

TRUNCATED SAMPLE SCRIPT

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HOLIDAY PLAYHOUSE

"Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol"

Adapted for radio by

Tony Palermo

(Excerpted scenes from the 60-minute radio version)

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PRODUCTION SCRIPT
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HOLIDAY PLAYHOUSE

"A Christmas Carol"

CAST (ranked by size of part)

EBENEZER SCROOGE	Miserly old man. (male)
THE NARRATOR	Charles Dickens. (male)
MARLEY'S GHOST	Spirit of Scrooge's partner (male)
SECOND SPIRIT	Ghost Of Christmas Present- Jovial spirit
FIRST SPIRIT	Ghost Of Christmas Past - Old/Young Spirit
NEPHEW FRED	Scrooge's kind nephew (male)
BELLE	Scrooge's young fiancée (female)
BOB CRATCHIT	Scrooge's meek clerk (male)
MRS. CRATCHIT	Bob's kind/feisty wife (female)
POOLE	First charity seeker (male or female)
LAMB	Second charity seeker (male or female)
MR. FEZZIWIG	Scrooge's old master (male)
MARTHA CRATCHIT	Bob's 15 year-old daughter (female)
FAN SCROOGE	Scrooge's young sister (female)
KATE	Nephew Fred's wife (female)
TINY TIM CRATCHIT	Bob's crippled young son (male)
PETER CRATCHIT	Bob's 12 year-old son (male)
BELINDA CRATCHIT	Bob's 9 year-old daughter (female)
OLD JOE	Old rag and bottle shop owner (male or female)
CHARWOMAN	Coarse cleaning lady (female)
MRS. DILBER	Lower class laundress (female)
BUCK	Cockney street urchin (male)
BUSINESSMAN #1, #2, #3	(3) Greedy businessmen (male)
GUESTS #1, #2, #3	(3) of Fred party guests (male or females)
BOY CAROLER	Poor street caroler (male)
CAROLERS	Several other carolers (male or female)

Five sound effects artists and several Walla Walla artists are also required. See appendix for sound effects and music listings.

SCRIPT NOTE: Asterisks besides a cue number (for example: 3*) indicate that the performer of that cue wait for music or a sound effect to establish itself and in some cases, await a signal from the director to begin. It is recommended that the master script be marked with a hand-lettered "Q" to the left of these special cues, so they stand out better. Copies for cast and crew should be made from this master.

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A Christmas Carol

1. MUSIC: [A-1] PLAYHOUSE THEME-UNDER. PLAY THRU.

2* ANNOUNCER: [CUE] Holiday Playhouse presents... Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol"... the tale of a miserly man who comes to realize the true spirit of Christmas. (PAUSE) When this story first appeared--over one-hundred-and-sixty years ago--few observed Christmas, other than at Church... Few employers gave workers off for the holiday... And the jolly country celebrations of the past were largely forgotten in the cities. But this little story helped transform Christmas from a staid religious holiday into the joyous season of faith, feasting, and goodwill it is to this very day. (PAUSE) Charles Dickens' "Ghost Story of Christmas" opens in London, on a cold, snowy December twenty-fourth, in the year... eighteen-forty-three...

3. MUSIC: PLAYHOUSE THEME--LET BELLS RING UNDER.

SCENE ONE: EXT. LONDON STREETS - AFTERNOON INTO EVENING
(NARRATOR, BOY CAROLERS)

1* SOUND: WIND. JINGLING BELLS--HALT AS SCROOGE YELLS.

2* NARRATOR: [CUE] Once upon a time--of all the good days in the year--on Christmas Eve, old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. Ebenezer Scrooge was a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner--a hard-hearted miser. Secret and self-contained... and solitary as an oyster. A morose and lonely man who consorted with nobody but himself. On this evening, the office of Scrooge and Marley was shrouded in cold, bleak, biting weather. External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather could chill him. No wind that blew... was bitterer than he...

3. MUSIC: [A-2] CAROLERS-UP. ON "SATAN'S POWER" SCROOGE YELLS, BOYS STOP AND GASP. PLAY THRU.

4* CAROLERS: [CUE] (SINGING, DISTANT) "God rest ye, merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay
(MORE...)

1. CAROLERS: (CONT'D...)
- Remember Christ our savior was born on
Christmas day
to save us all from Satan's power..." (GASP
IN FRIGHT, SCATTERING CRIES.)

SCENE TWO: INT. SCROOGE'S OFFICE - IMMEDIATELY
(SCROOGE, BOY CAROLER, FRED, BOB, LAMB, POOLE, NARRATOR)

- 2* SCROOGE: [CUE] (CUTTING THEM OFF - CALLING OUT) Bah!
(NASTILY) "Merry Christmas!" (PAUSE) Humbug!
Be gone, you miserable little beggars! Take
your infernal Christmas carols and get away
from my door!
3. BOY CAROLER: (DISTANT) Sorry, sir. Merry Christmas
though, sir.
4. SOUND: SCROOGE SLAMS DOOR & LITTLE BELL. ENTERS.
- 5* SCROOGE: [CUE] Bah! (TO FRED) And you, nephew! What
right have you to be merry? You're poor
enough. Christmas? Bah! Humbug!
6. FRED: Christmas a humbug, Uncle? You don't mean
that, I am sure. What right have you to be
dismal about Christmas? You're rich enough.
Don't be cross, Uncle!

1. SCROOGE: What else can I be, Fred, when I live in such a world of fools as this? (SNOTTY)
"Merry Christmas!" If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with (SNOTTY)
"Merry Christmas" on his lips, would...
(CHUCKLING) would be boiled with his own pudding! Ha! And buried with a stake of holly through his heart! Ha! Keep Christmas in your own way, nephew (SNORTS) and let me keep it in mine.
2. FRED: Keep it? (AMUSED) But you don't keep it, Uncle.
3. SCROOGE: Well, let me leave it alone, then. Much good may it do you! Much good it ever has done you!

SCRIPT HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT (several scenes later...)

SCENE THREE: EXT. SNOWY STREETS - LATER
(NARRATOR, MARLEY)

7* MUSIC: [A-3] FOGGY NIGHT-UNDER. PLAY THRU.

8* SOUND: WIND. SCROOGE STEPS IN SNOW--CONTINUE UP TO
MARLEY'S LINE: "EBENEZER SCROOGE!"

1* NARRATOR: [CUE] Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern, and walked home through the rolling fog and bitter cold. He silently passed the urchins crowded 'round fires in the street, trying to keep warm. The icy Scrooge trudged along through the dark streets, but... just as he reached the door of his dismal house... he thought he heard... something... calling...

PRODUCTION NOTE:

All ghosts will speak through a reverb to give their voice a ghostly flavor. Marley's sound effects also get reverb.

2* MARLEY'S GHOST: [REVERB] Ebenezer Scrooge! Ebenezer Scrooge!

3* NARRATOR: [CUE] It was the voice of his long-dead partner, Jacob Marley! ...Whose ghostly face appeared on the door knocker! Scrooge hurried inside, closed the door, and locked himself in! He double-locked himself in!

4. SOUND: DOOR CLOSSES QUICKLY. LOCKS (2X).

1* NARRATOR: [CUE] He checked the sitting-room, bedroom, lumber-room--all as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa. Nobody under the bed, nobody in the closet. Secured against surprise, Scrooge put on his dressing-gown and nightcap, and sat down before the fire to take his gruel. (PAUSE) When... suddenly...

SCENE FOUR: INT. SCROOGE'S SITTING ROOM - IMMEDIATELY
(SCROOGE, MARLEY, PHANTOM WALLA)

2. MUSIC: FOGGY NIGHT-QUICK FADE.

3* SOUND: (SILENT PAUSE) THEN BELL 1. THEN BELL 2. THEN MANY BELLS. (NOT TOO LOUD.) CONTINUE UNDER, THRU THE LINE "WHAT IN THE..."

4* SCROOGE: (STARTLED) Ahh! What? What is it! Every bell in the house must be ringing! What in the...

5. SOUND: BELLS ALL STOP.

6* SCROOGE: ...world? (PAUSE) N-Nonsense. Humbug! It's all humbug! I had... Wait! What-what's that?

7* SOUND: SILENCE THEN BASH... BASH/BASH! CRASH. CHAINS DRAGGED. SLOW FOOTSTEPS--UNDER.

8. MUSIC: [A-4] MARLEY'S WOE-UNDER. PLAY THRU.

- 1* SCROOGE: Someone's in the cellar! But the doors are locked! Double-locked! Something... is coming. Up the stairs! Closer! It's outside my door! It's humbug! I won't believe it! Humbug, I say...
2. MARLEY'S GHOST: [REVERB] (MOANING) Scrooge! Ebenezer Scrooge!
3. SOUND: THUNDER-CRACK. RUMBLE. CASHBOXES. CHAINS
RATTLING. MARLEY'S DRAGGING STEPS. STOP
SOON.
- 4* SCROOGE: (SCARED) Ah! How now! (PAUSE) What-what do you want with me? Who-who are you?
5. MARLEY'S GHOST: In life, I was your partner, Jacob Marley.
(PAUSE) You don't believe in me, Scrooge?
Why do you doubt your senses?

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(several scenes later...)**

9. MUSIC: [A-7] CHRISTMAS PAST--UNDER, PLAY THRU. NOTE: IT
WILL PLAY RIGHT THROUGH SEVERAL SCENES. END
JUST BEFORE "FEZZIWIG'S BALL."

SCENE SIX: EXT. COUNTRY-SIDE - DAY

(NARRATOR, SCROOGE, FIRST SPIRIT, WALLA--BOYS)

1* NARRATOR: [CUE] As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. A little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church and winding river. It was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

PRODUCTION NOTE:

When Scrooge accompanies the spirits, he will also speak through their reverbed mic. All non-ghostly dialogue is dry. When left by the Spirits, Scrooge moves to "dry" mic again.

2* FIRST SPIRIT: [REVERB] Do you recognize this place, Scrooge?

3. SCROOGE: [REVERB] (EXCITED) Good Heaven! I was bred in this place. I was a boy here! Look! In that coach going by! My schoolmates, Charles and John!

4. SOUND: HORSES. WALLA--BOYS AND "MERRY CHRISTMAS"

5* SCROOGE: They're on the Norfolk coach--taking them home for the Christmas holiday. (CALLS OUT) Hallo! Johnny! It's me, Ebenezer!

1. FIRST SPIRIT: Wait! These are but shadows of the things that have been. They have no consciousness of us. Come!

2. SOUND: CYMBAL ROLL. WIND-CHIMES.

SCENE SEVEN: INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DUSK
(SCROOGE, FIRST SPIRIT)

3* SCROOGE: [REVERB] (GASPS) Why, it's my old schoolhouse! But, it wasn't a place of learning--more like a prison.

4. FIRST SPIRIT: [REVERB] On Christmas Eve, the school is not quite deserted. A solitary child--neglected by his friends--is left there still. A lonely boy, reading beside a feeble fire. Do you know him?

5. SCROOGE: (WEEPS) Yes, I know. I am that child. Alone. My only companions were my books--"Ali Baba!" "Robin Crusoe." (SIGHS) Oh, poor boy. (PAUSE) Oh, I-I wish... but... it's too late now.

**SCRIPT HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT
(several scenes later...)**

2. FIRST SPIRIT: Scrooge, my time grows short. Quick. Several years later...

3* MUSIC: [A-9] BELLE'S MUSIC BOX--UNDER, PLAY THRU.

SCENE TEN: INT. BELLE'S PARLOR - DAY
(SCROOGE, FIRST SPIRIT, BELLE)

4* SCROOGE: [REVERB] (IN AWE) Ah, Belle! As beautiful as
 ever...

5. FIRST SPIRIT: [REVERB] A penniless girl... who loved you,
 Scrooge.

6. SCROOGE: And I, her. It didn't matter that she had no
 dowry. We were so happy together...

7. FIRST SPIRIT: Until your career with Jacob Marley came
 between you. As you gained, so you lost. Do
 you see yourself? You're older now--a man in
 the prime of life. Your face has begun to
 wear the signs of care and avarice. Your
 eyes are greedy--the eager, restless eyes of
 a miser!

8. SCROOGE: (SHAKEN) No! No! No! Spare me this! Not
 this, Spirit. (PLEADS) No!

1. BELLE: (TEARFUL) This music box is a beautiful gift, Ebenezer, but I realize I matter little to you, very little. To protect yourself from a hard and cruel world, you have become hard and cruel in response. I have tried to cheer and comfort you, but another idol has displaced me.
2. (OLD) SCROOGE: What idol could ever displace you, Belle?
3. BELLE: You now worship a golden idol. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off, one by one. (SIGHS) Oh, Ebenezer, you've become another man.
4. (OLD) SCROOGE: I wanted security, success--for you. Belle!

**SCRIPT HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT
(several scenes later...)**

1* MUSIC: [A-12] CHRISTMAS PRESENT-UP, PLAY THRU TWO
SCENES. (TRANSITION/CHURCH BELLS/ORGAN CAROL)

SCENE THIRTEEN: EXT. LONDON STREETS - NOON
(WALLA-STREET, NARRATOR, SCROOGE)

2* SOUND: HORSES. SNOW WALKING. WALLA--STREET BUSTLE.
"MERRY CHRISTMAS", ETC. CONTINUE THRU SCENE.

3* NARRATOR: [CUE] And instantly they were transported to the streets of London on a bright Christmas day. The shops were bustling, with jolly people completing their errands or returning from church. The grocers, the poultry-and-fruit shops--all were busy and all a delight! Presently, Scrooge and the Spirit came to Camden Town, to a humble house... on a humble street.

4. SCROOGE: [REVERB] This is the home of my clerk, Bob Cratchit, his wife and six children. Why are we here, Spirit?

SCENE FOURTEEN: INT. BOB CRATCHIT'S HOME - SECONDS LATER
(SCROOGE, SECOND SPIRIT, MRS. CRATCHIT, PETER, MARTHA, BELINDA, BOB, TIM,)

5* SOUND: PLATES RATTLING. WALLA--KID LAUGHTER.

CONTINUE UNDER.

1* MRS. CRATCHIT: What has ever got your precious father then?
And your brother, Tiny Tim.

2. SOUND: DOOR OPEN/CLOSE. MARTHA ENTERS. WALLA--KIDS

3* PETER CRATCHIT: Oh, but here's Martha, Mother. Hurrah!

4. **MARTHA CRATCHIT:** Sorry, I'm late, Mother. We'd had a deal of work to finish up last night--and to clear away--this morning.
5. **MRS. CRATCHIT:** Well, never mind--so long as you are come. Sit ye down by the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless ye!
6. **BELINDA CRATCHIT:** No! Father's coming! Hide, Martha, hide!
(PAUSE) Father! Father!
7. **SOUND:** WALLA-KIDS. DOOR OPENS/CLOSES. BOB ENTERS.
- 8* **BOB CRATCHIT:** Ah! Peter, Belinda, Frederick, Harriet! Why, where's our Martha?

SCRIPT HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT (several scenes later...)

8. **SECOND SPIRIT:** (MOCKING) "Are there no workhouses? Are there no prisons?" (MORE...)
- 1* **MUSIC:** [A-14] SPIRIT HANDOVER-PLAY THRU.
(CHURCH CLOCK/CYMBAL CHIMES/SPIRIT 3 THEME)
2. **SECOND SPIRIT:** (FADING OFF MIC) "Are there no workhouses? Are there no prisons?" "Are there no workhouses? Are there no prisons?" (etc...)

3* NARRATOR: [CUE] And with that, the Ghost of Christmas Present dissolved into the mist and Scrooge stood alone upon the street. (PAUSE) As the last stroke of Midnight rang, Scrooge remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting his eyes, he beheld the Third Spirit... a solemn Phantom... (PAUSE) shrouded in black... draped and hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground, ...towards him.

5. SCROOGE: [REVERB] (FRIGHTENED) I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas... Yet To Come?

6* SOUND: OTHERWORLDLY SCREECH (AS IF "YES").

SCRIPT HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT (several scenes later...)

1. NARRATOR: (CONT'D) (PAUSE) The next morning, he was early at the office. If he could only be there first--and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon. (PAUSE) And was Bob ever late! The clock had struck Nine--no Bob. Quarter past--no Bob. Finally...

2. SOUND: DOOR & BELL OPENS/CLOSES. BOB SNEAKS IN--
STOPS SUDDENLY.
- 3, SCROOGE: (MOCK ANGRY) "Mister Cratchit!" (SLY
CHUCKLE) What do you mean by coming in at
this time of day?
4. BOB CRATCHIT: I am very sorry, sir. I'm behind my time. It
shall not be repeated. Um... I was making
rather... "merry" yesterday, sir.
5. SCROOGE: Bob Cratchit! I'll not stand this sort of
thing any longer! And therefore...
therefore... I am about to... raise your
salary! (NUTTY LAUGH)
6. BOB CRATCHIT: Oh, please sir, you're... going to raise?...
my... salary? (SKEPTICAL) But... sir...
7. MUSIC: [A-21] GOD BLESS US- QUIETLY UNDER - PLAY THRU.

SCRIPT HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT

Writer/Director's notes for "A Christmas Carol"

by Tony Palermo

My radio adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* restores this oft-told tale to its source in Charles Dickens' 1843 novel. In the 160-odd years since this story appeared, it has been bowdlerized and cut to fit the conventions of the day--resulting in widespread mis-perceptions and simplifications of its true meaning. Most people are only familiar with second-hand retellings and any accusations of triteness and cliché against this story are most likely attributable to poor adaptations.

With this in mind, I've endeavored to create a version that is both faithful *and* fresh. The dialogue is nearly verbatim from Dickens' text, however the emphasis and psychological shadings are my own as I sought to reinforce Dickens' original message. This "Ghost Story of Christmas" is particularly well suited to the medium of radio--where the audience's imagination provides an unlimited special effects budget. Please take note of my intentions when producing this script.

Charles Dickens's major literary themes were memory and forgiveness. He believed that through experiencing the joy and sorrow of memory, you could learn to live properly in this world. Accordingly, the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge's redemption is carried out by memory, example, and fear.

Scrooge has often been mistakenly presented as an evil man with no redeeming characteristics who suddenly gets converted--overnight! That perception has been fostered in many of the film and animated versions produced over the years and often results in a rather boring fable for children. However, this instant redemption--what critics call "the Scrooge problem," can be overcome. There must be motivation for Scrooge's miserly behavior and he must be permitted to change little by little, so the final conversion isn't totally unbelievable. The elements of a convincing transformation are in Dickens' book, but hardly anywhere else. It boils down to understanding the character of Scrooge.

First, Ebenezer Scrooge isn't just evil--that's one-dimensional. He's got a tough shell on the outside to protect his squishy soft interior. He holds terrible, anti-social attitudes, but has them for a reason. His character is based upon Charles Dickens' regrets for his own personal behavior--in not being kind enough to his fellow man, in not being charitable enough to unfortunates. In fact, Scrooge's history is modeled upon Dickens' early life. And there's a little Scrooge in all our natures.

Memory: Scrooge's Tortured Past

Through the Ghost of Christmas Past, we learn that Scrooge was raised in the country, where they observed an old-fashioned Christmas. He was sent away to a dismal boarding school and (like Dickens) was left there over several Christmases by a remote and cruel father. The schoolboy Scrooge sought escape in books---fantasies that protected him from the cruel world--and took him out of it. He loved his sister, the angelic Fan, who later died giving birth to Fred--which explains Scrooge's resentment for his good-natured nephew.

The young Scrooge was taken out of school and put to work in a warehouse run by the jolly Mr. Fezziwig--who serves as one of several models for Scrooge's re-education. In the world of business, Scrooge/Dickens sought financial success as a way to fortify himself from the harsh realities of loneliness and a rapidly industrializing Britain. Unfortunately, Scrooge's wish to make himself invulnerable also shut him off from humanity--which is why his fiancée, Belle, breaks their engagement. This further isolates him until he is entirely alone, "as secret and solitary as an oyster." His partnership with the similarly cold-blooded Jacob Marley reinforces Scrooge's miserly ways.

However, despite the warped personality, Scrooge retains a keen intelligence--he is a successful businessman--and has a biting sense of humor. He doesn't see himself as evil--he's just being "practical." Here he personifies modernism and Puritanism--ideas firmly in place when Dickens wrote the story. (British Puritans discouraged "pagan" Christmas celebrations and had largely succeeded in eliminating the holiday as a feast of any kind by 1800. Their social engineering of the workhouses separated families and produced thousands of "orphans" when the parents were still alive.

Scrooge's Saving Grace

Humor is the key to my interpretation of Scrooge--not jolly, but snide humor. I've left Dickens' dialogue alone, but I freshen it up by having Scrooge deliver it as biting sarcastic jokes to show his sense of superiority and utter disdain for the fools of the world. Think of him as a nasty, wise-cracking cable TV "news" gasbag--smart, but twisted. He's a self-made man who can't see making "idle people merry."

There's a hidden laugh behind his most famous lines. He's thinks he's being *clever* when he asks the charity seekers, "Are there no prisons?" He thinks he's being *funny* describing how idiots should be "boiled with their Christmas pudding and buried with a stake of holly through their heart!" In my view, Scrooge doesn't believe this in a literal sense. He's making mean-spirited jokes--chortling to himself. I even have him laugh as he delivers these outrageous pronouncements. Here, Scrooge is being provocative and very entertaining--to himself. He's in his own world. It's the self-satisfied smugness of somebody who has it made. He's laughing all the way to the bank.

Scrooge's ill-humor is a way to leaven his misanthropy--otherwise he comes off as a monster--someone beyond hope. However, that's just the way many adaptations portray Scrooge--as evil incarnate. The trouble is, the harder you make Scrooge appear, the more unconvincing his eventual conversion becomes--the "Scrooge Problem".

The wicked Scrooge approach completely ignores Dickens' themes of memory and forgiveness. Scrooge knows the difference between right and wrong, but feels contempt for those that don't share his values of thrift and practicality--so he lampoons the "losers" with self congratulating put-downs. Think of Scrooge as a smarty-pants who finds himself endlessly clever. In my view, if Scrooge has a sense of humor, then he is human--and therefore, has a possibility of redemption. The various ghosts wipe the smirk off his face and through hocus-pocus psychoanalysis and example, pave the way for his eventual salvation.

Example: How to Keep Christmas

On the example side, I make sure to show how Scrooge should "keep Christmas" by vividly depicting the celebrations at Fezziwig's, the Cratchit home and Fred's party. When Dickens wrote the story, the Christmas holiday was celebrated the way Easter is today--you go to church and there are a few gifts for children. Dickens converted the 12 day Yuletide feasts (largely of pagan origin) which had been held in large country manors, into smaller scale celebrations that could be held at work, home and among friends. The feasts, children's games and punch were popularized by the story and revolutionized the holiday. If you view Dickens' Ghost of Christmas Present as a variant/prototype of a pagan Father Christmas/Santa Claus, nearly everything about our modern Christmas comes from Dickens's tale--a fact I highlight in the announcer's introduction.

Fear: The Ghost Story of Christmas

Fear is the final motivator for Scrooge's conversion. Once softened up emotionally by the first two ghosts, he now reviles the callousness and materialism of the businessmen and the rag and bone shop grotesques. The dead body and Tiny Tim's passing move him to compassion, leading him and the Spirit to the graveyard scene, which is the most difficult in the story.

Most adaptations of the "Carol" fail right here. They show Scrooge quaking in fear and then, somehow, he is saved. Several versions even have him fall into the grave, but at his own tombstone, Scrooge wouldn't just be afraid of dying. After all, *everybody* dies. The crypt alone isn't enough motivation for the miser to change his ways. He is saddened by the death of Tiny Tim, but must also undergo his own demise to be re-born.

To finish him off, Scrooge must be reminded that he's headed for *Marley's fate*--eternal damnation! So, I bring back the rattling chains and hundreds of phantoms from Marley's visit. Now, *that* could scare him into being a nice guy--and gets us past the implausible "Scrooge problem."

Scrooge repents, of course, but is only saved when he says, "I'll change! I'll change... *I pray!* I beg you." It's the word "pray" that turns things around and this submission to God is a fitting Victorian Christian touch. With it, the phantoms vanish and Scrooge is saved.

Why a "Ghost Story of Christmas" anyway? It was an English custom to tell ghost stories on Christmas Eve--stemming from the old Yule celebrations of Saturnalia and the Winter Solstice, and Dickens wrote several other supernatural Christmas tales. My adaptation seeks to play up the ghostly aspects of the story--but in the context of 19th century Christian beliefs. Marley's Ghost is truly scary, as are the hundreds of phantoms.

Likewise, to increase Scrooge's fear, I use thunder and wind sounds to add real menace to the graveyard scene. To get a ghostly flavor where necessary, I use a slight reverb for the spirits--and also for Scrooge, when he accompanies them. I employ the reverb to depict the spiritual realm as distant, yet nearby. And Scrooge segues from the graveyard to his bedroom by the reverb becoming drier and drier--a nice radio touch. Afterward, the cacophony of church bells announce both Christ's birth and Scrooge's re-birth.

Social Protest

The last area I restore, is Dickens' beloved soap box preaching about the children, "Ignorance and Want"--a scene missing from many versions. Charles Dickens was a liberal social reformer--he'd been poor and knew firsthand the horrors of life in the workhouses, the factories, and the streets.

In most adaptations, this social message gets deleted in favor of more sentimental scenes--some actually turning "Tiny Tim" into the star, but *charity* is what is central to Dickens' Christmas--Goodwill towards men. Charity despite the hard weather and economic pressures. Dickens takes the metaphor of Christ's offer of heavenly redemption and literally brings it down to Earth. His Christmas is a utopia and Scrooge's journey there is Dickens' model for us all. Without this plea for charity to the less fortunate, the story becomes too materialistic as a paean to feasts and games--hardly what Dickens, the moralist, intended.

What Christmas Is All About

Some people object to Dickens' *Carol* for its lack of references to religion, but they fail to see Tiny Tim as a metaphor for Christ--Tim's crutch is his cross; His death redeems Scrooge; His creed is "God bless us, every one"; Marley's ghost and the chained phantoms are damned souls to whom Christ is unknown; Scrooge is a "wise man" who travels far before bestowing his gifts; Scrooge's death and resurrection, etc. Charles Dickens was too much an artist of symbol and myth to tell his story any more directly than he did. Those who can't see Christ in this Christmas story, have perhaps a bit too much fundamentalism clouding their eyes. This subtext informs us as we produce this play.

Music

In scoring *A Christmas Carol*, other than my own ghost and suspense music, I adapted real Victorian carols throughout. I tried to use less well-known carols, to avoid cliché or sentimentality, without

sacrificing the authentic characteristics that period music could lend to the drama. I employed the carols to reinforce emotional and structural connections in the story.

For example; Belle's theme ("The Coventry Carol") is played by a music box--a gift from Scrooge--that *winds down* as their relationship crumbles. "In The Bleak Mid-Winter" plays under Scrooge's visit to his boyhood and his good-hearted sister, Fan. This theme returns after Scrooge's redemption, played by a heavenly harp at the party where he is welcomed back into the family by Fred, Fan's son.

In radio drama, sound effects are motion and music is emotion, and Christmas music has a powerful effect on audiences, evoking both fond memories and reverence. I can't understand why other composers have not used this approach in scoring this story--it being so naturally obvious and highly effective.

The instrumentation is strictly Victorian: brass choir, pipe and reed organs, hand bells, church bells, chimes, cymbals, timpani, fiddle, concertina, music-box, wine glasses (glass harmonica), choirs and strings. I think this musical underscore adds greatly to the production.

Sound Effects

Bells are central to this story and I use plenty of them in the score and as sound effects. The bells serve as punctuation and as a metaphorical "wake up call" to Scrooge--who lost a fiancée named "Belle." The program's sound effects begin with jingling bells and the tiny bell on Scrooge's office door, and work their way through clocks, wind chimes, death-bells, and finally, to a cacophony of church bells when Scrooge is saved.

There is also a great deal of background walla walla to paint the parties and streets. The story doesn't have many sound effects, but I rally plenty of them for the graveyard as Scrooge must battle the elements of doom before he prays and is redeemed.

Directorial Approach

There are a number metaphors I use in my interpretation of this material. First, I seek to convey an edge-of-the-seat quality by urging a vigorous delivery and slightly fast tempo. Christmas celebrates the pending birth of a child and always carries anticipation and mystery, as does the unwrapping of a Christmas gift, and so too, the best ghost stories. With that in mind, there is surprise everywhere and I endeavor to keep the audience always guessing "what's next," even though this material is familiar. I stress mystery being revealed repeatedly--in Scrooge's comic toying with the charity seekers, Marley's arrival, the hiding of Martha Cratchit, Fred's "twenty questions" game, the contents of the charwoman's bundle, the shrouded body on the bed, and the otherworldly "voice" of the Spirit of Christmas Yet to Come.

The second metaphor I pursue is the contrast of delight amidst awfulness--the laughing crowds despite the privations of winter's cold wind and crunchy snow; the boy carolers being interrupted mid-song by the angry Scrooge; the abrupt change from Fezziwig's gay fiddle-driven party to Belle's sadly winding down music box. There's a defiant mysticism about celebrating life on one of the shortest days of the year. The idea that hope can spring from such bleak surroundings is at the heart of Christmas--and Dickens' fable.

Lastly, I seek a gusto from the many grotesques in the story, starting with the unreformed Scrooge. He relishes his misanthropy. He's not suffering in the counting house. He loves it there. He enjoys punning with Fred and the charity seekers. He even jokes with Marley's ghost--for a while. The chained Phantoms inspire compassion in Scrooge, while the Spirits teach him the sad fate of all those other exuberant ogres. Scrooge's loony joy at the end seems that much higher for all the fright and suffering that preceded it.

I hope to encourage cast and crew to dive headlong into their roles and leave behind all the gloomy and moralistic “Carols” they seen before. This is a miraculous birth, not a fatalistic funeral. Let’s laugh good and hearty! Just like Scrooge!

Preparation

The only other advice I could give regarding producing the program would be to read Charles Dickens’ original story to refresh your memory as to what is really going on. It would also be very helpful to view the video of the excellent 1951 film version starring Alastair Sim. It goes under the title of either *A Christmas Carol* or *Scrooge* and is available in original black & white or in a colorized version.

On radio, the 1939 Campbell Playhouse version, titled *A Christmas Carol*, produced by Orson Welles and stars Lionel Barrymore as an exceptional Scrooge. Barrymore’s vocal mannerisms and delivery are perfect--unfortunately the script, in my opinion, deletes many important scenes and doesn't exploit others enough. However, for my version, I've modeled my ending introduction of the cast and crew after theirs, as an especially fitting and fun closer .

Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* is a great story for all ages and should be an enjoyable production. It will teach people things they didn't know about Christmas and Scrooge and themselves. And its fantasy elements are perfectly suited to the magic of radio. To those who seek to produce this wonderful story as a radio drama I can only echo Tiny Tim's credo, "God Bless you, every one!"

Radio Skills School

Microphone Technique:

- 1) Sensitive and dead areas. Don't touch!
- 2) Proximity effect. (Boomy if too close.)
- 3) Proper distance for radio acting.
- 4) Dynamics and distance. (Back off to yell.)
- 5) Off mic use for distant sounds. Asides.
- 6) Popping "P"s and S-S-S-Sibilance.
- 7) Mic safety. (hitting, blowing, dropping)
- 8) Assume every mic is always ON.
- 9) Quiet script page turning.

Radio Acting:

- 1) Quiet in the studio.
- 2) Don't cough, laugh, or talk during production.
- 3) Watch the director. Wait for your cue. (Q)
- 4) Speed equals excitement. Don't bore audience.
- 5) Jump in if there's dead air.
- 6) Wait for director's signal at end of show.

Radio Direction "Sign Language"

- 1) "Wait" - Open hand.
- 2) "5-4-3---" - Finger count down.
- 3) "Theme starting" - Form a "T" with hands.
- 4) "Watch for cue" - Point to person then eye.
- 5) "You're on" - Pointing finger.
- 6) "Cut" - Finger slits throat.
- 7) "Faster" - Move index finger clockwise.
- 8) "Stretch it out" - Pulling taffy.
- 9) "Come in/"Back off" microphone - Move hand towards/away from face.
- 10) "Louder" - Elevate the hand, palm up.
- 11) "Quieter" - Lower the hand, palm down.

CASTING MONOLOGUES: "A Christmas Carol"

Everyone participating in our radio workshop is asked to read some lines aloud in front of a microphone. The casting director will cast the roles in our production based upon these "luke warm readings." Please take a moment to read the lines below several times, both silently and aloud. These monologues provide a bit of a "back story" giving an idea of who the characters are. Since radio actors often play several parts, we encourage the use of different voices or accents for the different roles.

- NARRATOR:** I'm the narrator. I describe the details of each scene and tell the audience what is happening. This is "Ghost Story of Christmas" requires a good story teller to make the scary parts scary and the happy parts happy--and that's my job.
- EBENEZER SCROOGE:** I'm Ebenezer Scrooge, now leave me alone! I don't celebrate Christmas and I don't suffer fools at all! I've got a wicked sense of humor, but I'm not all bad, just very practical. As for Christmas, Bah! Humbug! Humbug, I say!
- BELLE:** I'm Belle. I was Ebenezer's fiancée when he was young, but became alarmed as my darling became hard and cruel. He chose money over love and I could no longer stay engaged to him. It hurt me to leave him, but I had no other choice. Farewell, Ebenezer. May you be happy in the life you have chosen.

MRS. CRATCHIT: I'm Bob Cratchit's wife and the mother to six children including my poor, crippled Tiny Tim. It breaks my heart to see my kind husband slaving away for that old miser, Mr. Scrooge. I'd give him a good piece of my mind to feast upon and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it!

MARLEY'S GHOST: I am the ghost of Jacob Marley, Scrooge's long dead partner. Because of my own greed and avarice, I am doomed to wander the world after Death without rest or peace. I wail in unceasing torture and remorse! Beware my fate, Ebenezer. Beware! Beware! (GHOSTLY WAIL)

SOUND EFFECT ROLES: "A Christmas Carol"**SOUND EFFECTS ARTIST #1:**

WIND

CLOCK BELL (strikes 7X)

CASHBOXES

DOOR CREAKS OPEN

FORKS

GLASSES CLINK (for a toast)

SOUND EFFECTS ARTIST #2:

WIND CHIME - stand?

FOOTSTEPS & SNEAKY FOOTSTEPS

WINDOW RAISES [COACH]

SCROOGE'S CLOCK CHIMES (strikes 1X, 7X, 9X)

PUNCH BEING LADLED OUT

OTHERWORLDLY SCREECH -- Bowed cymbal device

SOUND EFFECTS ARTIST #3:

DOOR & TINKLING BELL

FOOTSTEPS IN SNOW

HAND BELL 1, BELL 2, BELLS 3

RUMBLE (works with THUNDER-CRACK)

QUIET CYMBAL CRASH

SPOON SERVINGS & SPOON RAPS ON TABLE

KNOCK ON DOOR.

SOUND EFFECTS ARTIST #4:

LOCKS

CRASH

THUNDER-CRACK (works with RUMBLE)

PLATES RATTLING

HORSES

SOUND EFFECTS ARTIST #5:

JINGLING BELLS

ONE MAN'S MEEK HAND CLAPS

CHAINS RATTLING

DANCING

SOUND EFFECT HOW TO: "A Christmas Carol"**WIND**

Wind machine SFX device or mouth sounds.

CLOCK BELL (strikes 7X)

Strike a small bell with a mallet

CASHBOXES

Rattle some coins in a tin cookie box.

DOOR CREAKS OPEN

Twist as 3/8" dowel (coated with violin rosin) within drilled out 1-1/2" dowel. Or use mouth sounds.

FORKS

Set silverware on a wooden surface.

GLASSES CLINK (for a toast)

Toast a couple of glasses together (don't clink too hard)

DEATH BELL

Strike large bell with blunt mallet.

WIND CHIME

Shake a small wind chime.

FOOTSTEPS & SNEAKY FOOTSTEPS

Ghostly drag-steps and and sneaky, soft footsteps on 18"x18" piece of 3/4" plywood.

WINDOW RAISES & COACH

Roll a roller-skate across a table.

CHURCH BELL (strikes 1X, 7X, 12X)

Strike a large bell with a blunt mallet.

SCREECH

Bow across a cymbal lowered into water. Or use mouth sounds. (Sounds like a train brake.)

DOOR (works with TINKLING BELL)

Slam, close or open a door in conduction with small bell.

FOOTSTEPS IN SNOW

SCRIPT HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT

ENGINEER'S NOTES: "A Christmas Carol"**EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENT:**

This show uses TWO electronic reverb devices, one for the ghostly voices (and Scrooge when he accompanies them) and another for the Sound Effects microphone for use on Marley's Ghost effects and the Phantoms. It will also be used during the Graveyard scene when the Phantoms return. Scrooge will move from one mike to another depending upon his needs for reverb. At the end of the Graveyard scene, Scrooge's mic will get drier as he leaves the Spirit's realm and returns to his bedroom.

MUSIC CUES:

A complete engineer's script should be marked up with highlights to show how long music cues run (through scenes and dialogue) as well as which characters are using reverb and when. Generally, there is no need to fade out any music cues--they all have proper endings. The only fading necessary is to "duck" to bring the volume down under a voice.

- 1) Holiday Playhouse theme (1:09) [A - 1]
 - "See Amid the Winter's Snow" (John Goss)
- 2) Boy Carolers (0:21) [A-2]
 - "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" (English Traditional)
- 3) Foggy Night (1:10) [A-3]
 - ends with timpani roll
- 4) Marley's Woe (3:05) [A-4]
 - ends with church bell tolling
- 5) The Phantoms (0:54) [A-5]
- 6) Spirit #1 Arrives (0:15) [A-6]

SCRIPT HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT

Except where noted, all music composed by Anthony E. Palermo.

All music arranged by Anthony E. Palermo.

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