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THEATRE

INDIANA'S THEATRE LAUREATE

Exploring A Christmas Carol



by Charles Dickens

adapted for the stage by Tom Haas

Mainstage, Nov 2 - Dec 24, 2005

“Marley was dead to begin with.” So you can imagine Ebenezer Scrooge’s surprise to find him in his house seven years after his death, wrapped in chains. “I am here tonight,” Marley said, “to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate!” Marley was once Scrooge’s business partner. He was greedy and unkind just like Scrooge. If Scrooge had any desire to escape wandering the earth as an unhappy ghost, he needed to visit with three spirits: the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future.

The Ghost of Christmas Past arrived at the stroke of one A.M. exactly and took Scrooge to visit memories from his childhood, both happy and unhappy. “Your lip is trembling,” said the Ghost. “And what is that upon your cheek?” Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would. Eventually, the memories became too much for poor Scrooge and he begged the spirit, “Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!”

The Ghost of Christmas Present was next. He showed Scrooge two Christmas parties. One was full of games at Scrooge’s nephew’s house. The other was a poor but happy Christmas din-

ner at the home of Scrooge’s employee, Bob Cratchit. At both parties, there were people who said unflattering things about Scrooge while others felt sorry for him, but it was clear that no one really liked him. “It should be Christmas Day, I am sure,” said Mrs. Cratchit, ‘on which one drinks to the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge.” Despite these remarks, Scrooge took a liking to the smallest Cratchit, Tiny Tim, who was ill and walked with a crutch.

The last spirit was the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. “The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently approached. When it came near him, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for the very air through which this Spirit moved seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.” The Ghost showed Scrooge the grave of a man everyone talked

about but no one cared for. Scrooge asked, “Are these the shadows of the things that will be, or are they shadows of the things that may be, only?”

What do you think happened to Scrooge? What choices did he make after his ghostly adventures? What happened to Tiny Tim? You’ll find out at the IRT production of Charles Dickens’s holiday classic, *A Christmas Carol*. ★

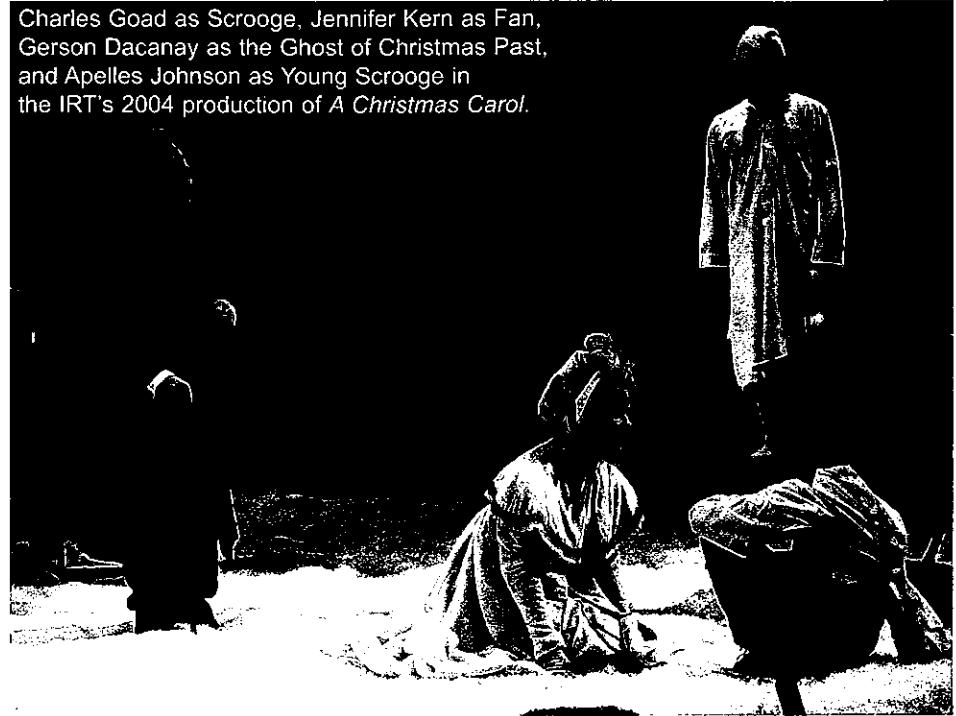


Ryan Artzberger and Charles Goad in the IRT's *A Christmas Carol*, 2001.

Going to the Theatre

You, the audience, are one of the most important parts of any performance. The theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors but with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:

- Don't bring CD players, mp3 players, cameras, cell phones, beepers, or other distracting and noise-making electronic devices into the theatre.
- Food and drink must stay in the lobby.
- Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.
- Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.
- The house lights going out signal the audience to get quiet and settled in their seats: the play is about to begin.
- Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show or during intermission (a 10-minute break half-way through the play).
- Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue, and look at the set, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.
- Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you become, the more you will enjoy the play.
- Remain at your seat during the curtain call because this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention. ★



Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens, author of *A Christmas Carol*, was born in 1812 in Portsmouth, on the southern coast of England. His family moved to London when he was three because his father lost his job. His family moved so much during Charles's childhood that he could not attend school regularly.

At the age of 12, Charles had to leave school to work in a shoe polish factory. A family inheritance allowed him to return to school for two years, but at 15 he had to go back to work. When he was 18, he became a court reporter and quickly became known as a very good one.

In 1834, Dickens began to publish short stories, under the name "Boz," in the newspaper. In 1836, on his 24th birthday, *Sketches of Boz* was published. That same year Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, daughter of a newspaper editor. Together, they had ten children before they divorced in 1858. Shortly after marrying Catherine, Dickens quit working for the newspaper and became editor of a magazine. This gave him more time to write novels such



as *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, both about poor children in England. Dickens began writing *A Christmas Carol* in the fall of 1843. He wrote it quickly, often laughing and crying at the pictures that popped into his head. John Leech illustrated the book, and it was published at Christmas that same year.

Dickens made sure that the book was inexpensive so everyone could afford it.

After *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens wrote several more books that are considered classics today, including *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*. He spent the last years of his life traveling all over the world, including America, to perform public readings from his novels. He was known everywhere as the greatest writer of his age. He enjoyed traveling and performing, but it was also very stressful. In June 1870, he had a stroke and died instantly at the age of 58. For three days, thousands of people passed by his open casket in Westminster Abbey to pay their respects to the most beloved of English writers. ★

Fun Facts about Stage Snow!

Each 25-pound box of plastic "snow" (made of shredded recycled milk jugs) covers a 7-by-7-foot square on stage. To cover the entire stage with snow requires 23 boxes of snow, or 575 pounds. During the entire run of *A Christmas Carol*, the IRT uses about 40 of these boxes, or 1,000 pounds. That's half a ton!

Vocabulary

Bah! Humbug!—Bah is an exclamation of disgust, and Humbug means ridiculous nonsense.

"Why did you get married?" ...

"Because I fell in love."—Scrooge does not approve of Fred's marrying before he has enough money to support a family. To marry for love was considered nonsense to many people at this time.

district work houses—Housing provided for the poor in exchange for hard labor. These people were given very little food and water for their work. Strict discipline was enforced, and men and women were segregated. It was considered disgraceful to have to go to a work house.

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December."—It was not unusual to work on Christmas Day at this time.

"Camden Town"—A part of London known for small, cheap housing. Dickens lived there as a boy.

"outside the baker's they had smelt the goose, and known it for their own."—Poor people, like the Cratchits, did not have ovens in their homes, so their holiday goose was roasted by the local baker for a fee.

"the pudding singing in the copper"—The copper was a large kettle kept in the wash-house for laundry. In this kettle Mrs. Cratchit steams the traditional Christmas Pudding. This pudding is not the creamy pudding that we are used to. It is more like a cake with a gooey center. Flour, milk, and eggs are combined with dates, figs, and nuts. This batter is put into a tin mold and steamed in very hot water. The Cratchit family uses a cloth instead of a tin mold as it is less expensive. ★

Discussion Questions

If they came and visited you, what would the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future show you from your life?

What gets you into the holiday spirit?

What do you think *A Christmas Carol* teaches people?

How would you feel if, like Charles Dickens, you had to go to work in a factory instead of going to school? How would that change your future?

Discuss some of the different charities in your community that help people during the holidays. Are you involved with them? What else could you do to help your community at this time? ★

If one box of *A Christmas Carol* snow costs \$55.00, how much does the IRT spend on snow each year?

Write a holiday story of your own that has a moral or teaches a lesson and share it with your class and family. ★

Activities

Look up Christmas traditions around the world and write a paragraph about what you find as well as some traditions of your own.

Find the rules of Blind Man's Buff or other Victorian parlor games and play them. Are they as entertaining as the games you play today?

As a class or at home (ask your teacher or parents first!) look up recipes for a Christmas pudding or wassail and make them.

On-Line or at the Library

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DICKENS OR A CHRISTMAS CAROL...

WATCH:

The Muppet Christmas Carol (1992), surprisingly faithful to the original story
A Christmas Carol starring George C. Scott (1984), an excellent TV version
Oliver Twist (2005), a new film starring Ben Kingsley as Fagin

CLICK ON:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Dickens

www.bbc.co.uk/arts/multimedia/dickens/

If you have macromedia flash on your computer, play the Dickens online game. Fight your way through Dickens's London to get to the author himself.

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/victorians/index.shtml

Children in Victorian Britain—an interactive history for kids.

READ:

If you like *A Christmas Carol*, try reading *Oliver Twist* or *Great Expectations*.

The answers to these questions may be found in the Word Search: forwards, backwards, up, down, or diagonal.

1. The story begins _____ years after Marley's death.
2. What is the famous phrase that Scrooge uses whenever someone mentions Christmas?
3. What is Scrooge's nephew's name?
4. Who was Scrooge's partner before he died?
5. All Scrooge cares about is _____.
6. How many ghosts visit Scrooge, aside from Jacob Marley?
7. The Ghost of Christmas _____ shows Scrooge scenes from his childhood.
8. Fan is Scrooge's _____.
9. Who was Scrooge's boss during his apprenticeship?
10. The Ghost of Christmas _____ shows Scrooge the Cratchit family Christmas.
11. Who is the Cratchits' oldest daughter?
12. What is the name of Bob Cratchit's smallest son?
13. How many Cratchit children are there?
14. What part of Christmas dinner is Mrs. Cratchit especially worried about?
15. What game do Fred, his wife, and their friends play on Christmas day that involves a blindfold?
16. Whose grave does the third ghost show to Scrooge?

Word Search

S	P	X	Y	M	L	M	Q	W	D	G	I	U	N	M	S	C	R	O	O
S	J	T	V	A	C	F	F	U	B	S	N	A	M	D	N	I	L	B	P
N	M	B	R	R	T	H	S	R	G	F	R	E	E	D	G	E	S	T	
E	L	C	A	T	V	D	D	F	U	O	L	K	Z	T	F	O	O	S	H
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C	Z	X	C	A	H	V	B	N	M	U	P	O	G	F	F	B	K	O	E
I	A	T	S	D	F	U	G	H	J	D	K	L	R	P	O	L	I	U	E
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U	E	X	E	U	E	G	O	R	C	S	S	D	E	R	E	R	D	Z	
D	Y	P	T	U	B	B	N	P	Y	T	T	I	S	A	S	R	K	J	Z
R	E	A	P	T	R	U	M	S	F	G	O	U	F	K	H	Y	V	N	E
H	L	O	O	T	I	N	Y	T	I	M	F	D	L	D	U	O	R	G	F
H	A	E	D	C	R	Y	B	J	F	I	M	A	T	R	E	N	B	I	D
S	I	X	E	G	J	G	E	N	M	P	T	G	O	S	E	E	M	O	P

17. The Ghost of Christmas Future never actually _____ to Scrooge like the others do.
18. What does Scrooge send to the Cratchit house on Christmas morning?
19. What does Tiny Tim say at the Christmas feast and again at the end of the play?
20. Charles _____ also wrote *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*. ★

Indiana Repertory Theatre

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King Lear • March 7-10, 14-17, 21, 22

Underneath the Lintel
March 29, April 12, 18, May 3

Driving Miss Daisy
April 25, 26, 28, May 3, 4

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