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Dramatic Publishing

THE LAST CHRISTMAS CAROL

A Musical in Two Acts

**Book and Lyrics by
DAVID MEYERS**

**Music by
SCOTT MICHAL**

**Inspired by Charles Dickens'
*A Christmas Carol***



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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For Elise ...

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THE LAST CHRISTMAS CAROL was first staged as a co-production of the Children's Drama Company and Park Playhouse Teen Theater at the Davis Discovery Center Shedd Theater, Columbus, Ohio, on December 12, 1997.

CAST

Brodwyn Branson	ALEX ADAMS
Max Plimsoll	ELISE MEYERS
Big Lou Bitterman	MELISSA MCDOWELL
J. Pilkington Burpee	KELLY WALTER
Laverne Spreen	MOLLY EICHMAN
Newsie	DARYA MARCHENKOVA
Blue Christmas	MIKE REED
Barbara Spanew/Tiny Tim	ANNICA BERLINER
Scrooge	JASON KIRKPATRICK
Scrooge, Too/Deshler/Old Joe	WINSTON COOK-WILSON
Fred/Undertaker's Man/Derelict	JARED BARONE
Margaret	JENNY RYBOLT
Bob Cratchit	TERRY SHOPE
Mrs. Cratchit	LAUREN FULTON
The Marthas	MEGAN and JENNY HINZ
Belinda Cratchit	JENNIFER COSBY
Peter Cratchit	ROB LEUTZ
Hannah Cratchit	NATALIE SPENCER
Stella	CATHERINE HARKNESS
Wallick	BRANDON MCDONOUGH
Mrs. Dilber	DANAE WENSLEY
Laundress	ALYSSA PENCE
Billie/Christmateer	JESSICA TAIGE
Bobbie/Christmateer	NAIMA VAN DER DOES
Bubbie/Christmateer	MARIE DANIELL

Auctioneer
Richards
Foster
Glencoe

BLAIR CRAWFORD
ERIKA HUBBARD
ANNA SCHUER
KATIE HOLT

With EMMY BROCKMAN, ANDY LATHROP, CASEY MILLER,
TERRY SHOPE, JENNIE WATT

PRODUCTION STAFF

Musical Director
Scenic and Lighting Design
Costume Design
Technical Director
Publicity
Program Director

TAMMY HANSON
PATTY DEMARIA
SARAH WORTHINGTON
MEG ALLWEIN
LISA MILLER
MICHAEL SCHIRTZINGER

THE LAST CHRISTMAS CAROL

A Musical in Two Acts

For 22-40 or more (about half males), extras, chorus

CHARACTERS

Ideally, adults should play Branson, Plimsoll, Bitterman and Burpee, while children and teenagers handle the remaining roles. Many of the roles can be doubled and tripled. An asterisk (*) denotes that the actor is portraying a would-be actor who is playing a character within the play-within-a-play. See back of script for additional casting suggestions.

Brodwyn Branson Jaded director of a children's theater company

Max Plimsoll Branson's devoted assistant

*Fred Scrooge's bland nephew

*Scrooge, Too Would-be actor who does not get the part

*Margaret Scrooge's lost love (as well as Branson's)

*Scrooge Would-be actor who does get the part

*Mrs. Cratchit Bob Cratchit's increasingly independent wife

*The Marthas Twin girls playing the role of Martha Cratchit

*Bob Cratchit Scrooge's much put upon employee

Barbra Spanew/*Tiny Tim Spunky homeless girl

Small Child Gullible kid who raises her hand

*Stella Scrooge's demure apprentice

Big Lou Bitterman Branson's late, somewhat disreputable agent

*Deshler Solicitor for charity

*Wallick Another solicitor for charity

J. Pilkington Burpee Once influential critic and Ghost of Christmas Past

PRODUCTION NOTE: All of the transitions between scenes are intended to be dissolves, with the following scene beginning before the previous one has ended. The actors will need to be very discrete when making their entrances and exits so they do not upstage one another.

PLACE

A theater—any theater—far from the lights of Broadway.

TIME

A couple of months before Christmas—too early for anyone to get excited about the holidays (save for the very young) or irritated by them (save for a certain theater director).

Set requirements: Most of the action takes place on a bare stage with a few props brought in as needed. For the climax, a painted backdrop portraying a Dickensian street scene is sufficient. The most important prop is Spreen's Christmas cart.

Approximate running time: 2 hours

THE SONGS

Act One

The Last Christmas Carol (Branson & Chorus)	13
Christmas Time (Spanew)	19
Columns and Rows (Bob & Stella)	23
Makin' the Best of a Bad Situation (Big Lou)	35
J. Pilkington Burpee (Burpee)	43
The Theater (Branson)	50
I Love All Things Christmas (Spreen)	55
I Give You Mister Scrooge (The Cratchits)	61
Christmas Time—Reprise (Choir)	66

Act Two

An Ordinary Man (Plimsoll)	70
Brodwyn Branson (Christmateers)	81
Waste Not, Want Not (Donner Family Singers)	89
C'mon and Rock (Blue & Christmateers)	99
Make Believe (Branson)	109
Christmas Time—Reprise (Cast)	112
C'mon and Rock—Reprise (Christmateers & Cast) . . .	115

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

SETTING: *Auditions are in progress for the obligatory annual children's theater production of A Christmas Carol.*

AT RISE: *There is no curtain. Fifteen minutes before the posted starting time, "auditions" will begin. As the theatergoers arrive, BRODWYN BRANSON and MAX PLIMSOLL move amongst the audience, asking for volunteers to try out for the show by singing a Christmas song. Children are usually eager to do so. PLIMSOLL jots down the names until she has at least five individuals or groups.*

As PLIMSOLL takes the stage, BRANSON moves to a seat in the front row. Before sitting down, he announces, "Quiet everyone. Let's show some respect for those who are auditioning." PLIMSOLL then calls each act up on the stage one at a time, ensures the band knows the song, then tells them to begin. PLIMSOLL and BRANSON are free to ad lib, as long as they remain in character.

After the last act is done, PLIMSOLL says, "We're ready for the next group, now," and the lights go down. As the stage lights come up, three groups of would-be actors stand "frozen" in tableaux, forming a triangle with its

apex UC. Projected on a screen far R is a headline from the local newspaper: <slide> "CHRISTMAS CAROL AUDITIONS SATURDAY."

The spotlight "unfreezes" the first group of TWO ACTORS UC who immediately begin reading through a scene for what is obviously the first time.

FRED (*the mother of all monotones*). A Merry Christmas, Uncle. God save you.

SCROOGE, TOO. Bah! Humbug!

FRED. Christmas a humbug, Uncle. You don't mean that, I am sure?

(The actor portraying SCROOGE, TOO stumbles over the unfamiliar words, but continues pell-mell through his lines.)

SCROOGE, TOO. I do. Out upon Merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills with—without money; a time for finding yourself—a year older, and not an hour richer; a time for finding yourself—wait, I said that. Let's see ... here it is—a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you?

FRED. Uncle.

SCROOGE, TOO. Wait. I'm not done. If I had my will, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. *(Perplexed by what he has just read, SCROOGE, TOO smiles sheepishly.)*

FRED (*tentatively*). Uncle?

SCROOGE, TOO. He should! Nephew, keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.

(As they conclude, the director, BRODWYN BRANSON, abruptly rises from a seat in the first row, automatically hands a humongous coffee mug to his assistant and all-around Girl Friday, MAX PLIMSOLL, seated beside him, and turns toward the audience. NOTE: If it is not possible to seat actors in the audience, BRANSON and PLIMSOLL can occupy theater seats positioned R beneath the projection screen.)

(SONG #1: "THE LAST CHRISTMAS CAROL")

BRANSON *(sings directly to the audience).*

**THE HOLIDAYS ARE HERE AGAIN
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S NEARLY BEEN
A YEAR SINCE WE LAST STAGED THIS PLAY
IT SEEMS LIKE ONLY YESTERDAY**

(Walks toward the stairs.)

**WE TOOK OUR FINAL CURTAIN CALL
AND I REMEMBER THROUGH IT ALL
I FELT NO TWINGES OF REGRET
AND COULDN'T WAIT TO STRIKE THE SET**

(As BRANSON continues to sing, he climbs the stairs to the stage and positions himself in between the first and third group of actors L.)

**THOUGH AFTERWARDS I TRIED TO PUT
THE WHOLE THING FROM MY MIND
IT TOOK ME TILL MEMORIAL DAY
TO FINALLY UNWIND
BUT SUDDENLY IT'S BACK AGAIN**

**TO HAUNT ME LIKE BEFORE
NO WONDER I FEEL I
CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE**

**I'D RATHER SPEND FOREVER IN PERDITION
THAN HEAR ONE MORE AUDITION
THOUGH THEY'VE GOT ME OVER THE
PROVERBIAL BARREL
I SWEAR THAT THIS WILL BE
MY LAST CHRISTMAS CAROL!**

(Sleigh bells are heard offstage shaking out the rhythm.)

CHORUS *(off)*.

**DECK THE HALLS WITH BOUGHS OF HOLLY
FAH-LA-LA-LA-LAH, LA-LAH, LAH, LAH**

(As the song ends, BRANSON steps aside, sliding into the shadows. The spotlight now shifts to the second group of actors R, who "unfreeze" at once. A different SCROOGE is gazing into the eyes of his girlfriend, MARGARET. Neither actor seems to have an inkling of what the scene's about. The actor portraying MARGARET is as overwrought as Lady MacBeth.)

MARGARET. It matters little. To you very little. Another idol has displaced me; and it can comfort you in time to come, as I would have tried to do. I have no just cause to grieve.

(The actor playing SCROOGE seems embarrassed by the whole affair and would rather be anywhere else—preferably the football field.)

SCROOGE. What idol has displaced you?

(MARGARET stalks the stage, clutching her breast, touching the back of her hand to her forehead, and generally chewing up the scenery.)

MARGARET. A golden one. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master passion, gain, engrosses you. Have I not?

(The actor portraying SCROOGE stands dumbstruck.)

MARGARET (glancing back). I said, "Have I not?"

SCROOGE. Huh? Hold on. Oh yeah. (Finds his place.)
What then? Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I am not changed toward you. Have I ever sought release from our engagement?

MARGARET. In words, no. Never.

SCROOGE. In what then?

MARGARET (moving at random so SCROOGE does not know where to look). In a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in another atmosphere of life; another hope as its great end. (Checks her script, finds it is upside down, and turns it over.) If you were free today, tomorrow, yesterday, can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl; or, choosing her, do I not know that your repentance and regret would surely follow? I do; and I release you. With a full heart, for the love of him you once were.

SCROOGE (looks hopefully to BRANSON). Is this where you want us to stop?

(BRANSON moves in front of the spot, eclipsing the ACTORS.)

BRANSON (sings).

**WHAT KEEPS THEM COMING BACK AGAIN
TO SEE THIS PLAY, YEAR OUT, YEAR IN?**

**YOU'D THINK THEY WOULD GROW TIRED OF IT
BUT EACH YEAR IT'S A BIGGER HIT**

**AND, SAD TO SAY, IT'S NOT IMPROVED
THE AUTHOR HAD HIS NAME REMOVED
THE STAGING'S LAME, THE STORY'S TIRED
THE ACTING'S MOSTLY UNINSPIRED**

**EACH YEAR I RACK MY BRAIN TO COME
UP WITH SOME CLEVER TWIST
ANOTHER WAY WE COULD PORTRAY
OUR OLD PROTAGONIST
BUT STILL NO MATTER WHAT I TRY
IT'S ALL BEEN DONE BEFORE
THERE'S SIMPLY NO NEW GROUND
REMAINING TO EXPLORE**

**'CAUSE HOLLYWOOD HAS BALLYHOOD IT
THEY'VE MICKEY MOUSED AND MR. MAGOOED
IT
SO DON YOUR GAY APPAREL
WITH YOUR SMILES SO STERILE
I SWEAR THAT THIS WILL BE
MY LAST CHRISTMAS CAROL!**

(More sleigh bells in rhythm.)

CHORUS *(off)*.

**GOOD KING WENCESLAS LOOKED OUT
ON THE FEAST OF STEPHEN**

(The spotlight now isolates the final group LC. It is the CRATCHIT FAMILY—a ragtag bunch, none of whom resembles the other, except for twin girls who are vying

for the role of MARTHA. They speak their lines in unison.)

MRS. CRATCHIT. What has ever got your precious father then? And your brother Tiny Tim! Martha warn't as late last Christmas by half an hour!

THE MARTHAS (*excitedly*). Here's Martha, Mother!

CRATCHIT KIDS. Here's Martha, Mother! Hurrah! There's such a goose, Martha!

MRS. CRATCHIT. Why, bless your heart alive, my dears, how late you are!

THE MARTHAS. We'd a great deal of work to finish up last night and had to clear away this morning, Mother.

MRS. CRATCHIT. Well! Never mind so long as you are come. Sit ye down before the fire, my dears, and have a warm, Lord bless ye!

CRATCHIT KIDS. No, no! There's Father coming. Hide, Martha, hide!

BOB. Bob. (*Realizes his mistake*). Uh, that's me. Why, where's our Martha?

MRS. CRATCHIT. Not coming.

BOB. Not coming! (*He clutches his chest as if having a heart attack and drops to one knee.*) Not coming upon Christmas day!

(Once again, BRANSON intrudes upon the scene.)

BRANSON (*sings*).

**SO PAINT THE FLATS AND RIG THE FLY
FOR OURS IS NOT TO REASON WHY
THEY COME TO SEE THE ELEPHANT
SO GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT**

**OLD SCROOGE, THE GHOSTS, AND TINY TIM
(I'M REALLY GETTING SICK OF HIM
HIS SWEETNESS MAKES MY STOMACH ACHE
I WISH HIS STUPID CRUTCH WOULD BREAK)**

**NOW, I DON'T WANT TO BE THE ONE
TO SLAY THE GOLDEN GOOSE
BUT THERE HAS GOT TO BE ANOTHER PLAY
WE CAN PRODUCE
A MODERN TALE THAT TACKLES THE
BIG ISSUES THAT WE FACE
WITH REALISTIC CHARACTERS
WE CAN EMBRACE**

**I KNOW YOU'LL THINK ME COLD AND
HEARTLESS
BECAUSE I FEEL THIS PLAY IS RATHER
ARTLESS
THOUGH I PLACE MY JOB IN PERIL
I SWEAR THAT THIS WILL BE
IN FACT I GUARANTEE
IF THEY LEAVE IT UP TO ME
FOR IT MEANS MY SANITY
MY LAST CHRISTMAS CAROL!**

(Sleigh bells.)

CHORUS *(off).*

**GOD REST YE MERRY, GENTLEMEN
LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY!**

(As they finish, BRANSON applauds perfunctorily while taking center stage.)

BRANSON. Thanks to all. You may be seated. Now, have we had a chance to hear everyone read and sing?

(The actors sit down on the stage. SPANEW, a young girl who will ultimately portray TINY TIM, walks up to BRANSON and tugs on his sleeve.)

SPANEW. I didn't sing.

(BRANSON can barely conceal his consternation.)

BRANSON. Then by all means, child, sing!

(BRANSON steps aside, returning to his seat, so SPANEW can sing. She hands some sheet music to PLIMSOLL.)

PLIMSOLL. What tempo?

(SPANEW hums a couple of bars. When PLIMSOLL nods she has it, SPANEW moves to center stage. PLIMSOLL hands the sheet music to the piano player, then settles into a seat beside BRANSON.)

SPANEW. My name is Barbra, and I am going to sing "Christmas Time."

PLIMSOLL. Barbra what, honey?

SPANEW. Barbra—Whitney—Mariah Madonna Gloria Cher Spanew.

BRANSON *(aside)*. Interesting bloodlines—like a racehorse.

PLIMSOLL. Go ahead, Barbra.

(The PIANIST begins.)

(SONG #2: "CHRISTMAS TIME")

SPANEW *(sings)*.

**CHRISTMAS IS THE TIME OF YEAR
WHEN MAGIC FILLS THE AIR**

PEOPLE LOOK WITHIN THEMSELVES
TO FIND THE GOODNESS THERE
CHRISTMAS IS THE TIME OF YEAR
WHEN ALL THE WORLD'S AGLOW
WONDERS OF THE HOLIDAYS
ARE EV'RYWHERE YOU GO

HEARTS ARE LIGH—

BRANSON (*interjects*). Thank you.

SPANEW.

—TER

(*Stops singing.*) But there's more!

SPIRITS BRIGHTER—

BRANSON. Always leave 'em wanting more, kid.

PLIMSOLL (*whispering*). That's okay, honey. You did fine.

(*Unseen by BRANSON, the singer sticks her tongue out at him, then quietly walks over to sit with the others. BRANSON stands, takes the stage again, and looks around. He rushes through his standard audition speech.*)

BRANSON. Now, is that everyone? Good. First, I want to thank all of you for trying out, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. You've heard this all before, right? But auditioning is a tough business. It doesn't get any easier. You're putting yourself in a position to be rejected and nobody likes to be rejected.

You were all very good, and I wish I could use you all. However, we are casting *A Christmas Carol*, not *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. So, then, callbacks will be Tuesday night. If you don't hear from us by then, you might as well kill yourself because your life

will be over anyway, right? (*Beat.*) How many of you think I'm serious? (*One small child meekly raises a hand.*) No, it just means at this particular time and in this particular place we did not have a part for you in this particular play. If you didn't get in, it's my fault, not yours. I'm the one who makes the decisions around here, and I don't always make the right ones. If I did, I wouldn't be here, right? (*Glances at PLIMSOLL who knows better than to laugh at his inside joke.*) So, thank you and go home. (*As the dejected ACTORS depart, BRANSON walks to the edge of the stage where PLIMSOLL is standing. He crouches down until they are looking eye-to-eye.*) Annie's to blame for all of this, you know. If I hear one more brat sing "Tomorrow" ...

PLIMSOLL (*hesitantly*). So ... what do you think?

BRANSON. Think? I'll tell you what I think. I think Jim Henson had the right idea. Sew some buttons on a couple of socks, stick them on your hands, and you're ready to do *King Lear*.

PLIMSOLL. It wasn't that bad.

BRANSON. No? Compared to what? A plague of locusts? The Hindenburg?

PLIMSOLL. They're just kids, Mr. Branson. I'm sure they'll be fine once they know what's expected of them.

BRANSON. What's expected of them is that they will sell many tickets and fill all of these seats night after night. What's expected of them is they will drag their parents, their grandparents, their aunts and uncles, their friends, their friends' friends like a human chain letter until everyone within a hundred miles has seen this show at least once.

(He hops off the stage. At the same time, the actors portraying BOB CRATCHIT, STELLA, and SCROOGE enter carrying the props for the next scene. As they set up, PLIMSOLL and BRANSON continue their conversation, oblivious to them.)

PLIMSOLL. Don't you think that's a rather heavy burden for a bunch of kids?

BRANSON. To their parents, they're kids. To their teachers, they're kids. To their probation officers—if they have them—they might still be kids. But to me, they're actors and I treat them as such. I don't think I need to point out, Max, the Christmas production is our “cash cow.” If we don't make it now, we don't make it.

PLIMSOLL *(a hint of a scowl)*. I know. *(Pause.)* So what do you want to do about casting?

BRANSON. Casting? That's a joke, as if we actually had some choices to make. *(Beat.)* You handle it. Pick some names out of a hat, for all I care.

PLIMSOLL. You're kidding, right?

BRANSON. Think of it as “Experimental Theater.”

PLIMSOLL. But, Mr. Branson!

(The actor portraying SCROOGE exits the scene transitions into rehearsal for A Christmas Carol.)

BRANSON. They're just blobs of clay, Max. I can make them into whatever I want. Remember that.

(PLIMSOLL stands with her mouth agape as BRANSON takes his seat, then quickly joins him.)