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Dramatic Publishing

Charles Dickens'

A Christmas Carol

Adapted by John Jakes

TOURING VERSION

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A Christmas Carol

Comedy/Drama with music. By John Jakes.

From his full-length play and the classic story by Charles Dickens.

Cast: 4m., 2w., 1 boy, 1 girl. This touring version of John Jakes' nationally successful stage adaptation (also available from Dramatic Publishing) specifically tailors the Charles Dickens holiday classic to the needs of a group touring the show to school cafeterias, gymnasiums, auditoriums and other venues not equipped for conventional theater. The script not only tells the Dickens story faithfully but also allows young audiences to enjoy the real magic of theater—watching the actors create the scene and costume changes as the show moves along. No lighting or sound equipment is required for the production. Music is provided by the cast a cappella. As in the full-length adaptation, Charles Dickens is introduced at the beginning, starts to tell the story of Scrooge's redemption, then brings it alive with the help of the others in the cast. All in all, this is a *Christmas Carol* low in production expense but high in imaginative uses of the theater. *Bare stage with props.* *Approximate running time: 50 minutes.*

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A Christmas Carol-touring

Dickens/Jakes

Dramatic Publishing



Charles Dickens'

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

(Touring Version)

Adapted by
JOHN JAKES

From his full-length play and the classic story by
CHARLES DICKENS

*“Mr. Scrooge, four ghosts, and the
authentic Dickens text in
50 minutes of live theater”*



Dramatic Publishing

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JOHN JAKES

From his full-length play and the classic story by
CHARLES DICKENS

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Dedicated with thanks to our director
Michael Licata
who brought it to life.

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“The author is a member of The Dramatists Guild,
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This touring version of *A Christmas Carol* was conceived and written for the Arts Center of Coastal Carolina on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, as part of the center's educational outreach program. The show was first presented in December 2005, at 18 school locations in a three-county region, with the following cast:

John David Rose Dickens, Blind Man, Gentleman,
Headmaster, Fezziwig
Alan Lathan Scrooge
Margaret Crenshaw Mother, Ghost 1, Mrs. Cratchit
Kristi Leigh Snyder Belle, Ghost 3, Sarah
Desiree Duff Girl, Fan, Belinda, Turkey Boy
Hannah Sachs-Scott Boy, Young Ebenezer, Tiny Tim
Anthony Paderewski Fred, Marley, Ghost 2, Ebenezer
Patrick Saxon Bob Cratchit, Dick

Directed by Michael Licata
Scenic Design Brian Riley
Costume Design Jennifer Correll
Director of Production Terry Cermak

Produced by the Arts Center of Coastal Carolina
Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

Jack Morris—Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Kathleen P. Bateson—President & CEO

*...with very special thanks to
the anonymous benefactor
who made the production possible.*

Production Notes

This script was conceived and originally produced as a traveling show that could be packed, carried, and set up using a van...but no lights, no sound system, no music except what the actors themselves provide.

The script runs 47 minutes or a bit longer, depending on pace and innovations by a director. For example, our show used a human clock: a young actress who slipped on a clock-face cutout, climbed onto a box and cheerfully bonged away, to the delight of audiences.

The script itself retains much of the flavor of my original, longer adaption. Scenes were edited down or, in several cases, eliminated, though with no dilution of the wonderful story. Here and there language was changed—a simpler word or phrase substituted for another—but I steadfastly refused to “dumb down” the magic of the original Dickens prose as a sop to youthful audiences. We discovered, as I suspected, that they don’t need it.

Some six months went into the planning and creation of the show, with a great share of the burden falling on the director and the Arts Center’s technical support staff. At an early meeting, one of us raised memories of *The Fantasticks*, a wonderful show which succeeds without a great deal of technical help, and we took that as our model. It helped significantly that our director, among other roles he played on and off Broadway, was El Gallo #35 in the Sullivan Street production.

A brief description of the set design would be appropriate, with the warning that “one size fits all” definitely does not apply—hence we have included no diagrams, drawings,

charts, etc. A production must be thought out and designed on the basis of where it will be performed.

Our set featured two large cabinets, upstage R and L, with shelves and hooks for storing or hanging certain props. A series of wooden boxes became the pedestals of Scrooge's bed and the Cratchit dinner table, as well as countinghouse desks when hinged lids were raised. As befitted a small touring company, all trunks and furniture items bore "theatrical" stickers and labels.

A drape painted with Big Ben and the London skyline was hung between the upstage cabinets and raised at the moment near the opening when Dickens speaks of Christmas Eve in London town. Coat racks and chairs were placed around the set as necessary. A costume rack behind the London drop was fully visible until the drop was raised; actors hidden by the drop could then change costumes out of sight. Marley was an actor cloaked as a door, with an elaborate knocker mounted on the back of the cloak; when turned around, the actor's face appeared in a cutout at the knocker position. Marley then doffed the prop cloak to be revealed with his baggage of chains, locks and cash boxes.

The three Ghosts were costumed appropriately and appeared from behind the drop. Each, along with Marley, wore a half-mask for that character.

No stage crew traveled with the company. The actors understood before rehearsals started that they would be required to pack the van, unpack and set up the show, and pack it up again for the return trip.

Did they suffer? To the contrary. Truly "live" theater, in which the audience's imagination plays a full role, is as in-

vigorating for a cast as for spectators. At one of the last performances, I asked the 7-year-old actress playing Tiny Tim whether she was tired of it. Her face lit up. She definitely wasn't—indeed, had become happily accustomed to signing autographs after every show.

— John Jakes
June 2006

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

A Play in One Act
For 4m., 2w., 1 boy, 1 girl*

CHARACTERS

VENUE HOST

CHARLES DICKENS

EBENEZER SCROOGE, surviving partner of Scrooge &
Marley

GIRL

LITTLE BROTHER

MOTHER

BLIND BEGGAR

BOB CRATCHIT, Scrooge's clerk

FRED, Scrooge's nephew

GENTLEMAN

JACOB MARLEY, Scrooge's partner; a ghost

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

HEADMASTER

YOUNG EBENEZER, age 10

FAN, Ebenezer's sister, age 11-12

FEZZIWIG

EBENEZER, in his 20s

DICK, an apprentice

BELLE, Scrooge's fiancée

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

MRS. CRATCHIT

BELINDA CRATCHIT, about 13
TINY TIM
THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME
BUSINESSMAN 1
BUSINESSMAN 2
STREET BOY
SARA, Fred's wife

* Or two girls

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

(Pre-show: ACTORS—excepting DICKENS—set up prop trunks, coatracks with masks and/or costumes on them, then take seats on the stage. When show is ready to begin, HOST for the venue greets the audience with the following introduction.)

HOST. Today we have a very special and famous guest who is going to tell us one of the world's favorite stories. He has toured America before—this is his second visit. Please welcome the great English novelist, Mr. Charles Dickens.

DICKENS (*entering*). Thank you, one and all. Today I should like to tell you what has proved to be my most popular tale. It was first published in my *Christmas Book* for the year 1844—"A Christmas Carol"—which I subtitled, "A Ghost Story of Christmas." I endeavored in this ghostly little narrative to raise the ghost of an idea, which I hope will not put you out of humor with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt your houses pleasantly.

I have always loved acting, and the theatre, so the members of our little company, myself included, shall play many parts in the story (*Members of the CAST step forward.*) ...which begins this way:

Marley was dead, there was no doubt about that...the register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and Scrooge, his partner for many years. Yes indeed, old Marley was dead as a doornail... but even so, Scrooge was a man of business and concluded an excellent contract on the very day of Marley's funeral. (*He moves toward the prop trunk.*)

On the day in question—Christmas Eve in London town— (*London drop is raised.*) It was cold, bleak, biting weather. The fog came pouring in, and candles appeared in the windows along the busy street—ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air.

(*DICKENS has donned dark glasses. With cane and tin cup, he moves into...*)

The Street

(*SCROOGE observes the MOTHER, BOY and GIRL. GIRL teases the BOY.*)

MOTHER. Behave yourself, or old Mr. Scrooge will get you while you sleep.

(*As they exit, DICKENS dons dark glasses and approaches as BLIND BEGGAR.*)

SCROOGE. Keep your distance! I've no money for homeless beggars. (*Seizes and throws the cane.*)

DICKENS (*removing glasses*). Feeling nothing, the cold-hearted gentleman proceeded to the countinghouse named for its owners, Scrooge and Marley.

The Countinghouse

(*BOB CRATCHIT discovered at desk. As SCROOGE goes to his own desk—*)

BOB. Good afternoon, Mr. Scrooge.

(*SCROOGE ignores him. FRED bursts in.*)

FRED. Merry Christmas, Bob Crachit.

BOB. Thank you, Mr. Fred.

FRED. And a merry Christmas to you, Uncle.

SCROOGE. Bah. Humbug.

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

SCROOGE. I do. What reason have you to be merry?

You're a poor man—

FRED. What reason have you to be dismal? You're a rich man.

SCROOGE. Bah. Humbug.

FRED. Uncle, don't be cross.

SCROOGE. What else can I be in a world of fools? What's Christmas to you but a time for buying presents without money? A time for balancing your books and having every item for the last twelve months written in red ink? Every idiot who goes about babbling "Merry Christmas!" should be buried with a stake of holly in his heart! Keep Christmas in your way but let me keep it in mine.

FRED. But Uncle—you don't keep it.

SCROOGE. Permit me to leave it alone, then. Much good Christmas has ever done you.

FRED. There are many good things from which I haven't profited—Christmas is among the best. I have always thought of Christmas—apart from its sacred name and origin—as a good time—a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time. And therefore, Uncle, though it has never put money in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good—and so, for the sake of Christmas and my late mother—your sister—I say God bless it.

(BOB applauds.)

SCROOGE *(to him)*. Another sound from you and you'll spend Christmas looking for another position.

FRED. Don't be angry, Uncle. We've never had a quarrel to which I've been a party. Come dine with my wife and family tomorrow.

SCROOGE. Never. Good afternoon, sir.

FRED. I am sorry to find you feeling this way. But I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. *(On his way out.)*
A merry Christmas, Uncle!

SCROOGE. Good afternoon.

FRED. And a happy New Year.

SCROOGE. Good afternoon!! *(FRED exits. SCROOGE turns on BOB.)* Why are you smiling? A clerk earning fifteen shillings a week, with a wife and family to support—and you expect a merry Christmas? They should lock you up in a mental hospital.

(Returns to his desk. DICKENS enters, playing a prosperous GENTLEMAN.)

GENTLEMAN. Good afternoon, sirs. Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE. Mr. Marley died seven years ago this very night. What do you want?

GENTLEMAN *(showing paper)*. My credentials, sir. At this season of the year it's desirable that we should make some provision for the poor and homeless. Hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts—

SCROOGE. Are there no prisons?

GENTLEMAN. Oh, plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE. Are the workhouses still in operation?

GENTLEMAN. Yes, and very busy, sir. But they hardly furnish Christian cheer to the multitude, Mr. Scrooge. That is why at this time of year a few of us endeavor to buy the poor some meat and drink and means of warmth. What shall we put you down for?

SCROOGE. Nothing.

GENTLEMAN. You wish to be anonymous.

SCROOGE. I wish to be left alone. I can't afford to make idle people merry. My taxes support the prisons and the workhouses.

GENTLEMAN. Many can't go there. Many would rather die.

SCROOGE. Then let them. It will deplete the surplus population. Good afternoon.

(The GENTLEMAN departs shaking his head. SCROOGE consults his pocket watch.)

SCROOGE. Very nearly time to close up.

BOB. Yes, sir, so it is.

SCROOGE. You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose.

BOB. If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE. It isn't convenient, and it isn't fair, paying a day's wages for no work.

BOB. Sir, Christmas occurs only once a year—

SCROOGE. A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket. Take the whole day, then—but be here all the earlier next morning.

BOB. Thank you, sir. And a very, merry—

SCROOGE. Don't you dare!

BOB. Yes, sir. Good night. (*Exits.*)

The Street

(*As SCROOGE goes homeward—*)

DICKENS. Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern. Then, having gone over all the figures in his bankbook, he went home to bed in his gloomy rooms in a gloomy old building. Darkness is cheap. Scrooge liked it.

SCROOGE (*dyspeptic burp*). Blast. Shouldn't have et that big meal. Eh? What's this?

DICKENS. The fog and frost hung about the old black threshold of the building—where there was a large doorknocker. And then—this ghostly thing occurred...

(*The doorknocker appears.*)

SCROOGE. Marley? Jacob Marley? How did you turn into my doorknocker?

(MARLEY's eyes fly open. SCROOGE yelps and turns away. MARLEY's eyes close. SCROOGE reaches toward the door.)

SCROOGE. Humbug. It's a doorknocker after all. Too much food upsets the system—including the eyes. Time to go to bed...sleep it off... *(He shuffles inside as—)*

DICKENS. Ah, what a dismal old house it was, lost in a hidden yard where it had so little business to be. One could imagine that it strayed there when it was a young house, and never found the way out. Nobody lived in it but Scrooge...

The Bedroom

(SCROOGE hangs up his scarf, finds a bottle, takes a large drink. Suddenly—a distant MOAN.)

SCROOGE. What's that? Did I bolt the door? *(Rushes to check it.)* Double locked—all secure.

(He puts on his nightcap, then hears CHAINS rattling.)

MARLEY *(offstage)*. Ebenezer Scrooge...

SCROOGE. I'm hearing things. A nice bowl of gruel will settle the stomach...

(Before he can find it, the CHAINS rattle more loudly. He jumps into bed, pulls up covers.)

SCROOGE. Who's there? (*Trembling.*) Come on, I'm ready for you.

(*MARLEY shuffles in, dragging his chain.*)

SCROOGE. Stop. Who are you? (*Mutters.*) I think I know.

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

SCROOGE. It's that supper again. (*Burps.*) You aren't real.

You're an undigested bit of beef—perhaps a blot of mustard. A crumb of cheese!—there's more of gravy than the grave about you—whatever you are.

(*MARLEY lets out a cry, rattles his chains.*)

SCROOGE (*cowering*). Stop! Mercy!—Dreadful apparition!—why do you torment me? Why do spirits walk the earth tonight?

MARLEY. It is required of every human being that the spirit within him must walk abroad among his fellow men. If that spirit does not travel widely in life, it is condemned to do so after death...doomed to wander through the world and witness what it cannot share—but might have shared on earth.

SCROOGE. But you are chained. Why?

MARLEY. I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link and yard by yard. You wear the same chain.

SCROOGE. Where? I have no chains. I don't understand, Jacob—

MARLEY. Pleading is no use. I can't stay, I can't rest, I can't linger anywhere because, in my life, my spirit never strayed beyond the limits of our money-changing

den. And so, many more weary journeys lie ahead for me. No rest—the incessant torture of remorse—

SCROOGE. Why remorse? You were always a splendid businessman.

MARLEY. Mankind was my business! The common welfare was my business! Charity and mercy were my business! I failed to learn that lesson. And so I suffer most this time of year.

SCROOGE. Christmastime?

MARLEY. Yes. I am here tonight to warn you that you still have a hope of escaping my fate. A hope—a chance—that I have arranged.

SCROOGE. Oh, thank you, thank you, Jacob—

MARLEY (*interrupting*). Tonight you will be haunted by three spirits.

SCROOGE. Yes, thank you, I could always count on you for— (*Take.*) Haunted?!? Is that the hope you offer me?

MARLEY. It is.

SCROOGE. I think I'd rather not.

MARLEY. Hear me!! Without three visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I took. Expect the first spirit when the bell tolls one.

SCROOGE. Can't I take 'em all at once and get it over with?

MARLEY (*backing away*). Expect the second when the bell strikes two, and the last when the bell tolls three.

SCROOGE. Jacob, don't leave me!

MARLEY. Good night, Ebenezer Scrooge. Save yourself—if you can... (*He goes.*)

SCROOGE. This can't be happening. The door is still locked. This is humbug, what else can it be?

ACTOR (*imitating bell*). Ding-dong!

SCROOGE (*cringing*). A quarter past twelve... (*He retreats to his bed.*)

ACTOR. Ding-dong!

SCROOGE. Half past twelve...

ACTOR (*louder*). Ding-dong!

SCROOGE. Oh, mercy—a quarter to...

ACTOR. Bong!!

SCROOGE (*after a beat*). That's it. The hour itself. Nothing's happened. I knew it wouldn't...

(Gets out of bed. ACTORS create the sound of a huge wind. SCROOGE yelps and flings himself back into bed, huddling there as the GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST, a pale, friendly spirit, appears)

Christmas Past

GHOST 1. Hello.

SCROOGE. Are you the ghostly presence whose coming was foretold to me?

GHOST 1. I am.

SCROOGE. But who are you?—*what* are you?

GHOST 1. I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE. Long past?

GHOST 1. No, your past.

SCROOGE. And may I ask what business brings you here?

GHOST 1. Your welfare.

SCROOGE. Thank you very much, but a night of unbroken sleep would be better.

GHOST 1. Don't trifle with me, sir. This is a matter of your salvation. Rise, Ebenezer Scrooge. Rise and walk with me.