborate the lighting design will be.

MUSIC: The song "Friends" sung by Young Ernestina in Act One, Scene Five was written by Nancy Arnold, the student who played the part. The arrangement for piano was written by two of her friends, Gretchen Draxler and Lisa Mapson.

COSTUME NOTES: Since the play has a modern setting, it is relatively simple to costume most of the characters. The ghosts are the only characters who require special costumes. These are discussed in more detail in the script.

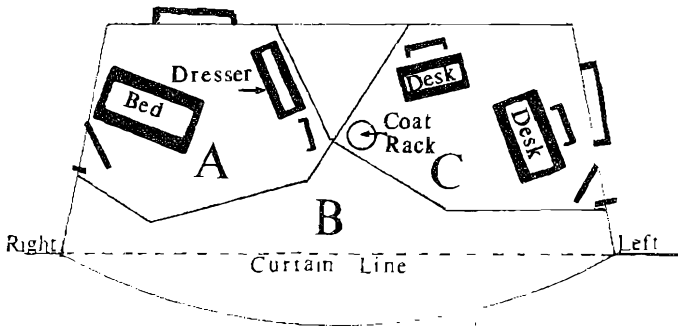
MULTIPLE ROLES: Although the cast appears to be very large, only Ernestina, Bob Kravachic, Bill McDougal, Little Bob and Young Ernestina are regarded as principals. The remainder of the roles can be filled by as few as thirteen actors or as many as the director wishes to employ. For the original production by Elk River High School, twenty-three students were used. Besides the five principals, the roles were distributed as follows:

Actor 1:	Narrator and caroler
Actor 2:	Narrator, caroler and employee
Actor 3:	Fund raiser and employee
Actor 4:	Fund raiser and employee
Actor 5:	Young caroler, Belinda, urchin
Actor 6:	Joan Barley, employee, mourner
Actor 7:	Christmas past, mourner
Actor 8:	Student, guest
Actor 9:	Student, employee, guest
Actor 10:	Student, Mrs. Kravachic
Actor 11:	Student, Mr. Korteeski, man
Actor 12:	Mr. Emtier, employee, guest, undertaker
Actor 13:	Christmas present, employee
Actor 14:	Martha, urchin
Actor 15:	Caroler, guest, woman
Actor 16:	Caroler, undertaker
Actor 17:	Christmas future, employee
Actor 18:	Mourner, guest

Even Young Ernestina doubled as a caroler, and Bob Kravachic doubled as the Ghost of Ebenezer Scrooge. Ebenezer's Ghost, incidentally, is a non-speaking role. He appears only briefly in very dim light between certain scenes. His character was left off the program and the cast had great fun denying that there was any "extra ghost" on stage.

Many of the roles may be played by either males or females. Elk River's production included 6 males and 17 females.

STAGE CHART



Area A is Scrooge's apartment. It remains unchanged throughout the play.

Area B is the downstage area. No scenery or set pieces are required here as this area is used for the outdoor scenes and for the ghostly wanderings and meetings of Scrooge's dreams.

Area C as shown is set for Scrooge's business office. With simple changes of furniture, Area C is also used as Scrooge's childhood schoolroom, Mr. Korteski's business office, and the homes of Kravachic and McDougal.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: A very dim blue light comes up on the DC area. Faintly visible is the silent SPIRIT of Ebenezer Scrooge, dressed in an old beaver hat, greatcoat and muffler. (The light should not be bright enough for the audience to exactly determine who he is.) The GHOST points to the back of the theatre where the CAROLERS are, and on the Ghost's signal they begin singing "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." The blue light on Ebenezer's GHOST goes out, and he exits in the blackout. The DC area is lit brightly after the GHOST has left the stage. The CAROLERS continue singing as they walk toward the stage. As the CAROLERS finish and exit, two NARRATORS step forward.

NARRATOR 1. Ah, Christmas! Of all the days of the year, *it* is the day people look forward to the most.

NARRATOR 2. More parties are planned and presents presented . . .

NARRATOR 1. And money spent . . .

NARRATOR 2. . . for this occasion than any other.

NARRATOR 1. Of course, Christmas can also be a sad time; for people who are lonely, are lonelier at Christmas.

NARRATOR 2. The memories of laughter . . .

NARRATOR 1. . . excitement . . .

NARRATOR 2. . . joy . . .

NARRATOR 1. . . and good will . . .

NARRATOR 2. . . can often haunt those of us who no longer have someone to share them with.

NARRATOR 1. Perhaps the best known Christmas story

about just such a person is *A Christmas Carol*.

NARRATOR 2. The story of Scrooge.

NARRATOR 1. Scrooge.

NARRATOR 2. The name of a fictional character.

NARRATOR 1. A name that became synonymous with
“miser.”

NARRATOR 2. . . . “bitter” . . .

NARRATOR 1. . . . “cold-hearted” . . .

NARRATOR 2. . . . “stingy” . . .

NARRATOR 1. Scrooge was a lonely man haunted by
memories.

NARRATOR 2. And it was only the hauntings of another
sort that caused Scrooge to mend his ways and bring
Charles Dickens’ immortal classic to a happy ending.

NARRATOR 1. Dickens wrote at the end of that story —

NARRATOR 2 (reading from book). “Scrooge had no further
dealings with spirits . . . and it was always said of him that
he knew how to keep Christmas well if *any* man alive
possessed the knowledge.”

NARRATOR 1. But whatever happened to Scrooge *exactly*?

NARRATOR 2 (examining book). Dickens never says,
exactly.

NARRATOR 1. And was Scrooge really only a fictional
character?

NARRATOR 2. Nothing wonderful can come of this story
unless it is understood that, amazing as it may seem,
Scrooge not only learned to love Christmas, but he also
fell in love with a fairly young and rather attractive
daughter of a London merchant.

NARRATOR 1. Even more amazingly, she fell in love with
him, and they were married.

NARRATOR 2. Still *more* amazingly, Scrooge lived to be-
come the proud father of a bouncing baby boy . . .

NARRATOR 1. . . . named Ebenezer, Jr. Ebenezer, Jr.
eventually grew up to become the equally proud father of

Ebenezer the Third.

NARRATOR 2. And finally, Ebenezer the Third became the father of . . .

NARRATOR 1. . . no, not Ebenezer the Fourth . . .

NARRATOR 2. . . but the father of a bright-eyed, happy baby girl named Ernestina. (Sweetly.) Ernestina Scrooge.

NARRATOR 1 (sourly). Ernestina Scrooge.

NARRATOR 2. She and her family moved to America, and, as luck would have it . . .

NARRATOR 1. . . how amazing!

NARRATOR 2. . . they settled down in a small town located along a lazy winding river in Central Minnesota.

NARRATOR 1. This, then, is the story of Ernestina Scrooge, the long lost and little known heir to the reputation of Ebenezer Scrooge.

NARRATOR 2. We will try in our little play to re-create the ghost of an idea that Charles Dickens wrote about so long ago.

NARRATOR 1. We hope that it will haunt you pleasantly. (The lights go out on the NARRATORS and they exit.)

SCENE TWO

SCENE: Scrooge's Loan Company Office.

AS LIGHTS COME UP on UL area immediately: A sign indicates that this is the "E. Scrooge and J. Barley Loan Co." SCROOGE and her clerk, BOB KRAVACHIC, are seated at desks left and right respectively. TWO CHARITY FUND RAISERS are standing at the extreme left in the office. (Scrooge is dressed as a conservative business woman and is about forty years old.)

SCROOGE (yelling angrily). Barley is dead!

FIRST FUND RAISER. Oh, I'm sorry, ma'am. I saw the sign on the window and . . .

SCROOGE. . . . Barley is dead, I tell you. She died seven years ago tonight.

SECOND FUND RAISER (crossing C). Well, I'm sure her generosity will be well represented by you, Miss Scrooge. You see, we're from the Charity Fund, and at this festive time of the year we try to provide a little something for the poor and needy.

SCROOGE (crossing R to clerk's desk). Are there no prisons or reform schools?

FIRST FUND RAISER (crossing C). There are plenty of those.

SCROOGE. And isn't Social Security still in operation?

SECOND FUND RAISER. Yes, it is, Miss Scrooge.

SCROOGE. And how about welfare, food stamps, and AFDC?

FIRST FUND RAISER. Yes, ma'am. They are all in operation; although I wish there were no need for them.

SCROOGE (returning to her own desk). Good, I'm glad to hear it.

SECOND FUND RAISER. Of course, those programs hardly provide the poor with enough food, warmth, and comfort in such difficult times. This is why we try to provide a little Christian cheer for those who need it most.

FIRST FUND RAISER (raising pen and book). What shall we put you down for, Miss Scrooge?

SCROOGE (continuing to work). Nothing!

FIRST FUND RAISER (puzzled). Oh, I see. You want to give anonymously?

SCROOGE. I *want* to be left alone! I don't celebrate Christmas, and I can't afford to pay for the celebrations of idle people. I pay plenty of taxes to support the programs I mentioned, and that's more than enough.

SECOND FUND RAISER. But still, there are many who can't use those programs, and many would rather die.

SCROOGE. Good. Let them die and decrease the over-population.

SECOND FUND RAISER (shocked). Certainly you know you were put on this earth to help your fellow man.

SCROOGE. If I'm here to help my "fellow man," what is he here for?

SECOND FUND RAISER. Why, he's here to . . . I mean . . . that is . . . you see . . . how was that again? (FIRST FUND RAISER good-naturedly crosses to Scrooge's desk and familiarly leans over it.)

FIRST FUND RAISER. But, ma'am, don't be an old Scrooge. (Pause.) Oh . . . I mean . . . ah . . . don't . . .

SCROOGE (standing). An old Scrooge? Yes, I am an old Scrooge. (She crosses C, backing the FIRST FUND RAISER across the room as the SECOND FUND RAISER sneaks L.) I'm the last of my family, and I'm sick and tired of your meddling in my business. Other people's problems are none of my business. *This* is my business, and it keeps me busy constantly. (The FUND RAISERS scurry off L. SCROOGE follows them.) Good afternoon! (She turns from the exiting Fund Raisers to find that BOB has sneaked DR to the imaginary "fourth wall" where he is pantomiming the adjustment of a thermostat.) Kravachic! Stay away from that thermostat and get back to work! Fifty-five degrees is plenty warm if you're working hard enough to generate any body heat. (They both sit.)

BOB. Yes, ma'am.

(BILL McDUGAL enters from L and crosses C. He is the same age as Scrooge, about forty. He is tall and handsome and is as positive about life as Ernestina is negative about it.)

BILL. Merry Christmas, Ernie.

SCROOGE. Bah! Humbug!

BILL. Merry Christmas, Bob.

BOB. Merry Christmas to you, Bill McDougal.

SCROOGE. And don't call me Ernie. It's Ernestina Scrooge to you, Mr. McDougal.

BILL. What's wrong, Ernie? Can't we ever be friends again? With all that humbug nonsense you sound like . . .

SCROOGE. . . . Like an old Scrooge? Thank you and good-bye.

BILL (putting his coat on Scrooge's desk). Oh, you don't mean it, Ernie.

SCROOGE. I do mean it. Who said you could be happy? You don't have any money.

BILL (laughing). Well, then, why are you so dismal? You're plenty rich.

SCROOGE (short pause). Bah. (She throws his coat onto the floor.)

BILL (shivering). Don't be angry, Ernie. (He crosses DR to adjust the thermostat.)

SCROOGE. What else can I be when I'm surrounded by fools? People take out loans to buy presents, and then they take the entire year to pay me back. Christmas is a time when people find themselves a year older and not an hour richer. (She rises and crosses DR where she turns the thermostat back down.) Every idiot who runs around with "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be impaled with a candy cane right through his heart.

BILL. Ernie.

SCROOGE. And don't call me Ernie. You keep Christmas in your way, and I'll keep Christmas in mine.

BILL. But that's just it. You don't keep Christmas any more. (He turns thermostat back up.)

SCROOGE. Let me leave it alone then. (She turns thermostat back down and returns to her desk.) A lot of good it's

done you.

BILL. It's done me a lot of good. Not financially, but other things are important, too. (He picks up his coat and absent-mindedly puts it across her desk again.) Christmas is a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time. The only time of the entire year when people open up their hearts and treat each other with tolerance and respect. And so, Ernie, even though I've never made a dime from the commercialism of Christmas, I say it *has* done me good, it *will* do me good, and I love it. (He turns thermostat up, and **BOB** applauds loudly.)

SCROOGE (to **BOB**). How would you like to spend Christmas in the unemployment line? (She drops Bill's coat on the floor.)

BILL. Don't be angry, Ernie. Have dinner with me tomorrow. I'll take you to the Bally Lo Cafe. (**SCROOGE** rises and crosses to adjust thermostat.)

SCROOGE. Bah. (**BILL** puts his coat on her desk again.)

BILL. All right, let's make it the Junction Cafe. (**SCROOGE** starts to return to her desk, but **BILL** blocks her path.)

SCROOGE. Leave me alone.

BILL. Why, Ernie?

SCROOGE (angrily). Why? Why did you leave me alone in this miserable town twenty years ago?

BILL. It wasn't because I didn't love you.

SCROOGE (pause, then angrily). That's a lie. (Not so angrily.) You never loved me.

BILL. I did love you, Ernie, and I still do. But twenty years ago there was college, and I was young, and foolish, and there were so many things to do and see, and . . .

SCROOGE (crossing to her desk). . . and now you're broke, and I'm wealthy, and here you are offering to take me out to dine at a lousy cafe. What a coincidence! (She drops his coat on the floor.)

BILL. Let's make it Phil's Place then. But that's as fancy as

I can afford. (He turns thermostat up.)

SCROOGE. Let's make it the Salvation Army's soup line.

Leave me alone!

BILL (pause; still good-naturedly). I'm very sorry, Ernie. (He picks up his coat.) I've tried to patch things up between us. (He starts to leave, turns.) A Merry Christmas, Ernie. (He exits L.)

SCROOGE (pause; staring after him). Bah. (Turns to see BOB staring at her.) What are you staring at? All you make is two fifty an hour. How can you be thinking of a Merry Christmas? (BOB quickly returns to his work and SCROOGE crosses to the thermostat.)

(A young CAROLER enters the office from L.)

CAROLER (singing).

"God rest ye merry gentlemen,

Let nothing you dismay . . ."

SCROOGE. Get out of here! Leave that door shut! (She chases the CAROLER off L.)

BOB (crossing DC). She was only caroling, Ernie.

SCROOGE. She was . . . (Pause. She turns and walks menacingly toward him as he cowers back to his desk.) Don't *you ever* call me that again. I am *Miss Scrooge* to you.

BOB. Yes, ma'am, er . . . yes, Miss Scrooge.

SCROOGE (returning to her desk). And she was not *just* caroling. She was being petulant. (BOB nods agreement, stops, scratches head.)

BOB. What was she being?

SCROOGE (exasperated). She was wasting our time, you ignorant little whelp. Don't they teach vocabulary in public schools any more? (Pause.) Now look what time it is. The day is gone and we've still got work to do. Well, you get out of here. I'm not paying you overtime just to

sit and explain vocabulary words to you. Get out. Go. Leave. (BOB begins scrambling for his coat. He rushes L. He stops and slowly turns to SCROOGE.)

BOB. Ah . . . Miss Scrooge . . . ?

SCROOGE. What is it now?

BOB. Well . . . I . . . you see . . .

SCROOGE. Yes, I see. Tomorrow's Christmas and you want the day off.

BOB (quickly). If you don't mind, Ern — Miss Scrooge.

SCROOGE. I do mind. (Pause.) I suppose you'd call in sick anyway. (Pause.) You may have the day off. (She prepares to leave also.)

BOB. Thank you, ma'am.

SCROOGE. But I won't pay you for it.

BOB. No, ma'am.

SCROOGE. And be in here all the earlier the next day.

BOB. No, ma'am. I mean, yes, Miss Scrooge. Thank you, Miss Scrooge.

SCROOGE. And stop that groveling, you obsequious little twit.

BOB. Yes, ma'am, good night, ma'am. (He exits L, then quickly returns.) Merry Christmas, Miss Scrooge.

SCROOGE. Will you . . . (But BOB is already gone.) . . . Bah! Humbug!

(The lights dim out on the office as SCROOGE exits L. The CAROLERS enter singing "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" and the DC area is lit for them. [During the caroling the office scene is changed to the schoolroom scene and SCROOGE changes her costume by putting on her nightgown beneath her coat.] When the caroling ends, the CAROLERS exit. The NARRATORS enter and cross to DC.)