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Guthrie Theater Study Guide
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Synopsis

Firmly rooted as a ghost story, just as Dickens conceived it, our new production of A Christmas Carol begins in a snowstorm in the middle of a London graveyard, slowly receding as the hustle and bustle of a London street come in to view.

Most of us will know what happens next. Just how it will happen is a holiday surprise.

Scrooge, a miserly and miserable old man, torments everyone he sees on most days, but is especially cranky on Christmas. He shouts at carolers, refuses to give money to charity and threatens to eat a small beggar boy. His ebullient nephew Fred comes to visit him at his frigid work house to invite him to Christmas dinner. Scrooge, predictably, declines. Fred leaves, and Scrooge grudgingly agrees to give his clerk, Bob Cratchit, Christmas off with pay, though Scrooge feels ill used by this. Cratchit leaves; Scrooge closes shop and changes into his dressing gown.

Settling in for the night, Scrooge is disturbed – and alarmed – by the ghost of his old partner, Jacob Marley. Marley warns him to mend his ways or he too will be forced to roam the earth in the chains he forged for himself with his cruel ways. Scrooge will be visited by three spirits, Marley tells him. He would do best to listen to what they have to say.

No sooner has Marley left than the clocks in Scrooge's house go berserk and the Ghost of Christmas Past appears. Together they journey back to Scrooge's sad school days, his delight at seeing his sister Fanny, and to a grand Christmas party thrown by his jolly old employer, Old Fezziwig. Scrooge begins to realize that Fezziwig's joy was infectious, that it spread to all his employees, and that this joy is worth more than whatever the party cost him. We also see Scrooge woo, and then lose, the beautiful Belle. The ghost tells Scrooge, "I show you only what is good, and fine, and beautiful. So that should you glimpse it again – as you glimpsed it once – you will grasp it as if your life depends on it." As quickly as she arrived, the ghost is gone, leaving Scrooge alone again in his bed.

The clocks are once again on the fritz and though it seems impossible, Scrooge is visited again in short order by the Ghost of Christmas Present. The ghost takes Scrooge to see how the Cratchits celebrate Christmas. Though they are poor and have little to eat, they are happy with what they have and to be in each others' company. Scrooge also learns that Tiny Tim, Bob's wise young son, is very ill and will likely die without proper care. Despite how poorly Scrooge treats him, Cratchit offers him a toast nonetheless, grateful for what he has.

The scene shifts to his nephew Fred's, and we see simultaneously how the other (richer) half live and that Fred, too, knows how to keep Christmas with friends and family. Generously, Fred proposes a toast to his uncle as well, hoping that Scrooge will find some happiness in life. Games abound, food is plentiful and a good time is had by all. Scrooge begins to wonder if he is truly missing something special.

Before the spirit leaves him, he reveals from under his cloak two small, sick children – Ignorance and Want – and Scrooge, moved, inquires if they have no place to stay. The spirit throws Scrooge's words back in his face: "Are there no prisons? Are there no workhouses?" Christmas Present, too, fades away.

The next visit, from Christmas Future, shows Scrooge his fate if he does not mend his ways. Poor Tiny Tim has died; so has Scrooge. At Tim's funeral are many grief-stricken people; Scrooge has not a single mourner. Merriweather begins to sell off his possessions, and Scrooge realizes that he must mend his ways or he will simply die forgotten and unloved.

The transformation of Scrooge is profound: he awakens to Christmas bells, gives money to charity, sends a huge turkey to the Cratchits, sings along with the carolers, and gives Bob a big raise. He even reconciles with his nephew. Scrooge's story of redemption, beloved by audiences for years, remains as powerful and uplifting as it ever was. From that point forward, we’re told, no one kept Christmas as faithfully or fruitfully as old Ebenezer Scrooge.
The Characters

**SETTING**

London, December 24–25, 1843

**CHARACTERS**

Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserly businessman  
Bob Cratchit, his clerk  
Mrs. Cratchit, his wife  
Martha, Peter, Belinda and Tiny Tim, their children  
Fred, Scrooge’s nephew  
Kitty, Fred’s wife  
Mrs. Polkingtonhorne, Kitty’s mother  
Fan, Scrooge’s sister  
Mr. Sykes, a schoolmaster  
Mr. Fezziwig, Scrooge’s jolly former employer  
Mrs. Fezziwig, his wife  
Daisy, Dora and Deirdre Fezziwig, their daughters  
Daniel, David and Donald, suitors to the Fezziwig daughters  
Young Scrooge, Ebenezer Scrooge as a young man  
Young Marley, Jacob Marley as a young man  
Dick Wilkins, a fellow clerk at Fezziwig’s  
Belle, Scrooge’s former fiancée  
Belle’s Husband  
Mr. and Mrs. Wimple, Scrooge’s tenants  
George, the bailiff  
Mrs. Dilber, Scrooge’s housekeeper  
Old Joe, a junk salesman  
Scrooge’s Priest  
Various carolers, revelers, children, Fezziwig guests, denizens of London  
Bunty and Bumble, taking a collection for the poor

**PHOTO: LAUREN MUELLER**

The cast of *A Christmas Carol* in rehearsal
I have endeavored in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it!

Their faithful friend and servant, C.D.

Charles Dickens
A Christmas Carol, December 1843

[A Christmas Carol] is a national benefit, and to every man and woman who reads it a personal kindness.

William Makepeace Thackery
Fraser's Magazine, February 1844

There was indeed nobody that had not some interest in the message of the Christmas Carol. It told the selfish man to rid himself of selfishness; the just man to make himself generous; and the good-natured man to enlarge the sphere of his good nature. Its cheery voice of faith and hope, ringing from one end of the island to the other, carried pleasant warning alike to all, that if the duties of Christmas were wanting, no good could come of its outward observances; that it must shine upon the hearth and warm it, and into the sorrowful heart and comfort it; that it must be kindness, benevolence, charity, mercy, and forbearance, or its plum pudding would turn to stone and its roast beef be indigestible.

John Forster
The Life of Charles Dickens, 1874

The narrow space within which it was necessary to confine these Christmas Stories, when they were originally published, rendered their construction a matter of some difficulty, and almost necessitated what is peculiar in their machinery. I never attempted great elaboration of detail in the working out of character within such limits, believing that it could not succeed. My purpose was, in a whimsical kind of masque which the good-humour of the season justified, to awaken some loving and forbearing thoughts, never out of season in a Christian land.

Charles Dickens
Preface to a collection of his Christmas Stories published in 1852

(Above) A boy dressed as a ghost upsets a gathering of friends. Print by John Massey Wright, 1814, part of the British Cartoon Prints Collection

(Top) Image of A Christmas Carol, first edition, 1843
I never beheld such a rapturous audience. And they – and the stage together: which I never can resist – made me do such a vast number of new things in the Carol, that Arthur [Smith, manager of Dickens’ reading tours] and our men stood in amazement at the Wing, and roared and stamped as if it were an entirely new book, topping all the others. You must come to some good place and hear the Carol. I think you will hardly know it again.”

So wrote Charles Dickens to a friend in 1858 as he learned with delight that a receptive audience could not merely discover for itself, but also reveal to him, a freshness in his story. How astonished Dickens would be, then, to think that more than a century and a half later, his little tale, being for so many something they have known for so long, still finds ways to surprise and delight!

What exactly is it in Dickens’ text that has made Carol a Christmas institution perennially met by both young and old with genuine glee, not merely with a sense of obligation? After all, since its publication in 1843, it is most likely that few stories have inspired more retellings, reworkings, condensations, piracies, or outright bastardizations, whether in print, on film, television, or stage, or told through voice, instrumental music, dance, or even mime. Perhaps Carol’s narrative simplicity has allowed it such a successful evolution: readers have been able again and again to delve into the text and develop rich social and personal interpretations. Working to its advantage, too, is the story’s inherent theatricality and its enduring popularity.

DICKE"NS’ DRAMATIC READINGS

In a sense, Dickens was one of his own earliest adapters. From his first-ever public reading in 1853 on to his last in 1870, Dickens chose regularly to perform various abridged versions of A Christmas Carol. And “perform” was certainly the operative word: according to contemporary reviews in the Cambridge Independent Press and The Times of London, Dickens “gave to every character a different voice, a different style, a different face” and displayed in his readings a “happy blending of the narrative and dramatic style, by which the author gives additional colouring to his already highly elaborate work, and astonishes the auditor by revelations of meaning that had escaped the solitary student.” The theatrical features of Dickens’ prose – his ear for dialogue, his impeccable pacing, his vivid characters and his ability to portray their emotional journeys – could only be enhanced by Dickens’ own formidable talent as an actor and his sensitivity to audience response.

Changing Tunes in Changing Times
by Margaret Leigh Inners
FROM STAGE PLAY TO SACRED TEXT

Long before Dickens began his public reading tours, however, others had already glimpsed the theatrical potential in his writing. Less than two months after the December 19, 1843, publication of <i>A Christmas Carol</i>, eight dramatic adaptations were being staged around England – among them productions at Sadler’s Wells and the Royal Surrey Theatre. Incidentally, they were bringing the tale to a wider audience than could have afforded the elegantly illustrated book itself. These productions evidenced the dramatically effective structure of the story: Scrooge’s troubled journey towards self-knowledge proved as compelling on stage as in print.

Scrooge’s trials and subsequent redemption certainly have religious undertones; nonetheless, in the context of late-Victorian British society, adapters chose primarily to emphasize the Biblical references relating to the Cratchit family. As Paul Davis states in his 1990 book <i>The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge</i>, “In Dickens’ latter-day Christmas story, the Cratchits became the Holy Family and Scrooge a nineteenth-century worldly wiseman making his pilgrimage to the humble house of the ‘poor man’s child.’” Accordingly, the Cratchit Christmas dinner was the highpoint of late Victorian theatrical productions, while in print the figure of Mr. Cratchit with a crutch-carrying Tiny Tim hoisted upon his shoulder became an image of iconic stature.

THE DEPRESSION AND THE RISE OF THE “AMERICAN CAROL”

As time went by, little could prevent eager adapters from continuing to try their hand at Dickens’ tale. The emergence of motion pictures in the late 19th century and early 20th century prompted the first film version of the story, entitled <i>Scrooge; or Marley’s Ghost</i> and released in 1901; Thomas Edison produced a version in 1910. Sound recordings for the gramophone were offered to the public as well. By the 1920’s, Dickens’ story had gained wide popularity in the United States and was developing its own uniquely American feel. In the 1930s, the years of the Great Depression, <i>A Christmas Carol</i> offered glimmers of hope to the American public. Listening to radio adaptations of the story became a traditional holiday pastime. Lionel Barrymore’s annual radio performances, in particular, established him as the first truly “American” Scrooge and comforted a nation yearning for symbols of hope and fortitude.

Depression-era Hollywood film versions of the <i>Carol</i>, developing alongside their radio counterparts, delivered to their diversion-seeking audiences a distinctly American fantasy of transcending class differences and “triumphing over impersonal economic forces,” says Paul Davis. In the egalitarian American take on Dickens’ story, Davis continues, some adapters even went as far as transforming the mere raise that the reformed Scrooge grants Cratchit in the original into a partnership in the firm! One of these “equal-opportunity” <i>Carols</i>, the 1938 big-budget MGM production, is a stunning, escapist spectacle which incorporates more romance than is present in the original text and, predictably, glosses over some of the harsher social critique in Dickens’ story.

POST-WWII PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS

With the arrival of the prosperous 1950s, it seemed the British and American adapters, attuned to the changing sensibilities of their audiences, were willing to engage with the darker themes present in <i>A Christmas Carol</i>, both the economic and psychological ones. As Freudian “readings” of the story, emphasizing issues of repression, dream psychology, and internal conflict, became the trend, popular adaptations engaged with similar themes. The 1951 British film version, featuring Alastair Sim as Scrooge, is a fine example of post-war adapters’ interest in Scrooge as a psychologically complex character. It incorporates into his visions of the past more details about Scrooge’s troubled childhood and youth, particulars which Dickens leaves to his readers’ imagination. The movie portrays Scrooge as a scarred, vulnerable, and isolated man.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESONANCES

Given the profit-obsessed corporate culture of the 1980s, the <i>Carol</i> took on new resonance, and adapters shifted their interest again to the socio-economic issues embedded in the text. The two widely-known adaptations of the time were the 1984 version starring George C. Scott and Hollywood’s 1988 darkly comic updating <i>Scrooged. </i>The former is a “traditional” period production, but one in which, according to Fred Guida in his 2000 book <i>A Christmas Carol and Its Adaptations</i>, “the spectre of economics is felt as it is in no other version.” It portrays Scrooge as particularly dense to the warnings of the spirits and unyielding in clinging to his selfish economic principles. <i>Scrooged</i> is a far looser adaptation, relocating the tale to modern-day America and featuring as its protagonist a workaholic television executive too caught up in producing a live televised version of <i>A Christmas Carol</i> to
care about the concerns of his colleagues or the struggles of his long-suffering secretary. This is perhaps the most self-consciously deconstructive of Carols, claims Paul Davis, for it ends with the modern-day Scrooge breaking up his broadcast of the Carol story in order to admonish his live audience for watching television on Christmas Eve instead of genuinely engaging with the community. The film works best perhaps as a polemic against the various forms of media which have made the Carol into the cultural commodity that it is, arguably, today.

Excerpted from an essay first published in Guthrie publications in 2004.
So loud this Victorian prophet cried poverty’s warning, that men began to erase some of the writing on the wall. If Dickens’ Society loomed larger than life, even he did not exaggerate the ills it countenanced. Among these were the prisons and workhouses of 1843. They were not to be borne, he cried, they were unbearable! He made them unbearable to his vast public; what the public can bear no longer is compelled to change. It takes an irresistible force to achieve this single handed. Dickens had it, and it surged through the first of his Christmas Books. ...

Eleanor Farjeon
“Introduction” to Christmas Books by Charles Dickens, edition published in 1954

Dickens romanticized the virtues of the poor, but he didn’t sentimentalize the circumstances of their poverty...We still have crime, homelessness, parents selling their children for a nickel bag and a host of other ills. If a master storyteller like Dickens could find his most compelling stories within that landscape, who am I to turn away from it?

Novelist Sara Paretsky
Dickens and the Christmas Tradition

Dickens’ *Christmas Carol* has become such an essential part of Christmas that we can hardly imagine the holiday season without it.


Theater, like the Holiday season, is laden with traditions. Everyone knows never to utter the word “Macbeth” in a theater; never to wish an actor “good luck” but rather to “break a leg;” and to always keep the ghost light on. Similarly, the Holiday season brings with it many well-established traditions: trips to visit Santa at an insanely crowded mall; the decoration of Christmas trees and the hanging of mistletoe; huge dinners of turkey or ham; Midnight Mass; or Chinese dinner and a movie.

Since 1975, the Guthrie’s annual production of *A Christmas Carol* has been a Minnesota tradition both for audiences and artists alike. This tradition, like the theater itself, is living and organic.

This section is designed to explore Holiday traditions and invite you to come and take part, once again, in the living tradition of the Guthrie’s presentation of *A Christmas Carol*.

It is often said that Dickens “invented” modern Christmas. While this may be a slight exaggeration, it is no exaggeration to suggest that he radically shaped – and continues to shape – the way we celebrate Christmas today.

Our historical Christmas origin tale is generally well-known: Christian belief mixed in with the Roman traditions of Saturnalia, the Scandinavian Yule traditions of feasting and merriment and a mixture of northern European cuisines – combined with a heady mixture of North American commercialism. But it was not always this way, and Dickens is largely responsible for the festive, family oriented celebration we know today.

There is no date given in the Christian *Bible* for the birth of Jesus, but beginning in late antiquity and continuing through the Middle Ages, the Feast of the Nativity was usually celebrated on December 25. In the early Middle Ages Advent was a time of general merriment: harvest festivals, feasting and revelry began on the Feast of St. Martin de Tours on November 11 and lasted for forty days. When Charlemagne was crowned Holy Roman Emperor on Christmas Day 800 A.D., the actual celebration on December 25 gained
greater prominence so that by the later Middle Ages, Christmas was the dominant feast of winter.

Christmas in the Middle Ages was a very public affair: communities celebrated together and it was a time to solidify relationships through gift-giving. Employers and servants would exchange small gifts, as would landlords and tenants. On occasion, a manorial lord might give his manor the gift of a feast or some ale. All people of means would give alms to the poor. In England, where A Christmas Carol takes place, Christmas became a widely celebrated party with lots of food, wine, dancing, and card-playing.

Following the Protestant Reformation, the Puritans in England sought to eliminate the celebration of Christmas; since it had no Biblical basis they viewed it as a Catholic invention and decried the lax morality of drinking and dancing to celebrate the Nativity. Following the English Civil War (1642–1651) the Puritans effectively banned Christmas in 1647; the ban remained in effect throughout the Commonwealth and Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. Christmas became legal again with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, but celebration remained sparse, and even church services for Christmas were relatively poorly attended until the early nineteenth century.

Thus by the time Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol, Christmas was a fairly subdued affair. It was neither the community festival of the Middle Ages nor the important religious celebration of late antiquity nor the ribald celebration of the seventeenth century. But the tide was turning. The Royal Family began decorating and displaying Christmas trees – borrowed from their German heritage – and Christmas dinners became more elaborate, and common. So when Dickens proclaims that Christmas is a “good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time,” he is hearkening back to a well-established tradition of merriment, charity and reverence, combining aspects of Christmases past. Dickens focuses his holiday not in the commons but at the family hearth – it becomes a personal celebration and a time for reflection as well as celebration. Dickens both reflects his society’s views about the importance of hearth and home as well as projects his own social conscience into Christmas. Dickens’ Christmas is not solely inward looking, portraying an idealized scene of Victorian domesticity; it also requires that each person admit that Mankind is his business – it is an opportunity to make the world a better place. For Scrooge, perhaps Dickens’ most famous invention, Christmas is an opportunity for rebirth. No doubt Dickens hoped Scrooge would be an example to all: to keep Christmas in one’s heart, always, and not to shut out the wisdom the season offers us.

Matt McGeachy
written for the 2010 play guide for A Christmas Carol.

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Did you know that...

• in Sweden, Christmas Eve is often called “Dipping Day” from a tradition in which families gather in the kitchen to soak the juices of their Christmas meat with rye bread?

• in Iran, Christians call Christmas the “Little Feast” and celebrate Easter as the largest religious celebration of the year?

• the ceremonial main course of a medieval Christmas feast was a boar’s head, and that this tradition persists today at Queen’s College, Oxford?

• in Oaxaca, Mexico, December 23 is celebrated as the “Night of the Radishes,” and that as part of the festivities, large radishes are carved into the characters of the Nativity story?

• on Christmas Eve, the President of Estonia declares an annual Christmas Peace?

• in Finland, Children receive gifts from Joulupukki, the Christmas goat?

• in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and others, Saint Nicholas visits good little children on December 6 each year to leave goodies in their shoes?

• in China, Christians celebrate Christmas by decorating trees and having a large family meal, but gifts are exchanged at the Chinese New Year celebration in January or February, accompanied by massive displays of fireworks?

This piece was adapted from the 2006 program for A Christmas Carol at the Guthrie.
Blind Man’s Buff
A parlor game in which one player, blindfold, tries to catch and identify someone from among the other players in the room.

“I love Blind Man’s Buff!” - Jane

Bob
A slang term for shilling implying an insignificant amount or a trifle

“Five bob a week to start with, how does that sound?” - Scrooge

Christmas pudding
Christmas pudding, also known as plum pudding (because of the abundance of prunes), originated in England. It is traditionally made five weeks before Christmas, on or after the Sunday before Advent. That day was often deemed “Stir-up Sunday,” and each family member or child in the household gave the pudding a stir and made a wish. The rich and heavy pudding is boiled or steamed, made of a heavy mixture of fresh or dried fruit, nuts and sometimes suet, a raw beef or mutton fat. Vegetarian suet may also be used for a lighter taste. The pudding is very dark, almost black, and is saturated with brandy, dark beer, or other alcohols. The puddings used to be boiled in a “pudding cloth,” but today they are usually made in basins.

Christmas pudding is eaten with brandy butter, rum butter, hard sauce, cream, custard or with a caster sugar. Families sometimes save one pudding for another holiday, like Easter, or even the next Christmas. Many argue that this takes away from the flavor, but that a good pudding will keep that long.

“If it was up to me I would take every man I hear say ‘Merry Christmas’ and boil him with his Christmas pudding.” - Scrooge

Copper
Laundry “coppers” were large copper pots for stoves or copper pots built in ovens (either indoors or outdoors). They were used to boil laundry for cleaning - but also for cooking/boiling as in the case of the Christmas pudding or bagged puddings.

“The pudding’s in the copper!” - Peter Cratchit

“Cor blimey”
An interjection distorted from the phrase “God blind me” which is the equivalent of “well, I’ll be…”

“Thanks guv’nor. Cor blimey!” - Beggar Boy

Humbug
An interjection to express disgust or disbelief. As a noun, it refers to a hoax, pretense or something that pretends to be what it is not.

“Christmas? A humbug? You don’t mean that I’m sure.” - Fred
“I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord. ... He that believeth in me, though he was dead, yet shall he live.”
“For if we live, we live unto the Lord; and if we die, we die unto the Lord.”
From the Bible (Christian Scriptures), Romans 14: 7–8.
“Ashes to ashes. ... Dust to dust.”
From the English Burial Service and the Anglican Book of Common Prayer; derived from a verse in the Bible, Genesis 3:19 (King James Version).

“I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord. ... He that believeth in me, though he was dead, yet shall he live. ... For if we live unto the Lord; and if we die, we die unto the Lord. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”
-Scrooge’s Priest

Jack Robinson
Before you can say “Jack Robinson” is a way of expressing immediacy; something that will be done straight away. A suggested origin involved the habit of an eccentric gentleman who was renowned for his constant change of mind. He often abandoned a social call and you had to be quick to catch Jack Robinson. This origin dates to 1811.

“Let’s have the shutters up and the decorations in before a man can say – ... Jack Robinson!”
-Old Fezziwig and All

Larder
A cool, dark place in a house to keep food cool before refrigeration.

“Cream? ... In the larder.”
-Mrs. Cratchit and Peter Cratchit

Michaelmas Term
The first academic term of the year in British schools and universities, deriving its name from the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels on September 29 and lasting until Christmas.

“Michaelmas Term is over and all the boys head home for the holidays. The school is quite deserted.” -Scrooge

Morris Dancers
Believed to have Moorish origin, Morris dance is a rural ritual dance often depicting a legend, such as the story of Robin Hood, performed by six men along with a fool character and a musician, typically a fiddler. Morris dancers traditionally wore white shirts, ribboned hats, and garters of bells on their legs and it was not uncommon to dance with handkerchiefs or canes.

“Morris dancers! How I loved the Morris dancers!” -Scrooge

“Never a borrower be, ... A lender, perhaps, but a borrower never.”
An allusion to Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Act I, scene 3: “Neither a borrower nor a lender be: For loan oft loses both itself and friend, And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry. This above all: to thine ownself be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man. (Polonius)

“No wife of mine will ever be a borrower.” -Young Scrooge

Poor Law
The New Poor Law of 1834; this law established a system of regional workhouses for debtors. The workhouses were awful places – poorly ventilated and overcrowded, the guards were often brutal and many poor people – as Thrive notes in our version of Carol – “would rather die” than go to a workhouse.

“And the Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour?”
-Scrooge

“... reduce the surplus population.”
Scrooge refers to the ideas of Robert Thomas Malthus, an English minister and influential economic thinker. He expressed concerns with England’s rising population in “An Essay on the Principle of Population” (1798). Malthus was concerned that England’s rising population would outstrip the nation’s ability to produce food. He observed population checks that ravaged the lower classes such as disease and hunger. He proposed that preventative measures to curb population growth should...
include postponing marriage until later in life or until financially stable, and celibacy. He wrote that aid to the poor should come from private charities instead of the government. Many were outraged by his treatise, whose second edition in 1803 included a controversial passage that was omitted from later editions. This passage speculated that a certain segment of the population was simply meant to be destitute, and that if the population continued to grow, more and more people would be resigned to a life of poverty because there was not enough space for them at society’s table.

“If they would rather die then die they must and help reduce the surplus population.” ~Scrooge

**Yes and No**

A game similar to “Twenty Questions;” the guests at Fred’s party may only ask yes or no questions to guess what the host has in mind.

“A game of ‘Yes and No!’” -Fred

**Sherry**

A fortified wine from Jerez in Spain.

“Can’t wait to be shot of them. Sherry?” -Mr. Sykes

**Sultanas**

A small seedless white grape.

“Sultanas? Apples? Flour?” -Peter Cratchit

**Treadmill**

A Victorian punishment device, the treadmill was an iron frame of steps around a rotating cylinder. Convicts would walk these endless stairs for up to six hours a day. The hard labor accomplished nothing but exhausting the prisoners and keeping them out of mischief.

“And the Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour?” -Scrooge
In 1843, London was a grimy place. The factories polluted the air. Sewage was channeled into the Thames. Three-fourths of the population was of the lower working class, and many families had to have all members working to eke out a living. The rich class only got richer. Many of the aristocracy left London to escape its oppressing summer stench and only returned for the cooler months. The greatly lopsided distribution of wealth and disparity between rich and poor was staggering.

We see similar wealth disparity worldwide today. The middle class is shrinking as big business and millionaires amass monetary assets. Our current economy is heading for despondency similar to what the Victorians saw.

Victorian England had Charles Dickens to speak out against this disparity of wealth that caused child labor and terrible living conditions. Although the start of the Occupy Wall Street movement was three years ago, the income gap in America continues to be a topic of debate, discussion and controversy.

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**MONEY, MONEY, MONEY...**

Money, poverty and wealth are all persistent themes in *A Christmas Carol*. In fact, the opening scene of the play is nearly all about money: Old Joe and Mrs. Dilber negotiating over some wares; Scrooge kicking the Wimples out of their home for failing to pay rent; the poor children begging for money at Scrooge’s heels – it all comes down to dollars and cents. Or rather, pounds and shillings.

In Scrooge’s London – and indeed until decimalization of British currency in 1971 – the **pound, shilling and pence** were the primary units of currency and were written £ (or l.) s. d., Latin for *librae, solidi* and *denarii*.

Bob Cratchit makes 15 shillings per week, or £39 per year. By contrast, a factory worker in a pottery factory might make 39 shillings per week, or roughly £101. A loaf of bread was roughly 1.8d. per pound, with the average quarter loaf weighing 4.33 lbs.

While we don’t know exactly how much Scrooge increases Bob’s wages at the end of the play, nor do we know how much his Christmas bonus was, we do know that bringing Peter on as a shop boy at 5 “bob” per week will increase the Cratchits’ weekly income to £1 per week.
Wage disparity between the UK's top earners and the rest of the working population will soon return to the levels of the Victorian era unless action is taken to curb executive pay, a new report by the high pay commission claims.

At the same time a new ICM poll shows that 72% of the public think high pay makes Britain a grossly unequal place to live, while 73% say they have no faith in government or business to tackle excessive pay.

The high pay commission was set up last November to scrutinise the rising pay of those at the top of the public and private sectors. Its research suggests that if current trends continue, the top 0.1% of UK earners will see their pay rise from 5% to an estimated 14% of national income by 2030, a level not previously seen in the UK since the start of the 20th century.

Graham Snowdon
“Pay gap widening to Victorian levels,”

In the past several years, it has become painfully clear that the interests of the American people are not held in high esteem in either lower Manhattan or Washington, D.C.

We’ve seen several bank bailouts since the early 1980s, only to find ourselves at the doorstep of financial ruin once again. Those of differing persuasions think we should “get a job” or “stop whining.”

But jobs are scarce, and a true protest is beyond a simple matter of whining.

The politicians have failed us. Wall Street has failed us. Now, only Main Street America can save us. That is our message. ...

We recognize that our banking and corporate systems do not honor merit, only the bottom line and short-term gains.

Their thinking is foolish. Our future and the future of our children is being threatened by those not held accountable. We see bankers and corporate masters walking away from financial disaster with tens and hundreds of millions of dollars while working Americans struggle to keep their homes. The common notion of capitalism is that merit and hard work bring rewards to those with the fortitude and determination to succeed. What we see in America today is quite the opposite.

Chris Nerlien
“The Coventry Carol”
This haunting old carol opens our show and is prevalent throughout the Guthrie’s version of A Christmas Carol. Originally performed in the sixteenth century as part of a mystery play in Coventry called “The Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors,” the original author is unknown. Historians agree that the earliest written text is from Robert Croo in 1534; this text was destroyed by a fire in the Birmingham Free Reference Library in 1879.

The carol, written in a minor key, tells the story of the Massacre of the Innocents from the Biblical book of Matthew, Chapter 2, where King Herod of Israel directs his soldiers to slaughter all the first born children in Bethlehem because he was fearful of losing power to the new “King of Judea.” The Catholic liturgical calendar celebrates the Feast of the Holy Innocents on December 28.

“God Rest You Merry Gentlemen”
This popular Christmas song, also in a minor key, was first published by William B. Sandys in his 1833 book Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern, though it is reputed to date back to the fifteenth century. Sandys’ book contributed to the Victorian Christmas revival, of which Dickens’ Christmas stories were a part. Our play contains only the first verse, though there are nine full verses in the Sandys version.

“Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day”
Another carol published and popularized by Sandys in 1833, the lyrics are from the point of view of Jesus, telling his story from birth to crucifixion. Because of the certain similarities in sentiment and tone, some historians suggest that this carol dates from the fifteenth century, though no conclusive date is known. Several verses contain anti-Semitic sentiments.

“We Wish You A Merry Christmas!”
This carol dates from the sixteenth century and the tradition of wealthier members of the community giving a Christmas pudding to the revelers who visited their door.

“Good King Wenceslas”
The tune is based on a thirteenth century Swedish Spring carol, “Tempus Adest Floridum” which first appeared in print in 1582. The lyrics are by John Mason Neale, an Anglican priest and hymnist and date to 1853. This carol tells the story of St. Wenceslaus I, Duke of Bohemia (modern day Czech Republic), canonized for miraculously saving his page’s life by spontaneously generating heat from his feet while on a long winter trek through the snow.

“Ding Dong Merrily On High”
The tune of this carol goes back to 16th century France and first appeared in 1588 under the name “Brane de l’Official” in the Orchesographie, a dance book written by Johan Tabourot. The dance was lively and saucy, in involved the men lifting the women into the air in the style of Queen Elizabeth’s favorite volta. The English lyrics were written in the early 20th century by George Ratcliffe Woodward with harmonization by Charles Wood.

“I Saw Three Ships”
This carol comes from the 15th century and originally it was thought that the three ships referred to the 12th century ships that carried the relics of the three wise men to Koln, Germany. Over the passage of time, as the text has evolved and varied, Mary, Joseph and Jesus have become the cargo on the ships instead. There have been many versions throughout the years, with a varying cast of characters riding the ships, such as St. Michael or St. John, but the most commonly sung version today features Mary and Jesus.
Select Theater, Film and Television Adaptations

*Scrooge, or Marley’s Ghost,* is the oldest film adaptation of Dickens’ book. Filmed in 1901 by British film pioneer R.W. Paul, only five minutes of the negative survive. King Edward VII saw the film in a Royal Command Performance around Christmas, 1901.

*Scrooge,* the classic 1951 film starring Sir Alastair Sim as Scrooge and directed by Brian Desmond Hurst, opens in the U.K. When the film was released in the United States, it was a box office failure, but has since gained classic status and is frequently shown on television around Christmas.

*A Christmas Carol,* a 1971 animated adaptation directed by Richard Williams, featuring the voice of Sir Alastair Sim as Scrooge, won the 1972 Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film.

George C. Scott was nominated for an Emmy Award for his portrayal of Scrooge in the 1984 made for television movie adaptation, directed by Clive Donner.

Patrick Stewart’s one-man dramatic reading of *A Christmas Carol* premiered in London in 1988 and subsequently moved to Broadway.

In 1992, *The Muppet Christmas Carol* directed by Brian Henson, starring Michael Caine as Scrooge and the Muppets as the supporting characters, introduced a new generation of young viewers to Dickens’ classic.

The 2009 holiday season brought Dickens’ tale into the digital film age with Disney’s 3D animated motion picture, *A Christmas Carol,* starring Jim Carrey.

Nineteen Scrooges on the Guthrie Stage

Since the Guthrie first produced A Christmas Carol in 1975, 19 different actors have portrayed Ebenezer Scrooge, each bringing his own interpretation of the famous miser. Here are brief glimpses at some of the actors who have played Ebenezer Scrooge on the Guthrie stage.

Richard Ooms 1983–85, 1991–95

One of the great blessings of A Christmas Carol for me has been that this tale of rebirth was shared in the telling with my real family, my wife Claudia and son Michael, who were in the production with me for many years. It always infused our family Christmas with such joy.

John Lewin 1986–88

Every actor who plays Scrooge will have his own take on the horrid old gooseberry. I was fortunate enough to be directed by Richard Ooms, who not only gave me my freedom but insisted that I use it with whatever integrity I could muster. That was difficult, because what I saw was scary: to understand where Ebenezer was “coming from” I would have to go there – or have been there – myself. There were certain parallels: the visits by the Spirits were like a compressed psychoanalysis (I know that groan, but hear me out) in which you and I and Scrooge turn our collective head away and say, “No! I don’t want to look at that!” And the Spirit/analyst takes that head gently between his hands and turns it in the direction we were avoiding, saying “nevertheless...” And we look, and a crack appears in the wall that has isolated Scrooge from his feelings ever since he decided, “I’m never going to let myself be hurt by having trusted and loved – never, not ever, again.” And Scrooge has indeed kept out the most rending and piercing feelings, but he has also been all but suffocated, sealed in with his own foul and frowsy vapors. And when finally the wall collapses, Scrooge finds that he can hurt and love, that he can cry with pain and joy, can experience the dire shock of human connectedness.

John Bottoms 1989

For me, the most satisfying moment in playing Scrooge was the morning scene in which he awakens to being human again. This scene is the culmination of Scrooge’s transition from dark to light. Each night, the journey of self-observation was painful, as he sees his own ugliness and witnesses the pain he has caused. This was a difficult journey to take every night, but the morning scene – awakening on Christmas Day and reveling in his newfound humanity, love, and generosity of spirit – was well worth it and always a joy to play.
Bruce Bohne 1990
The process of aging is enlightening for an actor. I played Young Scrooge my first two seasons at the Guthrie, and then they asked me to do the old guy at age 37. My first question was, “Why not have one of the old guys do it?” But I figured, “What the heck... lead role...” So I put on my old man makeup and dove into Dickens’ deep and darkly comic character. I think I did OK, but I think I was too young. Now, approaching 50, a little older, a little wiser, having borne some of the “whips and scorns of time,” I feel a kind of “there but for the grace of God” kinship with Scrooge. Flintiness can creep into the soul unawares as time goes by, causing occasional irascibility. When I catch myself, I smile and take note for a future character. I’d enjoy playing him again in 10 years or so.

Nathaniel Fuller 1992-95
When I think of A Christmas Carol, I think of children: children as an idea, children as drama and children as stark raving reality. In the cast, children bring noise, chaos, charm, talent, colds and fevers, curiosity, innocence, joy, tears, enthusiasm and a special brand of magic. They make me feel old. They make me feel young. In the audience children bring sound we rarely hear at the Guthrie any other time. There is the laughter of unadulterated delight and the occasional wail of unreasoning fear. I hope that the myth of old Ebenezer grows as strong in their hearts as it remains in mine. Some of my most cherished memories are of my own daughter playing various roles in the cast during her fourth and fifth grade years as I played Scrooge. Our daily trips in the car and our sharing of work and play were a very special time in our relationship. I feel I’ve shared with children and with the child in myself something significant about goodness and the meaning of life. A Christmas Carol always confronts me with the Scrooge within myself and inspires a little transformation every year.

Robert Stattel 1996
I first heard the story of A Christmas Carol when I was a child. Over the years it has meant different things to me, but it always remained a simple tale of values and redemption: where your heart is, there is your treasure. When I was asked to undertake the part of Scrooge at the Guthrie, I didn’t know what lay in store for me. I was excited, challenged and thrilled to be the centerpiece of this special production. Besides, who wouldn’t want to play the meanest crank in the world? But the experience of Scrooge went far beyond that. This brilliant story of Christmas explored for me all the basic values of life, its many twists and ironies, its pains and joys, the essence of community and sharing, and most of all, how easy it is for one to get lost in life and how beautiful it is to be found again.

Jarlath Conroy 1997-98
Scrooge is one of the most challenging roles I’ve ever played. His journey was not an easy one to make, but there were more wonderful events along the way. The absorption of children and adults alike in Scrooge’s sometimes sweet, sometimes bittersweet and often scary journey kept me honest. I’m still working at it.

Philip Goodwin 1999
I remember hoisting Max Friedman, as Tiny Tim, onto my shoulder to deliver his final line. He leaned down to whisper in my ear, “I think I’m going to throw up.” He sat up to say, “God bless us, everyone!” to all the assembled. Then in my ear again, “Just kidding.” Such a kidder. Such a good kid. My most salient memories of my A Christmas Carol in Minneapolis have to do with kids. Bright, talented, caring and funny kids.

Charles Janasz 2000
I’m thinking that the important thing is to keep looking as much as possible for the real connections
to what’s going on, to the reality of it. I think it’s absolutely essential to keep anchoring it in the real pain that the man is going through, pain that he has been denying for so many years, but which then gets thrown in his face during this night of hallucinations or visitations or dreams or whatever they are. Then there’s the immense opening up of his heart that takes place and the revolution that it cause in his life. So I’m trying during the course of rehearsal to ground him in as real a reality as possible, because I think it’s a very real story. A very real ghost story.

Peter Michael Goetz 2001-03, 2009
I began my acting career at the Guthrie as a young man out of the University of Minnesota graduate program in 1968, and I was a member of the first five years of *The Christmas Carol* company starting in 1975. The marvelous actors who played Scrooge in those days are no longer with us. I remember them so fondly. At every performance of the play, standing on that venerable platform of the Tyrone Guthrie Theater, I as Peter Michael Goetz and I as Ebenezer Scrooge will have our lives revisited by those spirits of the past, and at every performance I as Peter Michael Goetz and I as Ebenezer Scrooge will deliver these words by Charles Dickens, “I know this place… know it blindfolded. I was apprenticed here! I was a boy here!”

Charles Keating 2004
I came to learn in the rehearsal process what an extraordinary part it is. We all have fantasies about the possibility of changing ourselves, and here’s the classic story of a man who undergoes an astonishing change. This man, who is perfectly wretched and miserable and awful to everybody, gets a series of jolts to impel him to look at himself and his life, and to seek change. ... Naturally, performing this role here is a bit humbling. The Guthrie has been doing this show for thirty years, and they have had a lot of Scrooges! And I wanted to put some kind of stamp on it, but a stamp that was not mine, but Dickens’. I asked myself, “How can I best realize his intent?”

Raye Birk 2005-08
Playing Ebenezer Scrooge is an extraordinary and unique opportunity for an actor. From my experience, the role is on a par with any of the great roles in Shakespeare. If the actor and the production are willing to invest as deeply and fully in the journey of the central character as Dickens invites, it is every bit as challenging as a Lear or Macbeth – from my experience, having had the honor of playing all three roles, arguably more so. Scrooge is forced to face his own past, his present and his future, and the range of emotions elicited by those encounters goes from the depths of despair and grief to the heights of joy and exhilaration and everything in between. Additionally, he undergoes a transformation that may seem magical but must be real and credible for the audience. One of the major themes of the piece is change (transformation) is possible.

Charles Keating
I think that there are two great stories of redemption in the canon of Western literature. One is the Christ story and the other is the story of Scrooge. Even those who have managed to avoid exposure to the countless version of the Carol will know the name of the central character and have some rough idea of what happens to him. And the fact that the audience knows how the story ends makes for a unique kind of involvement and identification on their part. If the actor’s work is clear, specific and deeply invested in the moment-to-moment reality of the journey, that very familiarity with the story encourages the audience to take the journey with Scrooge and not just observe the story at arm’s length. I believe it’s that kind of theatrical experience that’s at the core of the immense and perennial popularity A Christmas Carol enjoys. For the truth is that Scrooge, or at least “Scrooge-ness” exists in all of us – in the sins and crimes large and small we knowingly or unknowingly commit against ourselves and others. It is a kind of virus of the human heart that permits greed, desire, envy, fear and selfishness to extinguish the impulses of kindness, compassion, generosity and love from our hearts, locking them away in a vault of fear that is as cold and foreboding as Scrooge’s cashbox. Ultimately his transformation and rebirth awakens in us the possibility of such a renewal within ourselves. We have a need and a longing to know that possibility exists.
And I love sharing the journey with you.

Daniel Gerroll 2010

The difficulty is that I wanted to – not exactly reinvent Scrooge – but wanted to bring a perspective that isn’t always brought to this character. In other words not someone who is twisted and bitter at the end of his life and then has a wonderful Christmas morning but as someone who is not living his life criminally or cynically, not immorally, but simply as someone who is not giving. There are people like this in the world, who are simply addicted to not giving, to money, to the accumulation of wealth. There are people like this in the world today, who are responsible for our current economic situation, and there certainly were people who were like this in Dickens’ London. I’m not trying to represent the current villainous banker, but I am trying to represent that part in all of us that is capable of being that miserly and that money hungry, to the point of pathology, because I think we all understand that. And I want to focus on that, rather than the way Scrooge is traditionally played, because I can’t do any better than the way it has been done before. This Scrooge is someone who has an addiction, and this show is an intervention. As anyone who has ever been in therapy knows, sometimes when a person is in denial, they make quips and jokes about it, even if things are really scary. That is here in this script, and that’s what makes it so interesting. I do a lot of light comedy, and so I recognized a lot of the humor in this script. Tackling a classic role like this, an actor has to demand that people move away from their comfort zones. As long as the actor is being truthful, as long as there is honesty, then we are doing something exciting. This is all here in this script, and this version of A Christmas Carol will just keep getting better through the years.

This piece was adapted and updated from the Guthrie program for the 2000 production of A Christmas Carol.
Q: What is your concept for A Christmas Carol, and how did you approach it artistically?

Joe Chvala: This production changes a little bit every year – not in big ways, but in little ways. This is the seventh year of this particular production of A Christmas Carol, and there’s only so much you can do to change it every year. This season, we’re trying to get a lot closer to the Charles Dickens’ novella. In preparation, I read the novella every year. From that reading, I try to imagine how in the direction and the designs we can get closer to what’s described in the book. The scene with old Joe and Mrs. Dilbert is a great example. Historically, the scene takes place in a part of London that is a series of crowded caves and dens where people do all of their horrible work of pulling rags and bones apart, figuring out what they can sell and what they can use for a meal. In previous years, we’ve staged the scene as a meeting on the street around Joe’s rag and bone cart. This year we’re going to create a little den for him to be in on the stage, so that it’s much more intimate. That’s how it is in the book and we’re trying to figure out how to create that atmosphere with props and actors playing really poor people lying around the set.

Q: How will the audience experience the directorial choices that you’re?

JC: The audience will most likely notice that we’ve taken out some of extraneous scenes from past iterations. It’s about making sure that we have Scrooge’s realization of who he is, and who he hopes to be, as the focal point. This year, we’ve streamlined that journey even more than in the past. At the start of the book, Dickens describes Scrooge as being this frozen man. His journey through the story transforms him from a completely frozen and solidly horrible man, into a man whose heart and mind open up because of the warmth of the people around him. So that’s really my big moment every year, the unfreezing of Ebenezer Scrooge. Hopefully the audience sees how each scene makes a little crack in Ebenezer Scrooge’s wall.

Q: Why do you think A Christmas Carol is still relevant today and why do you feel families continue to come back every year to see it at the Guthrie?

JC: I think A Christmas Carol is more relevant today than it was when it was written. England during Dickens’ time was a horrible place with a wide gap between different classes of people and high amounts of poverty. Currently, things are very similar. Globally there is so much disparity in wealth, and greed keeps millions of people poor. Ebenezer Scrooge represents that wealth-driven mentality. In the book, Scrooge’s fiancée says about him: “You fear the world too much.” In my opinion, that fear is what drives him, and it is something that drives many people. They are so afraid of what might happen if they don’t have this gigantic wall of money dividing them from poverty. One of the people who Dickens based Ebenezer Scrooge on was a miser who went to bed before it got dark so he wouldn’t have to burn any candles. He had loads of money, and he would spend very little of it on anything that made him happy. For the audience to see someone who is so dedicated to money for its own sake and so cruel to all the people around him, and to witness that person actually changing for the better...that’s why people come back every year to see A Christmas Carol.

Q: What led you to become a director, and what advice would you have for students pursuing the arts, specifically directing?

JC: I’ve always had a little bit of the director in me. I remember the moment I first stepped onto a stage and thought about where scenery should be placed and where actors should be in relation to each other. When I would see productions that didn’t have much going on, I would think about how I could fix and change them. If I saw a performance that didn’t feel true, I would think about how I could make it better. I
am always very evaluative when I see things. Also, I saw a lot of theater as a child, and I would ignore the story, taking note of how visual effects were made onstage. I’d notice where the lights were coming from and all those sorts of things. Onstage, I like to create worlds that are different from the one we’re living in order for the audience to see a new, more exciting reality.

In fifth grade, we had a wonderful teacher who gave us all an opportunity to complete special projects that were centered on a specific book. I chose Alice in Wonderland, and I said “I would like to write and direct the mad tea party scene.” And that is exactly what I did. In high school, I had a drama teacher who saw that I liked to direct, and he said, “Why don’t you do a one-act play.” And I did that, too. So my advice would be: you have to always be open to those sorts of opportunities.

Q: Not every production has music or a composer. How do you feel the music and the choice to include a composer in the artistic process adds to A Christmas Carol?

KT: Everything comes from the script. I’ll read through the new adaption of the script and mark places where I think there could be some music, and I also mark where the mood or tone changes, places where I think I could support a moment with some music. I go through the entire script making all my notes, and then I meet with the director, Joe Chvala. At this meeting we compare our notes, and hopefully we agree on where there is music and how that music should sound and feel. I always try to get myself into the mindset of the director in order to support his or her vision.

Q: What was your artistic process in terms of composing the music for Carol?

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Q: What made you want to become a composer and, for students interested in the arts, what advice do you have on getting started?

KT: I started out as an actor. I went to school for acting, and I acted professionally for 10 years. During that time, I would compose music on the side, and eventually I decided to do music full-time. Since I knew the people in the theatre community, I began composing music for plays. It took some time for my colleagues to wrap their brains around me being a composer instead of an actor, but eventually, I stopped acting entirely and said, “No, I don’t act anymore. I’m a composer. Take me seriously as a composer.” Eventually people did. If you love creating music, just keep making it. By following my passion, I totally changed careers at 40 years old.

Keith Thomas
Composer for A Christmas Carol

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Q: What artistic choices did you make to support the concept of *A Christmas Carol*?

Matthew J. LeFebvre: When first approaching the design, the director and I were really looking at a number of different worlds. There is the London of present Scrooge, the world of his past memories and finally there’s the world of his future. With the costumes we also wanted to represent the different class and economic structures within the London of Scrooge, especially the difference between the upper class and those individuals who are poor and destitute.

Representing this distinction of class is a big theme in many of Dickens’ stories and novels, and is really apparent in the costuming of the Cratchit family, who are barely making ends meet. It is really important to the telling of the story to show their poverty in their clothes, so every article of clothing they wear is really worn and has been mended over and over again. I hope the audience empathizes with them, and the clothing helps us to do that because it feels a little bit more concrete and real, not cartoony.

In contrast, the first big scene taking place in Scooge’s past is the Fezziwig party where we see Scrooge as a young man, before he changes into his present miserly self. We see him fall in love, but we also see him begin to change and become more and more concerned with money. Since the scene spans several decades of Scrooge’s life, we hoped to show the progression of, not only time, but also of Scrooge’s character. Practically speaking, each of Fezziwig’s parties involves a lot of dancing, and the costumes are very colorful and bright to reflect the festive mood. It really is a stark contrast to the London of the older Scrooge we see later in the play, with his dark and muted colors.

In each of these time periods, texture plays a big role in my designs, such as the ragged clothing of the poor Londoners or the richer fabrics of the upper class characters. Texture helps the audience feel and understand the lives of these characters without having to know their full history.

Q Is there a character you had the most fun designing?

ML: This show in particular has many characters, and is very demanding in terms of the number of costumes needed. With this particular production and adaptation, we started a number of years ago with the intent of creating the costume designs in phases, focusing on different parts of the play, one at a time, and then over the next several years adding new costumes in phases. As you may have guessed, that is a much different process than designing costumes for a show that is only produced once and then goes away.

The costumes are really like my children, so I hesitate to say which one is my favorite. Each one presents a different challenge. For example, the main Ebenezer Scrooge (or present Scrooge) costume needed to be texturally rich. To achieve that, we carefully selected fabrics that have amazing texture and then concentrated on making those into a extremely well-tailored suit. Another example is Mrs. Cratchit’s costume, which is fairly simple and pragmatic. However, there is such a sense of wear, as well as a functional quality about it. Even though her costuming reflects her impoverished circumstances, there’s something really beautiful in its spare simplicity.

Q: What excited you most about the designing process and this production in general?

ML: Well, it’s such an amazing story. There’s a reason why so many theater companies produce this story every year. It’s really an uplifting story, and it renews our faith in humanity. It’s also a really great challenge, for no other reason than the sheer number of costumes and the several decades represented in the play. The play has costumes that are very stark and spare, and also has costumes that are lush and vibrant. To be able to do all of those in one production is great. The Guthrie is one of my favorite theaters to work with because the costume technicians – who are called drapers and tailors – and the crafts people, and the wig people are of some of the best in the field. They’re some of the most skilled that I’ve ever worked with, and I am always excited about how my designs will look in their capable hands.

Matthew J. LeFebvre
Costume Designer for *A Christmas Carol*
Q: What led you to becoming a costume designer, and what advice do you have for students interested in the arts and costume design specifically?
ML: I took a roundabout path to designing costumes. Like many others, I started out in theater training to be an actor. While pursuing my theater degree in college, I was required to take a number of design courses. I’ve always liked to draw, so when I took a costume design class, it really clicked that I should transition from being on stage to behind the scenes. And I believe my actor training makes me a stronger costume designer because I do think about the costumes as being an extension of the character. I recommend that anybody who is interested, specifically in theatrical costume design, should take some acting classes. I think it’s important that a designer understands what it’s like to wear a costume on stage and how that costume supports the work that the actor does. It’s also important to see a lot of theater. Seek out a wide range of performance aesthetics. It’s sometimes a difficult career to make a living in, but being able to design for a wide variety of theater and performance styles helps with that. I learned probably as much, if not more, about design by watching other productions and seeing how other designers solve challenges than I did from sitting in a classroom.

Q: How do you feel the message gained from A Christmas Carol is still relevant today?
Crispin Whittell: Oh my goodness! It’s one of the great, great, great, stories. It’s so completely relevant that it’s kind of hard to know where to begin. It’s relevant because there are still people who think that money is the most important thing in life. Recently moving back to England got me to think about what A Christmas Carol would look like in London in 2016. Witnessing the way Britain and America right now are reacting to who Dickens’ called the “other.” As long as there are people who are less fortunate than the Scrooges of this world, and as long as people chase after money believing it to be the be all and the end all, these issues will be staring us in the face. So, yes, I was thinking, “How would one do a modern version of Carol?” Well, Tiny Tim would be Syrian or Iraqi and Scrooge wouldn’t be the old man with a bent back and a candle. He’d be working on Wall Street or in the city.

Q: What inspired you to create this specific adaptation?
CW: Well, this adaptation has now gone on quite a journey. This is the sixth year of this adaptation being produced at the Guthrie, and I’ve written sort of a new version each time. I think it’s great that that happens and it’s essential for a story and production like this one. It needs to change, if possible, each year just because it’s a strange show to try and keep fresh. Really, the start of this adaptation came when former Guthrie Artistic Director Joe Dowling asked me if I would you write a new A Christmas Carol. The previous version used by the Guthrie has a narrator, and I thought that I didn’t want to have a narrator. I wanted the piece to feel like a play instead of a story being told to the audience. To begin the play, I thought of Tiny Tim, or a tiny voice in the middle of an enormous stage. Then I just kept going from there. Each year, I think the play becomes closer to Dickens’ original novella. And something you might not know unless you are English is that we aren’t afraid to mess about with Shakespeare and even Dickens. In my opinion, the British feel that Dickens’ reputation is solid, so we don’t feel squeamish about messing with his stories. Dickens is one of the greatest people in history, but I didn’t go into adapting his story thinking that I have to show reverence to him. I wanted it to be un-boring, alive, funny and be modern in feel. It’s an important show for the Guthrie to try and get as right as possible for the families who come and see it.

Q: What made you become a playwright?
CW: I think I was always going to be a playwright. I wrote my first play when I was about 11 or 12 years old, in school. After being an actor I starting directing, but I continued to write. So when I started directing, I thought, “Why would I direct plays that people have done before? I may as well write them from scratch.” Writing words that come out of other people’s mouths
is not something that I learned; it’s just something I could always do.

Q: How would you encourage students to get started in playwriting?
CW: Just do it. There’s a fantastic Fringe Festival in Minneapolis! If I were in Minneapolis and I were 18, that’s what I would be doing. I’d write and I’d direct a Fringe show every year, and I’d make it as good as it could possibly be...also, I’d try to make it funny, not too long, and not boring. That’s what I’d do. Just do it.

Q: What was your favorite prop to create for this production and why?
PO: Sometimes it’s just the little things. The kids have coins in a tin cup. Well, the coins are naturally going to fall out, they’re going to get lost, and it’s going to be a problem. So, what can we do to avoid that? So it could be a prop challenge that small. A lot of what I love is the set decorating for Scrooge’s house and all of the shops. If people ever have a chance to really look into the shops they will see how much detail there really is, like all of the baked goods in the bakery shop. The pawn shop was fun, too. Creating that level of detail is actually my favorite part.

Q: How do you decide how much detail is relevant for such a large stage?
PO: That is a topic we spend a lot of time talking about in preparation for A Christmas Carol. Not only do we have to come up with a way to tell the audience what needs to be told, but we also need to listen very carefully to what the director and the designers want. We then pull all those things together. And sometimes, just for extra measure, we sneak things into the set that we like, too. We strive to be as realistic as possible so that we don’t distract the audience. We want to make sure that the props actually help tell the story. We also hold to something called the “10-Foot and Squint Rule.” This rule helps us to better understand what the audience will see, since most of the time we build the props so close to our faces that we see every minute detail in that prop. To see what the audience will experience, we set the prop down, take a few steps back (usually about 10 feet) and squint our eyes just slightly to see what it looks like. This prevents us from obsessing over any one prop.

Q: On average, how long does it take to make a prop?
PO: It varies. It could take an hour to come up with a prop made with paper and a pen. Or, it could take multiple hours to quilt a comforter. In A Christmas Carol, Scrooge’s quilt on his bed was handmade from different pieces of fabric, which was all done in our prop shop. We also make a lot of our own furniture, a task that typically takes multiple people. For example, one person will build the furniture’s framework while somebody else upholsters the piece. Props like Scrooge’s bed were made from scratch, and then we have people who purchase other pieces of furniture, either at yard sales or at antique shops. For a different production, we made a full size Rolls Royce in our shop, which took 12 people and a lot more time than it took to complete Scrooge’s bed. We tend to go from one extreme to the other, and it can take an hour or many days to prepare a prop for the stage; it just depends.

Q: Does this show have any “magic moments,” and how do they work?
PO: We do have one. It’s one that our actor playing Scrooge, JC Cutler, happens to really like. It’s actually a simple thing: a puff of air is pushed through a hole in Scrooge’s counting table, which “magically” blows some papers up into the air. This trick is all about making sure that the air gets to where it needs to go and also making sure that the papers are in the right spot on the table. This effect helps portray a moment.

Patricia Olive
Props Master
for A Christmas Carol
when Scrooge senses his former partner Marley’s ghostly presence. It’s just something super simple, just a poof of air, but we have to make sure that it’s the right amount of pressure to set the right tone. We don’t want it to be a comical moment. It’s a mystery moment, and probably my favorite one in the show.

Q: How did you get into props and, for students interested in pursuing the arts, specifically props, what is your advice for getting started?

PO: I did high school theater, where I thought I wanted to be onstage. Then I was talked into doing props for a couple of shows, which I really enjoyed. Since I was mostly interested in auto mechanics and woodworking in college, I was studying to be a shop teacher. After school, I taught industrial education, or shop class, for nine years. On top of being a school teacher, I was required to participate in an outside extracurricular activity. I was assigned to build the scenery for a school play. From there I just stuck with theater, working summer stock because I had the summers off. Then a mentor of mine convinced me to do something I didn’t even know was possible, which was quit teaching and pursue a career in prop making full time. And that’s been my career for the past 35 years.

If you like to do crafty things, or if you like to go to yard sales and thrift stores, or if you love making things into other things, then you have the basic skills for props making. At the Guthrie, our props people can do fine wood and metalworking. They also weld, sew and upholster. If students are interested in technical theater, my advice to them is: it’s great that you can use a hammer, but if you can weld, that will put you at the top of everybody’s hiring list. Also, find somebody to be your mentor, even as early as high school. Your high school drama teacher probably knows people in your local theater community. Finally, any time that you can get into a theater and do whatever you can to learn about the process, you put yourself a step-and-a-half ahead of others even before you get to college.
A Selection of Christmas Literature

Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* is one among many stories arising out of the Christmas holiday. What follows is a selected list which may include many of your own favorites.

**NOVELS, SHORT STORIES AND POEMS**
- *The Legend of Bafana*, traditional European story
- *Baba Yaga*, folktale, probably Russian in origin (19th century)
- *The Nutcracker*, E.T.A. Hoffmann (1816)
- *The Night Before Christmas (A Visit from St. Nicholas)*, Clement C. Moore (1822)
- *The Fir Tree*, Hans Christian Anderson (1845)
- *The Snow Queen*, Hans Christian Anderson (1845)
- *The Little Match-Seller*, Hans Christian Anderson (1846)
- *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott, chapters 1–3 (1869)
- “How Santa Came to Simpson’s Bar,” Bret Harte (1870)
- *Christmas Every Day and Other Stories Told for Children*, William Dean Howells (1892)
- “The Burglar’s Christmas,” Willa Cather (1896)
- “Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus,” Francis P. Church, The New York Sun (1897)
- *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*, L Frank Baum (1902)
- “The Tailor of Gloucester,” Beatrix Potter (c. 1902)
- “The Gift of the Magi,” O. Henry (1906)
- *Christmas Stories*, Charles Dickens (1910)
- *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis (1950)
- *A Christmas Memory*, Truman Capote (1956)
- *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, Dr. Seuss (1957)
- *The Santaland Diaries, Holidays on Ice*, David Sedaris (1992)
- *Santa’s Twin*, Dean Koontz (1996)

**PLAYS**
- *Babes in Toyland*, Glen MacDonough and Victor Herbert (1903)
- *The Man Who Came to Dinner*, George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart (1939)
- *Black Nativity*, Langston Hughes (1961)
- *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, Barbara Robinson (1972)
For Further Reading

BOOKS


John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 1874

Sidney Moss, *Dickens' Quarrel with America*, New York: Whitson, 1984


WEBSITES

www.stormfax.com/1dickens.htm
The text of Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*

www.charlesdickenspage.com
David Purdue’s Charles Dickens Page includes information on Dickens - on page, onstage and in life

www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/CD-Chesterton-CD.html
G.K. Chesterton’s biography, Charles Dickens, 1906

www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/CD-Forster.html
Entire text of John Forster’s biography, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 1872–74

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/victorians/index.shtml
Interactive BBC site about children in Victorian England, designed for children from 9-11

www.wwnorton.com/nael/victorian/welcome.htm
Norton Topics Online site provides illuminating primary documents relating to British society in the Victorian Era

www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/snow/1859map/
Searchable map of London in 1859, from the UCLA Department of Epidemiology

www.victorianweb.org
Site designed and edited by Professor George P. Landrow for Brown University as a resource for Brown students studying Victorian literature