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*Dramatic Publishing*

*Charles Dickens'*

# **A CHRISTMAS CAROL**

**A New Version for the Stage**

**by**

**JOHN JAKES**



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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JOHN JAKES

“God Bless Us, Ev’ry One”

Music by MEL MARVIN

Lyrics by JOHN JAKES

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JOHN JAKES and MEL MARVIN

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The playwright is a member of the Dramatists Guild.

**Affectionately dedicated to the Self Family Arts Center,  
and especially to Dallas, whose talent and creativity  
contributed immeasurably to development of this script.**

*A CHRISTMAS CAROL*, A New Version for the Stage  
was first presented at the Hilton Head Playhouse on Hilton  
Head Island, S.C., on November 25, 1988.

### CAST

Anthony Sears . . . Theater Manager / Fred / Fan's Husband /  
Undertaker's Man  
John David Rose . . . . . Charles Dickens / Businessman  
Travis McKinley . . . . . Ebenezer Scrooge  
Kim Nichols Banks . . . . . Flower Woman /  
Ghost of Christmas Past  
Rebecca Gordon . . . . . Girl / Miss Fezziwig 1  
Scott Allen . . . . . Little Brother / Student / Ignorance  
Julie Hahn . . . . . Mother / Woman in Black / Party Guest /  
Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come  
David Boles . . . . . Blind Beggar / Ebenezer / Old Joe  
Porter Thompson . . . Shopkeeper / Fezziwig / Businessman  
Joseph Urato . . . . . Bobby / a Miss Fezziwig beau / Warden  
Jim A. Choate . . . . . Bob Cratchit  
Sandy Banks . . Gentleman 1 / Ghost of Christmas Present /  
Businessman  
Mike Bonavia . . . . . Gentleman 2 / Bill / Party Guest  
Adam Lowery . . . Street Boy / Student / a Miss Fezziwig beau  
Welborn Ferrene . . . . . Young Husband / Dick Wilkins  
Nat Gerhart . . . . . Jacob Marley / Party Guest / Warden /  
Businessman  
Leon Gilbert . . . . . Schoolmaster / Party Guest  
David Drane . . . . . Young Scrooge  
Amanda Walling . . . . . Fan / Want  
Kim Taulbee . . . . . Student / Martha Cratchit  
Annette Gilbert . . . . . Mrs. Fezziwig



# **A CHRISTMAS CAROL**

A Play in Two Acts  
For 11 Men, 6 Women, 4 Boys, 2 Girls  
(expandable to as many as 25-30 actors)  
plus extras

## **CHARACTERS**

**GENERAL MANAGER OF THE THEATRE**  
**CHARLES DICKENS**  
**EBENEZER SCROOGE**, surviving partner of Scrooge & Marley  
**FLOWER WOMAN**  
**GIRL**  
**LITTLE BROTHER**  
**MOTHER**  
**BLIND BEGGAR**  
**SHOPKEEPER**  
**LONDON BOBBY**  
**BOB CRATCHIT**, Scrooge's clerk  
**FRED**, Scrooge's nephew  
**GENTLEMAN 1**  
**GENTLEMAN 2**  
**STREET BOY**  
**WOMAN IN BLACK**  
**YOUNG HUSBAND** (Buckworthy)  
**JACOB MARLEY**, Scrooge's partner; a ghost  
**THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST**  
**SCHOOLMASTER**  
**YOUNG SCROOGE**, age 10  
**FAN**, Ebenzer's sister, age 11-12  
**FEZZIWIG**  
**MRS. FEZZIWIG**  
**THE MISSES FEZZIWIG** (1, 2, and 3)



DICK WILKINS, an apprentice  
COOK  
COOK'S FRIEND (Bill)  
MISS BELLE, Scrooge's fiancée  
FIDDLER  
EBENEZER, in his 20s  
FAN'S HUSBAND (Tom)  
BELLE'S DAUGHTER, a little girl  
BELLE'S HUSBAND  
THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT  
SARA, Fred's wife  
TOPPER, a party guest \*  
RAUCOUS LADY \*  
THE OLDER CRACHT CHILDREN:  
    PETER, about 17  
    MARTHA, about 15  
    BELINDA, about 13  
TINY TIM  
IGNORANCE, a ragged boy  
WANT, a ragged girl  
WARDENS (1 and 2)  
THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME  
UNDERTAKER'S MAN  
LAUNDRESS (Mrs. Dilber)  
CHARWOMAN  
BUSINESSMEN (1, 2, 3, 4, and 5)  
OLD JOE, keeper of a rag and bottle shop  
YOUNG WIFE (Caroline)

and...

LONDONERS, CAROLERS, STUDENTS, GUESTS AT  
FEZZIWIG'S PARTY, etc.

\*These characters were not included in the original production.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

The play is designed to allow for flexible production. A unit set is recommended, though this can be anything from a design of rough wooden platforms and catwalks (as in the very first production), to a larger, more realistic set representing the streets of London (the approach taken in the lavish 1996 production at Hilton Head's new Self Family Arts Center). Whatever the design concept, the presentation should be fluid, cinematic, with actors helping to move wagons, furniture, etc., on and off.

Dickens can appear almost constantly, performing not only those small roles indicated in the text, but observing, handling props, helping with costume changes—the imaginative director will find many opportunities to use him. In the most recent production which I saw, he was almost never offstage, and the effect was highly satisfactory.

Music for the carol “God Bless Us, Ev’ry One” is offered in an accompanying booklet, and the script indicates cues for incidental music. No set score has been provided, however; because each production is individual, a score must be worked out in terms of the design concept, the timing of scene and costume changes, and other factors. No more than three or four instruments are necessary for effective scoring (for example, keyboard, violin, flute, perhaps a recorder). Good use can and should be made of traditional carols, some of them sung onstage as part of the story.

Although an act break is indicated—one which is very effective—the play can also be performed without intermission.

– J.J.

# **A CHRISTMAS CAROL**

# ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

AT RISE: *Curtain is up when audience enters. Downstage we see a velvet-padded lectern for the evening's star performer. THEATER MANAGER enters, surveys the audience, checks the lectern, etc.*

THEATER MANAGER. Ladies and gentlemen—here now—as part of his second American tour—the management of the theater is proud to present the great English novelist, Mr. Charles Dickens.

*(DICKENS enters. White tie, tails. He carries a book. He gets applause and expects it. He opens the book and prepares to read. He milks the moment—he is a master of timing.)*

DICKENS. Good evening. Tonight I shall read what has proved to be one of my most popular tales. It was first published in my *Christmas Book* for the year 1844. *A Christmas Carol—Stave One. "Marley's Ghost."* *(Now he begins his dramatic and well-rehearsed reading.)* Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. There was no doubt whatever about Marley. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge

signed it. And Scrooge's name was good for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was dead as a doornail. Scrooge knew he was dead. Of course he did. Scrooge and he were partners for years. Scrooge was his sole executor, sole administrator, sole friend, and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnized it by concluding a favorable contract.

*(Claps and signals—sign reading SCROOGE AND MARLEY flies in.)*

DICKENS. Scrooge never painted out old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterward, above the door. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge and sometimes Marley but he answered to both names—it was all the same to him.

*(Music begins. Lights are fading up.)*

DICKENS. On the day in question—of all the good days in the year, on a Christmas Eve—it was cold, bleak, biting weather. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole. *(Lights candle on BOB CRATCHIT's desk.)* It was late—and candles appeared in the windows of offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air.

*(A bell chimes six times—6-note motif for "God Bless Us, Ev'ry One." DICKENS moves into the background as an observer. Music swells as lights fade up on a street in Victorian London. It's a drab street, ugly with*

*poverty. LONDONERS enter in small groups; they freeze for a tableau. SCROOGE enters and crosses on his way to his office. He confronts a FLOWER WOMAN. She offers him a small white flower. He dismisses her and goes on. A GIRL with packages is teased by her LITTLE BROTHER, trying to get her to drop them. MOTHER boxes his ears.)*

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

*(SCROOGE appears again and stands admiring the sign. A BLIND BEGGAR with a cane and tin cup approaches.)*

SCROOGE. Keep your distance—keep your distance!  
*(Seizes his cane.)* I've no money for homeless beggars.

*(Throws the cane. Without it, BEGGAR falls. He struggles up and flees. LONDON BOBBY and SHOPKEEPER have been watching.)*

BOBBY. He's a heartless old sinner, ain't he?

SHOPKEEPER. Aye, he's a cold 'un, that Mr. Scrooge. Ever notice how the ice in him freezes up his features? He chills his office in the dog days, an' he don't thaw it so much as one degree at Christmas. Cold as a glacier, that's him.

*(Now the office is lit. It consists of two spaces, an inner for SCROOGE, an outer where BOB works at his desk, a long white muffler around his neck. The candle burns*

*on his table. SCROOGE goes into the office. The door is imaginary—when it opens or closes, DICKENS rings a small bell. SCROOGE goes to inner office. BOB follows with a coal scuttle.)*

SCROOGE. Coal, sir? You want *more* coal? I saw one lump in the grate. That's quite enough. Begone.

*(Shivering, BOB returns to his office. SCROOGE hangs up his coat and hat. Scrooge's nephew FRED bursts in. He is a ruddy, robust, energetic, young man; well dressed.)*

FRED. Merry Christmas, Bob.

BOB. Thank you, Mr. Fred.

FRED *(goes into inner office)*. A merry Christmas, Uncle. God save you.

SCROOGE. Bah. Humbug.

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

SCROOGE. I do. Merry Christmas! What reason have you to be merry? What right? You're poor enough—

FRED. What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE. Bah. Humbug!

FRED. Don't be cross, Uncle.

SCROOGE. What else can I be when I live in a world of fools? What's Christmas time to you but a time for buying presents without money? A time for finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer? A time for balancing your books and having every item for twelve months, written in red ink? If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas!" on

his lips should be boiled in his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly in his heart.

FRED (*amused*). Uncle!

SCROOGE (*definitely not amused—a sneer*). Nephew! Keep Christmas in your way and let me keep it in mine. (*He turns away with a ledger.*)

FRED (*following him*). Keep it? But you don't keep it.

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

FRED. There are many good things from which I haven't profited, I daresay. Christmas is among the best. I have always thought of Christmas—apart from its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—I have always thought it, I say, as a good time. A kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time. The only time I know when men and women seem to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of each other as if they were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, Uncle, though it has never put gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good, and for the sake of Christmas, and my mother, I say God bless it. (*BOB, who has stopped poking at the grate to listen, applauds.*)

SCROOGE. Let me hear another sound from you and you'll keep Christmas by losing your situation. (*BOB pokes the grate furiously.*)

FRED. Don't be angry, Uncle. Come dine with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE. Sir, I will see you—get this clear—I will see you in hell first. (*BOB drops the poker.*)



FRED. But why? We have never had any quarrel to which I've been a party.

SCROOGE (*almost blurts a reply, then quickly recovers*).  
Good afternoon, sir.

FRED. I am sorry to find you feeling this way. But I made this effort in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So—(*A beat to "wind up"—then the hard ball:*) A MERRY CHRISTMAS, Uncle!

SCROOGE (*explodes*). Good afternoon.

FRED (*dodging SCROOGE's cane*). And a happy New Year.

SCROOGE. GOOD AFTERNOON! (*FRED darts into outer office. He and BOB exchange boisterous "Merry Christmas!" greetings, which puts SCROOGE in a fury.*) Look at Cratchit. A clerk earning fifteen shillings a week—with the burden of a wife and family in Camden Town—and he talks about a merry Christmas. They should lock him up in the mental hospital.

(*BOB sees FRED to the door. Two prosperous GENTLEMEN appear and enter. They carry books and papers.*)

GENTLEMAN 1 (*to BOB*). Scrooge and Marley's, I believe. Have we the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE. Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years. Seven years ago this very night.

GENTLEMAN 2. We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner.

SCROOGE. Liberality? ...

GENTLEMAN 1. Our credentials, sir. (*Hands them over.*)  
At this season of the year it's desirable that we should

make some provision for the poor and destitute. Many thousands are in want of common necessities. Hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts—

SCROOGE (*returning credentials*). Are there no prisons?

GENTLEMAN 2. Oh, plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE. And the workhouses? Are they still in operation?

GENTLEMAN 2. Very busy, sir.

SCROOGE. I am very glad to hear it. From what you said at first, I was afraid something had stopped them in their useful course.

GENTLEMAN 1. But they hardly furnish Christian cheer of mind and body to the multitude, Mr. Scrooge. That is why a few of us endeavor to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink and means of warmth.

GENTLEMAN 2. What shall we put you down for?

SCROOGE. Nothing.

GENTLEMAN 1. You wish to be anonymous.

SCROOGE. I wish to be left alone. I can't afford to make idle people merry. I help support the prisons and the workhouses—they cost enough.

GENTLEMAN 1. Many can't go there. Many would rather die.

SCROOGE. If they would rather die, let them. It will decrease the surplus population. Good afternoon.

*(The stunned GENTLEMEN stare at one another. SCROOGE returns to his desk and ignores them. They give up and exit. The street is darker. Some CAROLERS appear. Their leader is FRED. CAROLERS stop outside the office, singing. SCROOGE runs out the door and FRED darts behind the others.)*

SCROOGE. Get away with your humbug. Get out of here!  
(*His brandished cane drives them off. FRED is discovered; leaves, chagrined. SCROOGE peers around.*) What a foul night... (*Into office again. BOB stands with his watch open.*) That time, is it? (*Checks his own watch.*) To the minute. Very well, very well, well, close up. (*BOB snuffs his candle.*) You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?

BOB. If quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE. It isn't convenient, and it isn't fair. If I was to hold back half a crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, wouldn't you? (*BOB smiles to admit it.*) And yet, Mr. Cratchit, you don't think me ill-used when I pay a day's wages for no work.

BOB. Sir, it occurs only once a year—

SCROOGE. A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket. I suppose you must have the whole day—(*He is putting on his hat and overcoat.*) Be here all the earlier next morning.

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

SCROOGE (*cane upraised*). Don't you dare!

BOB (*winds his muffler around his collar, unable to understand how a man can be so mean-spirited; pities him*). Yes, sir. Good night.

(*And he vanishes in the street. Fog swirls there now. SCROOGE puts on his hat and coat. A ragged STREET BOY has come on and seated himself outside office. BOY begins to sing a carol. SCROOGE leaves office, locks door. Hand out, BOY continues singing. SCROOGE, seeing that he's unobserved, reaches into pocket for a coin. A cowed WOMAN IN BLACK enters and SCROOGE*

*withholds the coin. WOMAN and BOY exit. SCROOGE looks around, shivering.)*

SCROOGE. I have never seen such evil fog. (*A thought amuses him.*) Let them try to keep Christmas in this weather. (*Chuckling, he shuffles into the dark. Music.*)