

## TRUNCATED SAMPLE SCRIPT

This is a series of excerpted scenes from the full script, which runs to 58 pages--about 60 minutes in performance. Also included in this truncated script is a sampling of the 42-page appendix *How to Produce 'Christmas Carol' as a Radio-On-Stage Show*,--featuring casting monologues, extensive production advice and detailed technical information.

If you wish to secure the performance rights to the script, pre-recorded music tracks and pre-recorded sound effects, contact  
Info@RuyaSonic.com

## "Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol"

Adapted for radio by

Tony Palermo

(Excerpted scenes from the 60-minute radio version)

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TRUNCATED SAMPLE SCRIPT  
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## BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

Producers of *A Christmas Carol* must give credit to Anthony E. Palermo in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play, and all instances in which the title of the play appears in advertising or publicizing the production, including programs and playbills. The name of the Author must also appear on a separate line, immediately following the title of the play, and must be in type size not less than 30% of the size of type used in the title of the play.

Billing shall be in the following form:

(name of producer)  
presents

### CHARLES DICKENS' "A CHRISTMAS CAROL"

Adapted for radio-on-stage by  
ANTHONY E. PALERMO

Musical score composed and arranged by  
ANTHONY E. PALERMO

Long bio:

**ANTHONY E. PALERMO** (PLAYWRIGHT) is a radio dramatist, performer, and educator based in Los Angeles. His work is heard on NPR and XM Satellite Radio as well as in audiobooks and on stage with L.A. Theatre Works, California Artists Radio Theater, numerous theatre troupes, and on national tours. His sound effects work on Yuri Rasovsky's *Sherlock Holmes Theatre* contributed to its winning the *Audie Award*--the Oscar of audiobooks in 2006. He directed the 60th anniversary production of Norman Corwin's *On a Note of Triumph*--also recreating Bernard Herrmann's orchestral score. Over the past year, Tony provided live SFX for shows such as Eric Idle's *What About Dick?*, CART's *Wizard of Oz*, LATW's *Broadway Bound* and *The Rivalry*, as well as performing 65 solo shows at the California State Fair. Tony's *Sonic Storytelling Studio* at San Francisco's Exploratorium is a permanent exhibit that has seen thousands of visitors since 2006. His *Sparx Audio Adventures* assembly programs and workshops are popular with schools and colleges across California, the U.S. and the world. Tony also hosts the RuyaSonic Radio Drama Resources website, offering info on writing, directing, scoring, engineering, and sound effects. [www.RuyaSonic.com](http://www.RuyaSonic.com)

Short bio:

**ANTHONY E. PALERMO** (PLAYWRIGHT) is an Audie Award-winning radio performer, dramatist, and educator who has produced dramas and workshops for broadcast, stage, and schools. Tony hosts the RuyaSonic Radio Drama Resources website, offering info on writing, directing, scoring, engineering, and sound effects. [www.RuyaSonic.com](http://www.RuyaSonic.com)

NOTE: Up-to-date text of the bios is available at [www.RuyaSonic.com/tp2bio.htm](http://www.RuyaSonic.com/tp2bio.htm) You can cut & paste the text into your playbill or program and thus not have to worry about typos.

Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol"

(60-minute version)

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.

Pre-recorded sound effects tracks are available as downloadable MP3 files. Contact [sales@RuyaSonic.com](mailto:sales@RuyaSonic.com).

Pre-recorded music tracks including the boy carolers are available as downloadable MP3 files. Contact [Sales@RuyaSonic.com](mailto:sales@RuyaSonic.com).

After the script there is a 42-page appendix on "How to Produce *Christmas Carol* as a Radio-on-Stage Show.

NOTE: To print just the script, specify pages 1-62. To print just the appendix, specify pages 62-104

Visit Tony Palermo's Radio Drama Resources website: [www.RuyaSonic.com](http://www.RuyaSonic.com)

A Christmas Carol

1. MUSIC: [MUS-01] PLAYHOUSE THEME-UNDER. PLAY THRU.

2\* ANNOUNCER: [CUE] \_\_\_\_\_ 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: [MUS-02] 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!

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

7\* MUSIC: [MUS-03] 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: [MUS-04] 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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9. MUSIC: [MUS-07] 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.

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

3\* MUSIC: [MUS-09] 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!

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1\* MUSIC: [MUS-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?

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8. **SECOND SPIRIT:** (MOCKING) "Are there no workhouses? Are there no prisons?" (MORE...)
- 1\* **MUSIC:** [MUS-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").

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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: [MUS-21] GOD BLESS US- QUIETLY UNDER - PLAY THRU.

**SCRIPT HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT**  
**Full scripts run to 60-minutes, 40-minutes, 30-minutes**

## APPENDIX

How to Produce *Christmas Carol* as a Radio-On-Stage Show

by Tony Palermo (www.ruyasonic.com)

**THIS APPENDIX HAS BEEN TRUNCATED IN THE SAMPLE SCRIPT  
The full appendix runs 42 pages.**

Here are 42 pages about how to mount a professional radio-on-stage production of my adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. You'll find everything from concepts to details—thematic approaches to the material, to casting monologues, a sound effects cookbook, pre-recorded track listings, audio gear resources, down to instructions for “working” a microphone. Additionally, there's a history of how radio-on-stage shows were produced in the Golden Age of 1940s radio and how you can blend the various styles to fit your troupe's resources and likings.

Section (pages)	Description
DIRECTION (1-5) print pages 63-67	Writer/Director's notes on how to approach the “Carol”
CASTING (1-4) print pages 68-71	Casting list, Audition list, Casting monologues
SFX (1-5) print pages 72-76	Live Sound Effects Cookbook – Walla-Walla listing
SFX (6-9) print pages 77-80	Pre-recorded sound effects listing and advice
MUSIC (1-4) print pages 81-84	Pre-recorded music cue listing and advice
PRODUCTION (1-13) print pages 85-97	Production design background and advice, radio director's gesture cues
ENGINEERING (1-7) print pages 98-104	Engineering advice, microphone school for cast and crew, Audio setup, technical checklist, mic & stand resources

For additional information on how to produce and perform radio drama see my Radio Drama Resources website: [www.RuyaSonic.com](http://www.RuyaSonic.com)

Here's a link to my page on how to prepare radio drama scripts for production.  
[www.ruyasonic.com/prd-pre-prod.html](http://www.ruyasonic.com/prd-pre-prod.html) You may find these other pages especially handy:  
[www.ruyasonic.com/rdr-prod-direct.html](http://www.ruyasonic.com/rdr-prod-direct.html) and [www.ruyasonic.com/sfx-rig.html](http://www.ruyasonic.com/sfx-rig.html)

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

by Tony Palermo ([www.ruyasonic.com](http://www.ruyasonic.com))

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 pundit--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 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!"



**CASTING EVALUATION: "A Christmas Carol" 28/14 Date: \_\_\_\_\_**

The plus symbol (+) indicates optional doubling of roles

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

=====

Audition ratings: A through F

Actor Name	Bold	Emotion	Accents	Who	X

**CASTING MONOLOGUES: "A Christmas Carol"**

The casting director will cast the roles in our production based upon "lukewarm 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 remain 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)

**SECOND SPIRIT:** I am the Ghost of Christmas Present! (STERNLY) If what I have to show you is too hard a lesson to learn, then look here! They are man's children! Their names are Ignorance and Want. Beware them both! Without the spirit of Christmas to comfort them, narrow Puritanism and greed would release these wretched beings upon the world! (MOCKINGLY) And yet you ask, "Are there no workhouses? Are there no prisons?" Hah!

## Sound Effects Roles for *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

**APPENDIX HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT IN THE SAMPLE SCRIPT  
The full appendix runs 42 pages.**

## Live Sound Effect Cookbook: *A Christmas Carol*

### WIND

Wind machine SFX device or mouth sounds.

### TICKING CLOCK

Metronome or baking timer SFX device. (or can be omitted)

### 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)

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## Pre-recorded Sound Effects for *A Christmas Carol*

By Tony Palermo ([www.ruyasonic.com](http://www.ruyasonic.com))

Certain sound effects are either hard to produce live or hard to mic well, or both. In *A Christmas Carol* these difficult sounds include clock chimes, carriages, wind, thunder, and the unearthly shriek of the Third Spirit. For these particular sounds, you should rely on pre-recorded tracks--for a variety of reasons.

My SFX mentors worked with Orson Welles, Jack Benny, Jack Webb and other radio greats and in the Golden Age of radio drama, these network SFX artists always used a mix of live sounds and pre-recorded ones. There was no SFX purism preferring live over pre-recorded sounds; they used whatever worked to best achieve the effect the script called for.

Usually, background ambiances, such as jungles, factories, weather, interiors of cars, etc. were pre-recorded. Actions, such as fights, doors, feet, guns, etc, were done live. Using a mix of live and pre-recorded sounds served both the budget and the realism of the shows--and this was true for both studio shows and those done with live audiences.

For modern productions of *A Christmas Carol*, some theatre troupes may seek to use live SFX for everything (including wind, clock chimes, thunder, etc.) but live would NOT always be authentic. It might also sound poor. For example: wind SFX are notoriously hard to mic. Also, if one SFX artist was busy doing wind ambience, would the other be able to do thunder and the Third Spirit's shriek? Here, pre-recorded SFX allow for a smaller crew.

### **Real Sonic Sorcery**

In the heyday of radio drama--for both studio and live performances--the SFX crew consisted of one or more artists doing the live SFX, with another artist playing 78 RPM sound effects records from a "sound truck"--a wheeled console/cabinet consisting of multiple turntables--some with two (or even four) tone arms, a mixer for crossfading between turntables/tonerms, and a speaker. The sound truck man would work side by side with the live SFX artists. On some shows, one artist would do both the live SFX and sound truck duties.

I suggest putting a sound truck on-stage and have one of the SFX artists trigger the pre-recorded SFX using it. This increases the precision of coordinating SFX with dialogue. Plus, being on-stage, next to the live SFX table allows the SFX artists to easily "assist" the pre-recorded tracks with live SFX. This "doubling" can put over the illusion of great live sound effects work--and thus entertain the audience in a way impossible if pre-recorded SFX are merely triggered by an unseen booth technician.

These illusions could be accomplished with a booth technician triggering the pre-recorded tracks, but coordination between the live SFX artist and the booth technician will be tougher. You'll need more rehearsal and there's a greater chance of mis-timing the actions, which would expose the trickery and disappoint the audience. (It could also get a great *laugh*--if the bad timing is bad *enough*.)

Build the sound truck so that the modern playback equipment is concealed from the audience's point of view. You can also "accessorize" the sound truck with some old 78 RPM records and have the artist appear to be cueing up the records--when he's actually triggering CD or MP3 tracks. This will look totally authentic for 1930s-50s radio drama.

To see my own sound truck: visit [www.ruyasonic.com/sfx\\_rig.htm](http://www.ruyasonic.com/sfx_rig.htm)

My modern sound truck is pretty fancy, but I do about 90 shows a year. For *A Christmas Carol* you won't need anything as elaborate as mine, but here's what I use. It's a wheeled modular cabinet--painted in "CBS Blue"--containing a 24-input mixer board, DJ-style dual CD players, reverb/FX unit, and a headphone amp. Lately, I've replaced the dual CD player system with a DJ-style dual SD chip player (model# SDJ-1 from American Audio.)

In addition to controlling the pre-recorded SFX players--and volume for them--all my SFX mics are routed through the sound truck's 24-input mixer, plus any telephone filter mics. I even mix the four actors' mics and the keyboardist's organ/piano from the sound truck. All the booth audio technician does is control the overall volume of the show. Having control of all on-stage mics on-stage with me allows me to correct things immediately.

However, some troupes may wish to have all mics controlled by .

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Pre-Recorded Sound Effects Cues for *A Christmas Carol*

Track	Volume	Page-Cue	Description
01		02-01	Wind--under intro--FADE AS NEEDED
02		09-07	Office clock strikes 7x--under dialogue
03		10-08	Wind--under "Scrooge took his usual..." FADE QUICK
04		11-04 (option)	Scrooge double locks (optional cue. )
05		12-01	Various doors and locks
06		12-03	Bells 1, 2, 3 – then they stop.
07		12-07	Marley (basement) Bash, Bash, Crash, chains, walking
08		13-03	Thunder (1x)
09		13-07	Thunder (2x)
10		16-06	Wind, ghosts—moan, chains--Thunder
11		17-04	Scrooge's bedroom clock (1x)
12		19-04	Coach, horses, boys walla-walla
13		20-02	Cymbal/Wind chimes transition #1 – to school
14		21-03	Cymbal/Wind chimes trans #2 – years later at school
15		27-05	Scrooge's bedroom clock (1x)
16		34-07	Cymbal/Wind chimes transition #3 – to Fred's
17		35-09	Small blind man's buff crash
18		36-02	Medium blind man's buff crash
19		36-04	Big blind man's buff crash
20		39-01	Wind--under "Much they saw..." --FADE AS NEEDED
21		41-06	Otherworldly screech from Spirit 3 ("Yes!")
22		42-01	Otherworldly screech from Spirit 3 ("No!")
23		42-03	Cymbal/Wind chimes transition #4 – to the Exchange
24		43-07	Otherworldly screech from Spirit 3 ("Wait!")
25		43-09	Cymbal/Wind chimes transition #5 – to Rag & Bone
26		46-01	Cymbal/Wind chimes transition #6 – to dead body
27		46-03	Otherworldly screech from Spirit 3 ("Look!")
28		46-05	Otherworldly screech from Spirit 3 ("Look!")
29		46-07	Otherworldly screech from Spirit 3 ("You must!")
30		48-09	Thunder transition to graveyard – with wind—It fades
31		49-01/50-05	SEQUENCE: Graveyard SFX – a series of linked cues
		49-03	Otherworldly screech from Spirit 3 ("Look!")
		49-03	Thunder and Wind
		50-01	Chains and Wind
		50-01	Thunder and Wind
		50-03	Thunder and Wind, Ghosts moaning
		50-03	Otherworldly screech from Spirit 3 ("Yes!")
		50-03	Thunder and Wind
		50-05	Thunder and Ghosts and Wind (it fades out)
32		55-08	Office clock strikes 9x—under narration
33		58-03	(optional) SFX department making a racket



## Using Pre-Recorded Sound Effects Tracks for *A Christmas Carol* by Tony Palermo (www.ruyasonic.com)

NOTE: A specially prepared collection of sound effects tracks is available from Sales@RuyaSonic.com. The tracks can be downloaded as MP3 files from a special web page--and burned to CD or triggered from a computer or MP3 player.

Most sounds for *A Christmas Carol* are produced using live SFX devices, however, as in the golden era of radio drama (1930s-1960s) pre-recorded tracks were used for sounds that were difficult to produce manually. Some sound effects artists perform the live sound effects AND trigger the pre-recorded ones from a playback device on the SFX table. Others leave pre-recorded SFX to an off-stage technician.

The live sound effects are to be rendered by sound effects artists— doors, toasts, footsteps in snow, Marley’s chains and cash boxes, etc. The pre-recorded sound effects are to be triggered from a playback device—CD player, computer, MP3 player, etc. These sounds include wind, thunder, cymbal/wind chime “time travel” transitions, clocks, crashes, a coach with horses, and the shriek of the Third Spirit.

Review the Pre-Recorded SFX Cue List where you will find each pre-recorded SFX track listed by the page and cue number where it occurs in the script (EXAMPLE: “16-06” indicates “Page 16, Cue 06”). Mark your script with the Track number (1 to 33) to be played at that point. Leave space to also mark a volume level for each track—in pencil—as the director may change levels over the course of rehearsal. Go through the script and listen to each SFX track. Know the SFX cues well, so you don’t cut them off too early. In some cases, you will have to fade them out or crossfade between two tracks (a cab driving and a cab pulling over).

Please note that some SFX tracks will be played at the same time as the music cues—and thus will require balancing the volume levels, as well as considering the level of the actors’ voices.

In some cases, the director may wish to have the SFX artists “double” some pre-recorded sounds live—for example, the wind or thunder. They may even fake doing the wind and thunder effects while the bulk of the sound is produced via the pre-recorded tracks. However, doubling is very effective in creating sonic illusions for audiences.

Ideally the playback device should...

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**Pre-Recorded Music for *A Christmas Carol***  
by Tony Palermo (www.ruyasonic.com)

**LIVE VS. PRE-RECORDED MUSIC:**

Some troupes may use the pre-recorded orchestral music cues I offer (contact: Sales@RuyaSonic.com for more information) or they may opt for a live keyboardist. The music cues can be “beds”--which play underneath dialogue, or “bridges”--which play between scenes and fade under the new scene’s dialogue, or as “source” music which is supposedly played by either musicians or a phonograph within the scene--often a bar or party. The engineer’s task here is to mix the music with the voices and sound effects so the volume level of the three elements is properly balanced. Generally, the music will need to fade as the dialogue begins—unless the script indicates otherwise, such as LET CUE FINISH, or PLAYS UNDER ENTIRE SCENE, or MUSIC CUTS ABRUPTLY at a certain line of dialogue.

If your troupe chooses to use the pre-recorded music tracks, a technician will be triggering those tracks from a playback device--an audio CD player, MP3 player, or computer. The audio tech will need to be able to clearly hear the actors’ dialogue and sound effects, so as to trigger their music cues at the appropriate time. However, since the actors’ voices and sound effects are going through a mixer to the P.A. system, the technician should use either headphones or a small monitor speaker to listen to the show as it is performed. This is in contrast to most stage play productions, where the control booth is located at the back of the theater and hearing the dialogue from on-stage can be difficult. Elsewhere in this document I suggest having the pre-recorded music triggered on-stage by a technician seated at a fake organ shell. You should seriously consider that option.

Some cues are triggered quickly in succession, such as where one scene ends with musical punctuation and the next begins with its own musical motif--for example, the many time travel transitions. You may find it useful to employ TWO playback devices--both loaded with the exact same tracks--and trigger one after the other or even crossfade between the two.

Some theaters use slow-to-engage DVD players to trigger music or sound design tracks, but you should make sure the playback devices can quickly play the tracks as scripted. I recommend using DJ-style devices since they respond instantly to button pushes. If your playback devices take a while to actually play the tracks, you should notate on the script exactly when to trigger a track to have it play in sync with the actors’ dialogue reaching the point where the cue should play. This could be earlier than indicated in the script.

You may want to investigate using a...

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## Pre-Recorded Music Cues for *A Christmas Carol*

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

Track	Volume	Page-Cue	Description
01		01-01	Holiday Playhouse theme (1:09) - "See Amid the Winter's Snow" (John Goss)
02		02-03	Boy Carolers (0:21) - "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" (English Traditional)
03		10-07	Foggy Night (1:10) - ends with timpani roll
04		12-08	Marley's Woe (3:05) - ends with church bell tolling
05		16-05	The Phantoms (0:54)
06		17-06	Spirit #1 Arrives (0:15)
07		18-09	Christmas Past (2:35) - Transition, - plus "In the Bleak Mid-Winter" (Gustav Holst)
08		22-05	Fezziwig's Ball (1:15) - Transition, silence, tuning, - then "Sussex Carol" (English Traditional) - ends with applause
09		25-03	Belle's Music Box (1:27) - Transition, plus - "The Coventry Carol" (English Traditional) - At end, song winds down
10		27-02	Take Me Back (Return to Bed) (0:11) - Transition
11		27-03	Spirit #2 arrives (1:02) - Clock bells/ - pause for SFX bell - plus "Good King Wenceslas" (John Mason Neale)
12		29-01	Christmas Present/Cratchit's #1 (1:40) - Transition plus "Bell Cacophony" - plus "Away in the Manger" (William J. Kirkpatrick) - plus "Tim's Wish"
13		38-10	Christmas Montage (0:55) - Transition - plus "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" (English Traditional)
14		41-14	Spirit #3 Arrives (1:16) - Spirit 2 Transition - Silence (6 seconds) - Spirit #3
15		47-01	Cratchit's Home #2 (1:09) - Transition - Silence - plus "Silent Night" (Franz Xavier Gruber)
16		49-01	The Graveyard (1:26) - Transition - Spirit #3 - plus "The Phantoms"
17		51-02	Bell Cacophony (1:26) - Gets louder midway through (for window) - runs longer than needed
18		52-10	Christmas Day (1:00) - "Wassail Song" (English Traditional)

<b>Track</b>	<b>Volume</b>	<b>Page-Cue</b>	<b>Description</b>
19		54-04	<b>Fred's Party (0:47)</b> - "In The Bleak Mid-Winter" (Gustav Holst)
20		55-07	<b>Uncle Scrooge (0:08)</b> - "Christmas Tree Quadrille #4" (W. H. Montgomery)
21		56-07	<b>God Bless Us (1:02)</b> - "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" (Felix Mendelssohn)
22		58-01	<b>Outro (0:54)</b> - "We Wish You A Merry Christmas" (English Traditional)

All tracks have 8 seconds of silence tacked onto the end, to allow you time to pause the playback device before the next track would begin to play.

Except where noted, all music composed by Anthony E Palermo.  
The Victorian carols are all public domain.

All music arranged and performed by Anthony E. Palermo.  
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## Producing *A Christmas Carol* as a Radio-on-Stage Show by Tony Palermo (www.ruyasonic.com)

### STAGE SETUP: Production Concepts

Below are several ways old time radio was presented. You can pick and choose the elements that fit your vision and budget. I also include logistical info regarding how you can stage the show as a *radio-on-stage* production.

#### **Radio Reality Ain't What It's Cracked Up to Be**

Theatre troupes seeking to present my radio adaptation of *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol* as an authentic piece of classic radio drama need to understand just how shows were actually produced in the fabled Golden Age. Sure there were actors reading from scripts in front of microphones, live sound effects artists, and an organist, orchestra or pre-recorded score. But there were also directors "throwing cues" (from a booth or on-the-floor), sound trucks, headphones for the SFX artists, sponsors watching the shows from their own booth, assistants with stop watches running up to actors at the mic to cut dialogue and fit the show into the time-slot, and more. Your production can use as many of these authentic elements as you choose.

However, authenticity can be a trap. As we say in the radio sound effects world, "Reality ain't what it's cracked up to be"--meaning that mistaken notions of authenticity can harm your production. I've seen modern stage depictions of "old time radio" chock full of errors--such as applause signs, using the film term "foley" instead of Sound Effects, actors tossing script pages to the floor, the absence of somebody throwing cues, etc. Here's a primer on classic radio-on-stage productions that may spare you from anachronisms, bogus "realism," and unnecessary art direction/prop expenses. Once you grasp the concepts of radio drama production, you can mix and match elements to create your own crowd-pleasing show.

#### **Hollywood Radio-On-Stage Productions:**

A typical 1940s radio-on-stage show--such as for the *Lux Radio Theater* or the *Theater Guild on the Air* programs--took place in a large, legitimate theater (seating 600-1000) or a fancy movie house. These live audience shows were hour-long adaptations of recent Hollywood films--often with just one or two lead actors reprising their film roles. The broadcasts mostly served to promote upcoming films starring those actors. The live audience functioned more as a sound effect. Applause was there to validate the egos of the film studios, producers, and movie stars.

For radio dramas such as Lionel Barrymore's annual *Christmas Carol* shows or *It's A Wonderful Life*, these radio-on-stage productions in large theaters made no attempt to recreate the look of a radio studio--no control room windows, no acoustical tile, no overhead boom mics, no "On-Air" signs, etc. Instead of any kind of "radio-land" set, all they used were a few boxy-shaped microphones in front of long velvet drapes--which served to acoustically deaden the room. The actors were elegantly dressed, even if the characters they portrayed were pirates or coal miners. There were no fedora-wearing actors with turned-up shirtsleeves, no gum-chewing actresses, no cigar smoking by the SFX artist, no Damon Runyon version of the 1940s. The look of these shows resembled our modern Oscar ceremonies. The intent of these shows was *glamour*, and not a showcasing of the technical aspects of radio production. As such, the sound effects were often minimal and presented without much fanfare--or visibility.

In this kind of *Hollywood radio-on-stage show*, there were 3-4 microphones on stands--positioned Down-Stage Center running Right to Left. Since the focus of these shows was on the movie stars, the sound effects elements were downplayed. With that in mind, the SFX table would be unobtrusively located Stage-Right or Stage-Left. Next to the SFX table, a “sound truck,” a wheeled console with several turntables and a speaker, played pre-recorded sound effects from 78 RPM records. An orchestra or organist might be Up-Stage or in the pit in front of the apron. A group of vocal “extras”--called the “mumble chorus” would be seated Up-Stage, headed by a “conductor” for the “walla-walla” crowd scenes.

This *Hollywood radio-on-stage* setup is one that most modern troupes could easily reproduce in any theater space. It is totally authentic for *Christmas Carol*. However, I believe this style of presentation requires some tweaking in order to provide a more satisfying experience for modern theater audiences. Those tweaks can be borrowed from the production styles detailed below.

### **Radio-Studio-Theater Productions:**

The weekly radio comedy and variety shows, such as the *Jack Benny Program* and the *Fred Allen Show*, were broadcast from *radio studio-theaters*--seating 150 to 300. Modern sit-coms and *Jay Leno*-style talk shows are based on this model. These radio shows used a setup similar *Hollywood Radio-On-Stage* with a smaller stage, drapes, mics, SFX, sound truck, etc., but the walls surrounding the audience itself had acoustical tile or drapes. There was an “On-Air” sign--but no “Applause” sign. Along the *side* walls were glassed windows into the control room and a box for the commercial sponsors—much like an opera box or skybox at today’s arenas.

In radio sitcoms such as the *Jack Benny Program* or *My Favorite Wife*, sound effects artists were prominently featured, often with elaborate props that were visual as well as aural. The studio audience was active and well-mic’d. They gave the performers instant feedback as to how well jokes went over--and most importantly, their laughter assured advertisers that the show they were sponsoring was actually funny. If somebody screwed up on-stage, it was all part of the show.

Using the *Radio-Studio-Theater* model of production allows...

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### **Small Radio-Studio Productions:**

The typical radio genre shows--crime, suspense, westerns, soap operas, horror-- were done *without* audiences present. Here, audience reactions would detract from the realism of the shows. Modern crime and doctor TV shows resemble this model--the realism is key. In the Golden Age of radio these kinds of genre programs were produced in small radio studios with acoustical tile everywhere, some drapes, and large control and advertising client box windows placed behind and beside the performers. The sound truck and live SFX devices were sprawled across the studio--often taking up a great deal of space--while the 4-8 actors were off to the side, huddled around 1 or 2 mics. The cast would provide their own “walla” crowd sounds--often from their seats, several feet from the mics. Here, actors and crew could be dressed informally—some in suits, others with rolled up shirtsleeves and collars loosened—and SFX men in bow ties or long ties tucked into shirt front, ladies in dresses—usually never in slacks.

To achieve this studio look, you can use white pegboard for the walls, above dark wainscoting, a talk-back speaker, an illuminated On-Air sign, a large vintage clock--with second hand, an armoire-style SFX closet, a 6-foot long SFX table and “sound truck,” wooden folding chairs, and a large window into a control room, peopled by a silent “director” and “engineer.” You can add a water cooler, or small table with coffee and donuts, etc.

While it is possible to present your show using...

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## STAGE SETUP: Logistics

Here are some technical and logistical issues you should consider in producing for radio-on-stage.

### **MICROPHONES:**

Use *real* microphones hooked up to a P.A. system. Some troupes think dummy mics and loud stage voices will carry, but with the amount of music and sound effects in a radio show like *A Christmas Carol*, the actors' voices will need to be balanced with the other sounds. I've done over 1200 radio shows--many of them as radio-on-stage productions--and they could NOT be done without mics for actors, let alone sound effects.

Actors will have to learn to use regular voices and realistic whispers for this show. It will take a while for them to get used to doing drama over a P.A. system. Try to rehearse at mics stands (optionally) with mics and amplification in order to quickly familiarize the cast and crew with this unusual form of theatre. See the Engineering section for information about setting up the P.A. system.

Well-heeled troupes may wish to use the large vintage microphones of the 1930s-40s (the boxy RCA 44BX or capsule-shaped RCA 77DX) but these...

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### **CHAIRS FOR OFF-MIC ACTORS:**

Place a row or two of chairs Up-Stage--for actors to sit on when they aren't on-mic. The chairs should be quiet when sitting down or getting up--beware of creaking chairs, swivel chairs, or padded chairs that emit "whoosh" sounds. There is no need for actors to be off-stage at any point in the show, so no doors or exits are required. (However, if you use a radio-studio type of set, you may want to have the actors enter at the opening of the show as if they're coming in the studio door.) The seated actors will serve as the "mumble chorus" to provide walla-walla crowd noises. And the distance they will be from the mics will serve to keep their volume balanced in the audio mix.

### **"RADIO" COSTUMING:**

Whether you choose to have a contemporary look for your actors or put everybody in 1940s radio actor garb (or Dickensian 1840s outfits), it is handy to allow actors to use various character-based hats, aprons, or shawls when they are at the mic--to help the live audience understand if the actor is portraying a clerk, charity seeker, housewife, Spirit, etc. This is especially true if many of your actors are ...

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### **ITEMS NOT RECOMMENDED:**

Some radio-on-stage productions put actors' scripts in 3-ring binders, however this makes for



noisy page turning, physically limits how many actors can share a mic, and is not authentic to Golden Age radio shows.

Similarly inauthentic is the practice of throwing script pages on the floor once the lines for that page have been read. This will distract the audience and make a mess of the stage--and require massive re-sorting of scripts for subsequent performances.

Some troupes use music stands to hold the actors' scripts while they're at the mic, however stands tend to clutter the set and can block the audience's view of the actors' faces.

A similar clutter would be the use of headphones on *actors*. Not only is it inauthentic to radio production--in the studio OR on-stage--the wires across the floor makes it difficult and even dangerous for actors to cross to mics. Please note that SFX artists and musicians *do* need headphones. If your show has an on-stage "Radio Director" character to throw cues and coordinate the ensemble work, they would also be wearing headphones.

Stools or chairs at microphones may be necessary if your actors cannot stand up for however long their scenes are, but these also clutter the stage, inhibit vocal performance, and make blocking difficult.

It is also not recommended for actors to be...

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#### **SOUND EFFECTS:**

Use a 6-foot table for sound effects at Stage-Right or Stage-Left--as far Down-Stage as the actors' microphones. Sometimes the SFX artist must make eye contact with an actor (to coordinate say, picking up a telephone or knocking on a door.) This is impossible if the SFX table is Up-Stage of the actors at their mics.

You will need several mics for the live SFX. I suggest one to be ...

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#### **MUSICIAN/MUSIC TRIGGERING:**

Throughout the show there are music cues to bridge between scenes or play beneath the dialogue. These can either be the pre-recorded orchestral tracks I offer or you may use a live keyboardist.

An organ would be a very authentic way to accompany this radio show, but the expense of renting a real Hammond B-3 organ may be beyond your budget. I suggest you use a modern synth/sampler keyboard, but house it in a wooden enclosure built to resemble a church organ's façade.

Another idea is to use ...

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For photos of a typical SFX rig and the Organ/Trigger Shell, see...

**LIGHTING:**

Atmospheric lighting is up to you, but make sure the performers have sufficient light to be able to read their scripts at the microphones. This often requires there be light provided above/just behind the mics. One way to provide enough light is to...

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NOTE: Please take care that audio equipment not share power outlets with dimmer packs for the light system, otherwise electrical hum may come through the audio system. You may also want to locate the SFX table on the side of the stage that is quietest—away from fans for the dimmers.

## Radio-on-Stage Advice to Cast & Crew

By Tony Palermo (www.ruyasonic.com)

### MICROPHONE TECHNIQUE:

Microphones will be set up at various heights to accommodate a variety of actors. You will generally be assigned a “home” mic and use it whenever you have lines and that mic is free.

For drama, mics are used differently than they are for singing or public speeches. In radio drama, we do NOT ...

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When a line of dialogue indicates (ENTERING), the actor should begin speaking a bit back from the mic as they step up to it. For (EXITING) they should back away from the mic and finish speaking at about 2 feet away. The sound effects artist will watch their approach and time his footsteps to mimic these entrances and exits. The dialogue instruction (FADING) means to step back a bit from the mic as you deliver the line and reduce your volume--as if this were a film and we were dissolving to a new scene. When the script indicates....

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### SCRIPT TECHNIQUE:

Radio actors in the 1940s would have their scripts either stapled in the upper left-hand side, or loose--either lying flat or slightly center-creased, length-wise. They wouldn't use 3-ring binders for scripts because binders make for noisy page turning that will be picked up by the mic. Binders also make it hard to have several actors share one mic--since the scripts are now double-wide. No matter how your scripts are held, all page turning is done with care, to be as quiet as possible—hold the script away from the mic and gently turn the page. This also goes for actors seated Up-Stage. If 10 or 20 actors noisily turn their script pages, it sounds like a flock of birds.

The elements of radio dramas are dialogue, music, and sound effects--all of which are called “cues,” because they come at a certain time in the show--and the performer may have to be cued by a director to begin. All cues are numbered in this radio script. This numbering system allows for fast rehearsals and notes. If you need to refer an actor or technician to a specific part of the script, just call out the page and cue #. For example: “Page 12, cue #3.”

Certain cues in the script have an asterisk (\*) beside them. For example:

**2. MUSIC: FOGGY NIGHT-QUICK FADE.**

**3\* SOUND: (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: [CUE] ...world?

These asterisks indicate that something needs to “clear” before the cue can be performed. Usually, this is to let a music cue or a sound effect reach a certain point before the dialogue cue begins. The performer should pay attention when their cues have the asterisk. Either they need to listen for the previous music or SFX cue to “clear” or wait for the director’s hand-signal to begin. Similarly, there may be a dialogue instruction of [CUE]--indicating to wait for music or SFX to be established. Often the director (or the SFX artist) will point at an actor to give them the go-ahead to begin speaking.

Golden Age performers used...

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The script indicates--in the SCENE headings--which characters are needed in a scene. For example:

**SCENE FIVE: INT. SCROOGE’S BEDROOM - LATER  
(NARRATOR, FIRST SPIRIT, SCROOGE)**

Just prior to this scene starting, the actors portraying the Narrator, First Spirit, and Scrooge should make their way to the mics and be ready to speak. You can unobtrusively make your way to the mics during someone else’s speech towards the end of the previous scene, or during the music cue that bridges the last scene to the upcoming one. Actors leave the mics at the end of the scene or when their characters have exited the scene.

**WALLA-WALLA** is the indistinct murmuring of crowds in radio dramas. Please DO NOT say “walla-walla walla” or “peas and carrots” or “rhubarb”--just mumble. (In Hollywood radio-on-stage productions from the 1930s-1950s, this group was often called the “Mumble Chorus.”)

While walla is considered a sound effect, it is usually performed by cast members whose characters are NOT speaking the main dialogue in a scene. Walla needs to have energy, but a lower volume than crowd sounds are in reality. You must remember to keep the walla going in a scene. The cacophony of walla really adds to the drama, particularly in *A Christmas Carol’s* Cratchit household, London Streets and Graveyard scenes.

In performance, the director or sound effects artist will “conduct” the walla as to vitality, length and most importantly, keeping the volume down.

Please note that live radio drama walla differs from...

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**“THROWING” CUES ON-STAGE:**

Radio dramas have more scenic transitions than stage plays, more music cues, and a need for a precise timing and volume balancing for the sound effects. A radio drama—and a radio-on-stage show such as *A Christmas Carol*—is more like a movie unfolding in real-time than a typical stage play, where once a scene starts, the actors are on their own.

With so many elements in need of coordination in radio drama, it is essential that somebody coordinate the ensemble. Otherwise, the troupe may spend endless hours in rehearsal trying to avoid “train wrecks” resulting from using stage directing methods to govern a far more complicated production. Giving notes *after* a rehearsal or performance may work for fine tuning the dramatic tone, but it won’t do for coordinating the elements of radio drama in real-time.

In radio dramas—from the Golden Age to now—the Radio Director...

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Please note that the Radio Director does NOT signal when EVERY cue is to be performed. It is only when the coordination of voices, music and SFX requires such coordination. (These moments are marked in the *A Christmas Carol* script with either [CUE] or an asterisk right next to the cue number—such as 12\*)

This kind of coordination is typically required whenever there is a transition from one scene to another. For example: Bob Cratchit has just convinced Scrooge to give him Christmas Day off. Scrooge delivers his last line, the SFX artist jingles the bell and slams the door, the “Foggy Night” music plays to take us into the next scene. Now, the director waits until the “Foggy Night” music has played just long enough for the audience to realize time has passed, and then cues the Narrator to begin speaking—setting up the meeting with Marley’s Ghost.

Without this live cueing, the coordination of so many events will require lots of rehearsal. In radio, we don’t get weeks to rehearse shows. Often, we get the script and perform it that same day. For your radio-on-stage show, you can use this same style—and make it part of the show. However, it isn’t necessary that your play director do the Radio Directing on-stage.

You can have a “Radio Director” character—script in hand, wearing headphones, with a stop-watch around her neck. She can stand Stage-Left or Stage-Right or even on the floor just beyond the lip of the stage, and “throw cues” to the performers.

You could also have a Sound Effects Artist do this in addition to their SFX duties. Another option is to get your troupe’s actual stage manager to play the role of “Radio Director”—since they are “calling the show” after all. Audiences enjoy the behind-the-scenes aspect of seeing the radio show be directed in this fashion. It’s up to you as to how prominent you want this character to be.

However it is essential that the “Radio Director” be...

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The next page of this section offers pointers for doing radio drama—including a list of radio direction gestures. I suggest that the entire troupe be given a demonstration of what these cues and movements mean. Using them in rehearsal and during performance is not only practical, but very entertaining for radio-on-stage productions.

## Radio Drama Pointers

### Microphone Technique:

- 1) Sensitive and dead areas. Don't touch!
- 2) Proximity effect. (Boomy if too close.)
- 3) Proper distance for radio acting. (4" to 6")
- 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. (Don't hit, blow into, or drop)
- 8) Assume every mic is always ON.
- 9) Quiet script page turning.

### Radio Acting:

- 1) Quiet in the studio.
- 2) Don't cough or talk during production.
- 3) Watch the director. Wait for your cue.
- 4) If your character is in a scene, stay at the mic.
- 5) Speed equals excitement. Don't bore the audience.
- 6) Jump in if there's dead air.
- 7) Wait for director's signal at the end of the 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.

## Radio-On-Stage Audio Setup

by Tony Palermo (www.ruyasonic.com)

Unlike traditional stage plays, radio-on-stage shows require that all voices be mic'd, as well as the live sound effects. Additionally, there will be the triggering of pre-recorded sound effects, and either a live keyboardist or pre-recorded music tracks of theater organ and piano. This show will be busier--audio-wise than any stage play. And the coordination and timing of actors and sounds/music will be more complex than stage plays. The number of live SFX, pre-recorded SFX and music cues may seem daunting, but there are ways to split up control of those sounds so as to not swamp the audio tech staff.

Some troupes may think they can get by without micing the actors, but balancing the volume levels of the various elements will be impossible unless voices and live SFX are mic'd. Dummy mics and stage voices will not work for this show. However, think of the audio system as *reinforcing* the sound on-stage and not *supplanting* it. The volume levels will not be extreme. The intent here is for clarity--allowing the audience to hear the many sonic elements of the show. The concept is to treat the show as if it were going out for broadcast, but deliver that sound to the live audience in the theater.

### **P.A. SYSTEM:**

You'll need a P.A. system sufficient to fill the venue--with mostly talk. While most P.A.s are used for rather loud music groups, the volume levels required doing radio drama won't approach those used for rock bands, so you won't need massive amplification. If your theater uses...

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### **Inputs:**

The sound sources will consist of 3-4 voice mics, 1-3 live sound effects mics, pre-recorded sound effects and either pre-recorded music tracks or a keyboardist (organ and piano, which could be provided from a single synth/sampler keyboard). Dynamic unidirectional mics are best for radio-on-stage shows. Avoid condenser mics--as they pick up too many stray sounds, including noises from the audience.

### **Electronic Effects:**

A reverb effect on one microphone would be nice. This is to depict Marley's Ghost, the Three Spirits and Scrooge, when he accompanies them. It is not essential. Many mixing boards now come with on-board reverb effects. This would be assigned to a single mic, but you'd want to be able to switch off the reverb effect so that mic could be used by non-supernatural actors. In the Graveyard scene, we do an audio transition where Scrooge's voice is ...

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### **Speaker Placement:**

The location of P.A. speakers in the theater may be impacted by the use of mics on-stage. The existing sound system in a theater may be fine for the typical sound design and scene music of a stage play, but could cause problems when used for radio-on-stage productions because of mics being on-stage. It may be better to opt out of using a theater's fixed speakers and instead employ portable P.A. speakers--which are better able to be positioned for clarity and sound quality.



Depending on the size and layout of your theater, you can place a speaker at...

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Please note that because mics will be on-stage, you risk feedback if the speakers are behind or directly above the mics. If your theater has speakers in these locations, you should either move them or avoid using them. Experiment to make sure that your speakers don't cause feedback or "monitor spill"--which is just before you reach the squeal point of feedback. "Monitor spill" produces a boxy sound that strikes the ear as odd--and will interfere with the intimacy that drama requires. By keeping the P.A. volumes at a reasonable rate you can avoid monitor spill. When setting volume levels, your goal should be...

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### **Monitoring:**

For monitoring purposes, there should be no speakers facing the performers--as this will produce "monitor spill." Instead, the sound effects artist(s)--and live keyboardist (if you use one)--should be wearing headphones and receiving a mix of all voices, music and SFX. This is necessary for them to hear both themselves and to follow where they are in the script. Certain scenes have bustling crowds on-stage and only headphones can provide an accurate rendering of where the actors are in their dialogue. Failure to use headphones often results in ...

## **APPENDIX HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT IN THE SAMPLE SCRIPT The full appendix runs 42 pages.**

### **MICS FOR ACTORS:**

Because radio dramas rarely have more than 4 people on-mic in a scene, you do NOT need a mic for each cast member. For *A Christmas Carol*, you should have 3-4 regular vocal mics, primarily to accommodate actors of various heights. Set up mics for "tall", "short" and "medium" actors. Since most scenes only have 2-4 actors speaking at one time, each actor can be on their "home" mic most of the time, but for dramatic purposes, they may be assigned to be a different mic--even one that might appear too tall or short for them. It's sometimes necessary for two or even three actors to share a mic. For example, in *A Christmas Carol's* time traveling scenes, Scrooge and the Spirits should share a single mic--since it will have a reverb effect applied to it.

Label the mic or mic stand with 1-2-3-R (with R--for reverb)--on the side facing the actors. During rehearsals, the director may employ blocking--as to who's on which mic for a scene--or even to cross from one mic to another on a certain line of dialogue. Since the mics are clearly labeled, actors can use these numbers when marking up their scripts as to which mic they need to be at and when. (Mic <2> , <R> , etc.)

Mics running through a P.A. system are treated differently by actors doing drama than by other mic'd performers. Rock singers, lecturers, or DJs often "eat" the mic (put their lips right on the mic.) For drama,

we seek a natural tone, so the actors should never be closer than 4 inches from the mic element. If they speak too close to the mic, the super-bassy “proximity effect” kicks in and you get the unnatural sound of a commercial voiceover or shock-jock. Such close-micing also ups the risk of actors popping their “P’s.”

**Mic Height:**

You can avoid both the proximity effect and popping “P’s” by setting the mic at...

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NOTE: You might be tempted to use modern “pop filters”--small hoops covered with sheer material, or thin metal screens at a distance of 3-5 inches from the mic. However, these devices were not used in the Golden Age of radio and would spoil the 1940s look. Instead of pop filters, radio shows used mic height and distance to avoid these problems. You should too.

To set the various mic heights, have some...

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Although you set the mic heights in this way, please note that actors must learn how to “work” a mic. Even if they’ve done 10 years of voiceovers, few actors are experienced when it comes to performing *drama* through a mic into an amplification system. Assemble the actors--together with the director--for mic school. With the P.A. on, do a mic technique demonstration so they can learn how to act into a mic.

- 1) Explain the concept of below-the-chin micing. Tell each actor to select a “home” mic based on their height and try to play there as much as possible during the play.
- 2) Describe and show the “strike zone” of the mic--what areas are sensitive, less-sensitive and dead.
- 3) Explain that a short actor’s mouth can be as far below the mic as a tall actor’s can be above it. (This will be essential training for when two actors of differing heights must share a mic--for dramatic purposes, such as a love scene or an argument. )
- 4) Show how speaking while one approaches the mic simulates an “entrance” and backing away while speaking simulates an “exit.” The distance traveled is only about 2-3 feet, but the talking should be non-stop during the travel.
- 5) Let them see that when the script indicates a character is (DISTANT) that they should be 12 to 18 inches from the mic.
- 6) Explain that all calling out, yelling and screams should be done at an up-angle into the theater--so as to not deafen crewmembers wearing headphones.

- 7) Demonstrate how to hold a script at a mic--and turn pages without the sound getting picked up.
- 8) Demonstrate how if one turns his head perpendicular to the mic while speaking, the mic won't pick them up. (Many newbie radio actors--trying to address an actor face to face--make this mistake.) They must aim their words AT the mic, from wherever they are positioned.
- 9) Bring up two actors to play a "two-hander" scene at adjacent mics. Show how they can deliver their lines without eye contact--just talking straight into the mic. Then show how they can do the scene *with* eye contact. (The actor on the right should stand a bit further right to his mic and "cheat" a bit left to aim his eyes at his partner, while his mouth is angled at his mic. The actor on the left does the mirror-opposite by standing further left of the mic and "cheating" right.) This type of positioning allows actors to use their typical stage skills when doing multi-character scenes.
- 10) Have two actors play a "two-hander" scene at the *same* mic. Position one at 45 degrees from mic-center and the other at 135 degrees from mic-center--but both are aimed directly at the mic. Also: Have the cast note how script handling needs to be coordinated when two actors work the same mic.
- 11) Lastly, explain that after a few rehearsals, actors will acclimate to "working" the mic.

#### **MICS FOR LIVE SOUND EFFECTS:**

The SFX artist (or artists) are usually located at either extreme Stage-Left or Stage-Right. They should be Down-Stage, in order to provide the audience with a clear view of their work. You'll need 2-3 dynamic unidirectional mics for sound effects, depending upon how many devices there are and how large. SFX artists work in front of a 6-foot table upon which is arrayed a variety of noise-making devices--creakers, scratchers, crashers, etc. They also use their feet to walk upon wooden or stone surfaces. They may have a full-size door beside the SFX table or miniature door mounted to either the main SFX table or on a table behind them.

For the SFX table, I recommend using a...

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You'll need a dedicated mic for the floor surfaces. You can mount it on a short mic stand or a regular height stand with a boom pointed at the floor.

If the door is free-standing or on a table, aim a mic at the lockset area, but it must be positioned so that the whoosh of air from door opening or closing doesn't ripple noisily across the mic element. I often use a small door mounted to my main SFX table and then position the boom mic each time I need to open or close the door. Please note that the door and the floor surfaces are usually located near each other, since characters entering or leaving via a door usually also take several steps.

#### **THE SFX "SOUND TRUCK":**

In Golden Age radio dramas--and in many contemporary radio-on-stage productions--the SFX artist triggers pre-recorded sound effects from on-stage. This is contrary to how conventional plays handle their pre-recorded tracks and your troupe may choose to have a booth tech trigger all tracks.

## TECHNICAL CHECKLIST FOR RADIO-ON-STAGE PRODUCTIONS

Items you may already have or need to buy or rent for a radio-on-stage production.  
For recommendations of specific items, see page ENGINEERING-6 in the appendix of this script.

### FOR ACTORS:

- 3 or 4 microphones (for regular voice sounds)
- 3 or 4 tall mic stands - for a period look get chrome stands with heavy iron bases.
- XLR mic cables - get enough for all mics, and have some spares in case cables go bad.  
25 foot cable lengths are recommended.

### FOR LIVE SOUND EFFECTS:

- 2 or 3 microphones - for regular voice sounds
- 1 or 2 tall mic stands with booms - for a period look get chrome stands with heavy iron bases.
- 1 short mic stand (for footsteps)
- XLR mic cables - get enough for all mics, and have some spares in case cables go bad.

### FOR PRE-RECORDED SFX:

- Playback device - (Audio CDs, MP3 player, SD player, etc)
- Mixer - to adjust volume for playback device

### OVERALL:

- Audio mixer capable of mixing a max of 8 microphones and how many playback devices you need,  
NOTE: If you use a live keyboardist, you'll need mixer inputs to handle their feed (and a "direct box" to go from their keyboard outputs.)
- (OPTIONAL) A multi-input "snake" may make it easier to run mic cables to your mixer--especially if the tech booth is far from the stage. You may choose to locate the mixer just off-stage.
- P.A. System (amp, cables and speakers) sufficient to fill your venue.

## Radio-On-Stage Mic & Stand resources (as of 2009) by Tony Palermo (www.ruyasonic.com)

**NOTE: Some info has been blacked out in this sample script. The full version has all the product names and webpage links.**

### MICS:

One easy-to-find mic that is perfectly authentic for a 1940s look is the [REDACTED]. This is commonly called [REDACTED]. They're available at [REDACTED] for \$160 each (with free shipping). LINK: [REDACTED]  
You'll need 3 or 4 of these—for the actors.

Another idea is to use conventional mics, but mount a boxy-style classic mic façade to the front.

For SFX, just get a few conventional mics—something like a [REDACTED]. Here's a link to some good \$30 clones:

LINK: [REDACTED]

### STANDS/BOOMS:

To complete the period look, I'd suggest shiny chrome mic stands—like these from [REDACTED] for \$20 each: LINK: [REDACTED]

You'd also want one chrome boom arm—for the SFX table mic: Here's a \$50 model:  
LINK: [REDACTED]

For a second or third SFX mic, maybe a chrome gooseneck will help to position the mic—depending on your SFX door size, etc. Here's a \$15 model

LINK: [REDACTED]

If you opt for the [REDACTED] mics--you'll need to order the short mic stand listed next.)

If you need a taller short mic stand for SFX, try this \$22 model:

LINK: [REDACTED] It's not available in chrome, but because it's on the floor, nobody will notice that it's black.

**HEADPHONES FOR SFX TEAM, KEYBOARDISTS, BOOTH TECHS:**

In the Golden Age of radio drama sound effects artists and organists wore headphones so they could clearly hear the dialogue and their own work and thus be more precise as to timing and volume levels.

The mix you'll want to deliver is what is going out to the P.A. system—voices, sound effects and music. There is no need to generate separate mixes for the SFX crew or anyone. The point is to provide clarity of what the show sounds like to the audience. Do not provide headphones for the actors—this will mess with their performance and cause traffic problems as they cross from their seats to the various mics. You may wish to let actors wear headphones when learning how to work a mic, but not during the show itself.

Please note that the actual headphones of the 1930s-1950s radio dramas were uncomfortable and tinny in their sound. It is possible to find these vintage headphones on e-bay, but I suggest using non-descript modern headphones that won't seem too out of place in your period setting.

I highly recommend...

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