

TRUNCATED SAMPLE SCRIPT

This is just the first few pages of the full script, which runs to 35 pages--about 30 minutes in performance.

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Charles Dickens'
"A CHRISTMAS CAROL"

Adapted for single narrator by

Anthony E. Palermo

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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 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 holiday-themed plays, *A Christmas Carol*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, and *Auntie-Scrooge, a Backwards Christmas Carol* have seen hundreds of productions around the world since 1998. Tony's sound effects work on Yuri Rasovsky's *Sherlock Holmes Theatre* contributed to its winning the 2006 Audie Award--the Oscar of audiobooks. Tony directed the 60th anniversary production of Norman Corwin's *On a Note of Triumph*--for which he also re-created Bernard Herrmann's orchestral score. Recently, Tony provided live SFX for shows such as Eric Idle's *What About Dick?*, CART's *Leviathan '99*, LATW's *California Suite* and *Side Man*, 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

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

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

"A Christmas Carol"
for single narrator

Prod # 101

VOICES

EBENEZER SCROOGE	Miserly old man.
NARRATOR	The story's narrator.
MARLEY'S GHOST	Spirit of Scrooge's partner
SECOND SPIRIT	Ghost Of Christmas Present- Jovial spirit
FIRST SPIRIT	Ghost Of Christmas Past - Old/Young Spirit
NEPHEW FRED	Scrooge's kind nephew
BELLE	Scrooge's fiancée
BOB CRATCHIT	Scrooge's meek clerk
MRS. CRATCHIT	Bob's kind/feisty wife
POOLE	First charity seeker
LAMB	Second charity seeker
MR. FEZZIWIG	Scrooge's jolly old master
FANNY SCROOGE	Scrooge's sister
TINY TIM CRATCHIT	Bob's crippled young son
BUCK	Street urchin

The narrator can either read the various roles using their one voice, or attempt to differentiate the characters by using a variety of voices. The script has been formatted like a radio play in order to keep the characters distinct.

MUSIC:

A Pre-recorded musical score is available to accompany this script. The music cues are largely adapted from Victorian Christmas Carols, with additional ghost music to accompany the various spirits and phantoms. If you have not purchased the rights for the music, you may do so by contacting Sales@RuyaSonic.com. The tracks are made available as MP3 files, so you can have download them within minutes of your payment being received. See appendix for complete music listing.

If you'd like the tracks burned to audio CD and postal-mailed to you, that can be arranged.

NOTE:

This version of the "Carol" runs about 30 minutes. If you'd like a fuller version of the story, consider producing the 40-minute or 60-minute radio drama version--which also makes use of pre-recorded and live sound effects (bells, wind, horses, coaches, and the un-earthly wail of the Third Spirit.) Contact Sales@RuyaSonic.com for info.

Visit Tony Palermo's Radio Drama Resources website: www.RuyaSonic.com

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

2. NARRATOR: Hear now... 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 family, faith, feasting, and goodwill it is to this very day. (PAUSE) Dickens' "Ghost Story of Christmas" opens in London, on a cold, snowy Christmas Eve, in the year... eighteen-forty-three...

3. MUSIC: INTRO THEME ENDS--LET BELLS RING UNDER.

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

1. SOUND: JINGLING BELLS. (HALT AS SCROOGE YELLS.)
2. NARRATOR: Once upon a time, 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. 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 wind that blew...was bitterer than he...
3. MUSIC: [MUS-02] BOY CAROLERS-UP. ON "SATAN'S POWER" SCROOGE YELLS, THEN BOYS STOP SINGING. PLAY THRU.

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

4. SCROOGE: Bah! (NASTILY) "Merry Christmas!" (PAUSE)
Humbug! Be gone, you miserable little beggars!
Take your infernal Christmas carols and get away from my door!
6. NARRATOR: And Scrooge shut the door on the boy carolers.
7. SCROOGE: Bah! (TO FRED) And you, nephew! What right have you to be merry? You're poor enough. Christmas?
Bah! Humbug!

1. 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!

2. 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...(LAUGHING) 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 and let me keep it in mine.

3. FRED: Keep it? (AMUSED) But you don't keep it, Uncle.

4. SCROOGE: Well, let me leave it alone, then. Much good may it do you! Much good it ever has done you!

5. FRED: Christmas-time is a good time, Uncle. A kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time of goodwill towards all men. And though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good and I say, God bless it!

1. NARRATOR: Just then, some meek handclaps and a meek voice...
2. BOB CRATCHIT: (DISTANT) God bless Christmas! Hurrah!
3. SCROOGE: (ROARS) You there, Bob Cratchit! Get back to work! Let me hear another sound from you, and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation!
4. FRED: Don't be angry, Uncle. Come! Dine with us for Christmas dinner tomorrow. Kate would love to see you.
5. SCROOGE: Kate? Oh...yes...your..."wife." Humph! Why did you marry against my will?
6. FRED: Because I fell in love, Uncle Ebenezer.
7. SCROOGE: (SARCASTICALLY) Because "you fell in love!"
...With a woman as penniless as yourself, Fred.
(FED UP) Oh, Good evening!
8. FRED: But you never visited before my marriage. I want nothing from you. I ask nothing of you.
9. SCROOGE: (MAKING FUNNY) Very well, good evening!
10. FRED: Oh, I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last.
So, a Merry Christmas to you, Uncle!

1. SCROOGE: (GETTING IMPATIENT) Good evening!
2. FRED: And a happy New Year!
3. SCROOGE: (A BIT ANGRY) Good evening! (TO BOB) Mr. Cratchit! See my nephew out.
4. BOB CRATCHIT: This way, Mr. Fred and... (WHISPERS) a Merry Christmas to you.
5. FRED: And to you and your family, Bob. How is Mrs. Cratchit and your children? And especially your youngest, the little lame boy?
6. BOB CRATCHIT: Tim, sir, "Tiny" Tim. Er...He's getting better. Thank you for asking. Happy Christmas.
7. NARRATOR: And Scrooge's nephew departed. But just as he did, two charity-seekers entered.
8. POOLE: (JOLLY) Good day sir! Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?
9. SCROOGE: Mr. Marley, my partner, has been dead these seven years. In fact, he died seven years ago this very night. I'm Ebenezer Scrooge.
10. POOLE: Oh. Well, at this festive season, Mr. Scrooge, we seek charity for the Poor and Destitute.

1. LAMB: You see, many thousands are in want of common necessities. Hundreds of thousands are in want of the simplest comforts, sir.
2. SCROOGE: Why is that? Are there no prisons?
3. LAMB: Umm...plenty of prisons...
4. SCROOGE: And the Union workhouses and the treadmill, are they still in operation?
5. POOLE: They are--I wish I could say they were not.
6. SCROOGE: (MOCK RELIEF) Oh! I was afraid that something had stopped them in their useful course.
(CHUCKLES)
7. LAMB: Well, they scarcely furnish "Christian" cheer, Mr. Scrooge. (SIGHS) A few of us seek to buy the Poor some meat and drink--and means of warmth. We do so now, because it is a time when Want is keenly felt amidst the holiday abundance. What shall I put you down for?
8. SCROOGE: Nothing!
9. POOLE: (SURPRISED) Ah, you wish to be anonymous?

1. SCROOGE: I wish to be left alone. I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make idle people merry. As a businessman and a taxpayer, I support the prisons and workhouses. Let those who are badly off go there.
2. LAMB: (SHOCKED) Oh, but, many can't go there.
3. POOLE: Yes, many would rather die.
4. SCROOGE: If they would rather die, they had better do so and decrease the surplus population.
5. POOLE: I see... So the firm of Scrooge and Marley "declines"...
6. SCROOGE: It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good evening!
7. LAMB: Very well, sir. You've made your views quite clear. (FADING) Good evening to you.
8. NARRATOR: As the two departed, the office clock chimed seven times.
9. BOB CRATCHIT: Uh...Mr. Scrooge? It's seven o'clock, sir and it is Christmas Eve.

1. SCROOGE: So? I suppose you'll want all day tomorrow, eh Mr. Cratchit?
2. BOB CRATCHIT: Uh... If quite convenient, sir.
3. SCROOGE: (MEAN) It's not convenient! And it's not fair! Why should I pay a day's wages for no work?
4. BOB CRATCHIT: 'Tis but once a year, sir.
5. SCROOGE: A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December! But I suppose you must have the whole day. Humph. Well, be here all the earlier the next morning, Mr. Cratchit.
6. BOB CRATCHIT: I will sir. Thank you, and...Merry Christmas!
7. SCROOGE: (INDIGNANT) "Merry Christmas!" Indeed! Baaaaah!

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

1. MUSIC: [MUS-03] FOGGY NIGHT-UP, UNDER - PLAY THRU.

2. NARRATOR: 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...

3. MARLEY'S GHOST: Ebenezer Scrooge! Ebenezer Scrooge!

4. NARRATOR: 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. (PAUSE) 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)

1. NARRATOR: A single bell--far off--began to ring. Then another and another--from all over the house.
2. SCROOGE: (SCREAMS) Ahh! What is it! Every bell in the house must be ringing! What in the...world?
3. NARRATOR: And all the ringing stopped!
4. SCROOGE: (PAUSE) N-Nonsense. Humbug! It's all humbug! I had...Wait! What-what's that?
5. MUSIC: [MUS-04] MARLEY'S WOE--UNDER. (FADE AT SCENE'S END)
- 6 NARRATOR: There was a huge crash--far away, but still within the house. Scrooge was frightened.
7. SCROOGE: Someone's in the cellar! But the doors are locked, double-locked! Something...is coming. Something is coming closer. It's outside my door. No! I won't believe it! It's humbug! Humbug I say...
8. MARLEY'S GHOST: (MOANING) Scrooge. Ebenezer Scrooge!
9. NARRATOR: Suddenly, the door flew open and there before Scrooge was a ghostly figure...macabre and strange!

1. SCROOGE: (SCARED) Ah! How now! (PAUSE) What-what do you want with me? Who-who are you?
2. 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?
3. SCROOGE: (FIGHTING FEAR) A-A disorder of the stomach makes them cheat! Y-You're not a ghost! You're just a bit of bad beef, a blot of mustard, a fragment of an underdone potato. Ha! There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are! Humph! Humbug, I tell you! Hum...
4. NARRATOR: And Marley's ghost shook his chains, violently.
5. MARLEY'S GHOST: (LONG, TERRIBLE WAIL) Aieeeeeeeeeee!
6. SCROOGE: (SCREAMS) Ahhhh! (FRIGHTENED) Mercy! I believe you! I believe you--I must! Oh, dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me? Why do spirits walk the Earth? Why come to me?
7. MARLEY'S GHOST: It is required of every man, that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow men. If that spirit does not go forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death--Doomed to wander the world and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared. (WAILS) Aieeeee!

1. SCROOGE: You are chained, Jacob. Tell me why?

2. MARLEY'S GHOST: I wear the chain I forged in life--link by link, yard by yard. I am chained by cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers. Witness the weight and length of strong chain you bear yourself, Scrooge. It is a ponderous chain!

3. SCROOGE: I-I see no chain.

4. MARLEY'S GHOST: You shall, on the day of your death! Mark me!
In life, my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole!
(SOBS) Now, I am doomed to wander without rest or peace. No regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused.

5. SCROOGE: But you always were a good man of business.

6. MARLEY'S GHOST: Business? (SCREAMS) Man-kind was my business!
The common welfare was my business! And it is at Christmas-time that I suffer most.

7. SCROOGE: I'm-I'm sorry for you, Jacob. Is there anything I can do?

1. MARLEY'S GHOST: For me, it is too late! But I have come... to warn you of a hope and chance of escaping my fate. You will be haunted by three spirits. Expect the first tomorrow when the bell tolls One, the second the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night at the last stroke of Twelve. Without their visits you cannot hope to shun the path I tread! (WAILS)
2. SCROOGE: No! No, Jacob. Please!
3. MARLEY'S GHOST: Ebenezer! Look out this window. That poor woman and her infant huddled on the door-step below! Look that you may see for your own sake.
4. MUSIC: [MUS-05] THE PHANTOMS--UP, UNDER, PLAY THRU.
5. SCROOGE: Ghosts! Hundreds! ...chained...just like yourself! They surround the woman! But, they're not haunting her, they're...pleading! Doesn't she see them? Why do these ghosts lament, Jacob? Why do they wail?
6. MARLEY'S GHOST: They seek to aid her... They seek to do good in human matters, but have lost their power... for-ever. They wail in unceasing torture and remorse! Beware this cruel fate, Ebenezer. Beware! (FADES) Beware! Beware! (WAILS) Aieeee!

1. NARRATOR: And with that, Marley's ghost floated out the window and swirled off with the hundreds of other lost souls in their unceasing remorse.
2. MUSIC: THE PHANTOMS--LET FINISH WITH CLOCK BELLS.

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

3. NARRATOR: The clock chimed one and Scrooge awoke. He was lying on his bed, still in his robe. Was Marley's visit a dream or not? He decided it was a dream and nothing more, ...(MORE)

THE SCRIPT HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT.
Several scenes later...

5. MUSIC: [MUS-09] BELLE'S MUSIC BOX--UP, UNDER, PLAY THRU.

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

6. SCROOGE: (IN AWE) Ah, Belle! As beautiful as ever...
7. FIRST SPIRIT: A penniless girl...who loved you, Scrooge.
8. SCROOGE: And I, her. It didn't matter that she had no dowry. We were so happy together...

1. 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!
2. SCROOGE: (SHAKEN) No! No! No! Spare me this! Not this, Spirit. (PLEADS) No!
3. 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.
4. (OLD) SCROOGE: What idol could ever displace you, Belle?
5. BELLE: You now worship a golden idol. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off, one by one. (SIGHS) Oh, Ebenezer, when we were first engaged, you were another man, but no longer.
6. (OLD) SCROOGE: I wanted security, success--for you. Belle!

1. BELLE: I seek tenderness, not riches--therefore, even though it is Christmas, I release you from our engagement, with a full heart, for the love of him you once were...
2. (OLD) SCROOGE: (PLEADING) No. No! Belle! Don't. Don't!
3. BELLE: (WEEPS) Dear Ebenezer, may you be happy in the life you have chosen...(SOBS)
4. SCROOGE: (PLEADS) Belle. Belle! No! (PAUSE) Spirit! Show me no more! Why do you torture me? (SOBS)
5. MUSIC: [MUS-10] RETURN TO BED--UNDER (CYMBAL ROLL)
6. SCROOGE: Remove me! I cannot bear it! Haunt me no longer! No longer! (FADING) No longer!

SCENE ELEVEN: INT. SCROOGE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT
(NARRATOR)

7. MUSIC: [MUS-11] SPIRIT #2. UP, PLAY THRU. (NOTE: TRANSITION/SILENCE/CLOCK CHIMES/SPIRIT THEME)
8. NARRATOR: The whole scene disappeared and Scrooge found himself, once more,...alone...back upon his bed. (PAUSE) He drifted off to sleep, only to be awakened...again...by the stroke of One...

THE SCRIPT HAS BEEN TRUNCATED AT THIS POINT.
Several scenes later...

SCENE THIRTEEN: EXT. LONDON STREETS - MORNING
(NARRATOR, SCROOGE)

1. NARRATOR: And instantly they were transported to the streets of London on a bright Christmas day. The shops were bustling, 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. It is the home of Scrooge's clerk, Bob Cratchit, his wife and six children. Bob was just returning from church, with the little, lame boy, Tiny Tim, upon his shoulders.

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

2. MRS. CRATCHIT: And how did little Tim behave at church, Bob?
3. BOB CRATCHIT: As good as gold, Mother, and better, eh, Tim?
4. TINY TIM CRATCHIT: (COUGHS) They sang ever so nice, Mother. I hoped the people saw me in the church, (COUGHS) because I'm a cripple and it might be pleasant for them to remember, on Christmas, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see.

1. BOB CRATCHIT: Bless you, my son. See Mother, his heart is strong and he will get better. I know it.
2. TINY TIM CRATCHIT: Oh, smell that Gooooooooooooose! Hurrah! Look! Look! There was never such a goose! Never!
3. MRS. CRATCHIT: All right, be seated. Here you go. Take your turn now. There's plenty of stuffing, dressing and plum pudding for all of you.
4. BOB CRATCHIT: Quiet, please. Quiet. Such a feast requires a Merry Christmas to us all! God bless us!
5. NARRATOR: And each of the Cratchits answered in turn—all down to the youngest, Tiny Tim...
6. TINY TIM CRATCHIT: (COUGHS)...God bless us...every one!
7. SCROOGE: Spirit, tell me if Tiny Tim will live.
8. SECOND SPIRIT: I see a vacant seat, Ebenezer, in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die.
9. SCROOGE: No, no. Oh, no, kind Spirit. Say he will be spared.
10. SECOND SPIRIT: Why? "If he's to die, he had better do so, and decrease the surplus population."

1. SCROOGE: (HURT) Oh, you use my own words against me.
2. SECOND SPIRIT: Yes. Perhaps, in the future, you will hold your tongue until you have discovered what the "surplus population" is and where it is! It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child.
3. NARRATOR: Master Peter Cratchit, assisted by his sister, Martha brought in a big bowl of steaming Christmas punch. They filled their cups and Bob held court--in the spirit of the holiday...
4. BOB CRATCHIT: Here...I would like to propose a toast...to Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge, the founder of our feast. To Mr. Scrooge!
5. MRS. CRATCHIT: What! Oh no, Bob! "The founder of the feast" indeed! I wish I had Mr. Scrooge here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it.
6. MRS. CRATCHIT: (SIGHS) I'll drink to his health for your sake and the Day's, not for his. Long life to him, a merry Christmas and a happy new year. He'll be very merry and very happy. I have no doubt.

1. NARRATOR: But the Spirit had other things to show Scrooge and they were whisked into the sky... to see how men keep Christmas in their hearts.
2. MUSIC: [MUS-13] MONTAGE THEME-UP, UNDER, PLAY THRU.

SCENE SIXTEEN: MONTAGE - CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD
(NARRATOR)

3. NARRATOR: Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and they were cheerful. (PAUSE) On foreign lands, and they were close at home. (PAUSE) By poverty, and it was rich. In poorhouse, hospital, and jail--in misery's every refuge, the Spirit of Christmas left his blessing, and taught Scrooge as he went. (PAUSE) At last, they returned to the streets of London for the Spirit's final lesson, but the Spirit had aged.

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If you'd like to secure performance rights for the full script and music tracks, contact Sales@RuyaSonic.com

Website: www.RuyaSonic.com

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

by Tony Palermo

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

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

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

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

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

Memory: Scrooge's Tortured Past

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

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

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

Scrooge's Saving Grace

Humor is the key to my interpretation of Scrooge--not jolly, but snide humor. I've left Dickens' dialogue alone, but I freshen it up by having Scrooge deliver it as biting sarcastic jokes to show his sense of superiority and utter disdain for the fools of the world. Think of him as a nasty, wise-cracking cable TV 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.

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.

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 a director 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.

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!"

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). All tracks all have proper endings, but you may need to fade out a track, depending on when the actors finish the scene. Also: You may need to bring volume down under a voice.

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

16		The Graveyard (1:26) - Transition - Spirit #3 - plus "The Phantoms"
17		Bell Cacophony (1:26) - Gets louder midway through (for window) - runs longer than needed
18		Christmas Day (1:00) - "Wassail Song" (English Traditional)
21		God Bless Us (1:02) - "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" (Felix Mendelssohn)

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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