

**A CHRISTMAS CAROL by MICHAEL THEODOROU**  
**adapted for the stage from the original story by Charles Dickens**

**CHARACTERS in order of appearance**

READER 1, MR CHARLES DICKENS  
READER 2, MRS CHARLES DICKENS  
EBENEZER SCROOGE  
NEPHEW - FRED  
NEPHEW'S WIFE  
HER SISTER  
BOB CRATCHIT  
MRS CRATCHIT  
MARTHA CRATCHIT  
PETER CRATCHIT  
TINY TIM  
CHARITABLE PERSON 1  
CHARITABLE PERSON 2  
CHARITABLE PERSON 3  
GHOST OF MARLEY  
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST  
SCROOGE AS A CHILD  
FANNY, SCROOGE'S SISTER  
OLD FEZZIWIG, SCROOGE'S OLD EMPLOYER  
DICK WILKINS, SCROOGE'S OLD FRIEND  
NELL, SCROOGE'S FIANCEE  
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT  
DRINKER 1  
DRINKER 2  
DRINKER 3  
MERCHANT 1  
MERCHANT 2  
MERCHANT 3  
LAUNDRESS  
CHARWOMAN  
UNDERTAKER  
GHOST OF CHRISTMAS FUTURE  
BOY

The cast as shown is for: 24 males and 9 females.  
Many of these parts could be played by women, though - see suggestions below,  
making up to 22 female parts.  
If fewer cast needed, some parts could be doubled.

The play is a simply staged adaptation of the original well-known story. Certain characters could be female rather than male, if desired - especially The Charitable People, Merchants, Boy, the Drinkers at a pinch - and even the Ghosts [except Marley], if required. This makes a more attractive proposition for those schools with loads of keen girls and few boys.

The play runs at about forty-five minutes - longer if full carols are included. It would make a lovely end of Christmas term play or, because of its simple staging - perhaps part of a Christmas concert programme.

## EXTRACT ONE

READER 1 Once upon a time - of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve - old Scrooge was busy at his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather - foggy withal - and he could hear the people in the court outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts and stamping their feet upon the pavement-stones to warm them.

### **Sound effects of London.**

READER 1 The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already; it had not been light all day; and the candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by and was brewing on a large scale.

READER 2 The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coalbox in his own room.

### **Enter Nephew.**

NEPHEW A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!

SCROOGE Bah! Humbug!

NEPHEW Christmas a humbug, uncle? You don't mean that, I'm sure.

SCROOGE I do. Merry Christmas? What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough.

NEPHEW Come then, what right have you to be so dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE Bah! Humbug!

NEPHEW Don't be cross, uncle.

SCROOGE What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this? What's Christmas time to you but a time of paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in 'em, through a round dozen of months, presented dead against you?

[**Indignantly.**] If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!

NEPHEW Uncle!

SCROOGE Nephew, keep Christmas in your own way and let me keep it in mine.

NEPHEW Keep it? But you don't keep it!

SCROOGE Let me leave it alone then. Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!

NEPHEW There are many things from which I have derived good, but by which I have not profited, I dare say - Christmas among the rest.

SCROOGE What things? What good?

NEPHEW I am sure I have always thought of Christmas as a good time - a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time.

SCROOGE **contemptuously** Charitable? Pleasant time?

NEPHEW The only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely ...

SCROOGE Bah!

NEPHEW ... and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-

passengers to the grave and not another race of creatures.  
 SCROOGE They *are* another race of creatures as far as I'm concerned!  
 NEPHEW And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good - and I say, God bless it!  
 CRATCHIT Bravo!  
 SCROOGE **to Cratchit** Another sound from you, sir, and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation.  
 CRATCHIT I am sorry, Mr Scrooge.  
 SCROOGE I should hope so too, sir. Keep your head down over your books, sir!  
 CRATCHIT Yes, Mr Scrooge.  
 SCROOGE **to Nephew** And as for you, sir, you're quite a powerful speaker. I wonder you don't go into Parliament.  
 NEPHEW Don't be angry, uncle. Come - dine with us tomorrow.  
 SCROOGE I'd rather see you in Hell first!  
 NEPHEW But why? Why?  
 SCROOGE Why did you get married?  
 NEPHEW Because I fell in love.  
 SCROOGE **contemptuously** Because you fell in love!  
 NEPHEW That's right. Because I fell in love.  
 SCROOGE Don't tempt me to say any more, sir. [**Turning his back on him.**] Good afternoon!  
 NEPHEW You never came to see me before that happened.  
 SCROOGE I certainly did not.  
 NEPHEW So why give it as a reason for not coming now?  
 SCROOGE Good afternoon.  
 NEPHEW I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you. Why cannot we be friends?  
 SCROOGE Good afternoon.  
 NEPHEW I am sorry with all my heart to find you so resolute.  
 SCROOGE I said, Good afternoon!  
 NEPHEW We have never had any quarrel.  
 SCROOGE Quite right, sir, we have not.  
 NEPHEW So then I'll keep my Christmas humour to the last. A Merry Christmas, uncle!  
 SCROOGE **shouting** Good afternoon!

***The Nephew walks out and immediately comes back in again.***

NEPHEW And a Happy New Year!  
 SCROOGE **roaring** Good afternoon!!!

***Scrooge goes off into a corner. We see the nephew in the outer office, talking to Bob Cratchit.***

NEPHEW A Merry Christmas to you, anyhow, Bob.  
 CRATCHIT Thank you, sir. And a Merry Christmas to you, sir.  
 NEPHEW How are the family, Bob?  
 CRATCHIT Well, thank you, sir.  
 NEPHEW Are we all managing to keep warm with this beastly cold?  
 CRATCHIT As well as can be expected, sir.  
 NEPHEW Look at your miserable fire. You'll catch your death, Bob.  
 CRATCHIT I am afraid Mr Scrooge does not believe in spending money on coal for his clerk, sir.  
 NEPHEW No - the miserable old skinflint. He doesn't even spend money on himself.  
 CRATCHIT I know, sir.  
 NEPHEW Anyway, Bob, give my best wishes to your family. I wish I could help you myself, but we are just as impecunious as you.

CRATCHIT Don't worry, sir. We'll get by.

NEPHEW **shaking hands** Well, God bless you, Bob, and give my kindest regards to all your family.

## EXTRACT TWO

READER 1 Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern, and having read all the newspapers and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker's book, he went home to bed.

READER 2 Now, it is a fact that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on Scrooge's door, except that it was very large.

### ***Spooky music sounds quietly.***

READER 2 So, let any man explain to me - if he can - how it happened that Scrooge .... having his key in the lock of the door .... saw in the knocker .... not a knocker but .... Marley's face!

### ***Spooky music climaxes as we see the Ghost of Marley enter.***

SCROOGE **terror-struck** Aaahhh!!

MARLEY **in a heightened whisper** Sscroooge!

SCROOGE How now! What do you want with me?

MARLEY Muuuch!

SCROOGE Who are you?

MARLEY Rather ask me who I was.

SCROOGE Who were you then?

MARLEY In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

SCROOGE Jacob Marley? He's dead. Dead and buried.

MARLEY You don't believe in me?

SCROOGE I don't.

MARLEY What evidence could you have of my reality beyond that of your own senses?

SCROOGE I don't know.

MARLEY Do you doubt your own senses?

SCROOGE I do. A little thing may affect them. A slight disorder of the stomach, a bit of undigested beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese ...

MARLEY And yet my voice disturbs you ... to the very marrow of your bones.

SCROOGE **holding up a toothpick** Can you see what this is?

MARLEY I can.

SCROOGE What is it? You are not looking at it.

MARLEY It is a toothpick.

SCROOGE You are not looking at it.

MARLEY Nevertheless, I see it.

SCROOGE Am I possessed by a legion of goblins, or what? .... What are you? ... Humbug, I tell you! It's all humbug!

### ***The Ghost points his finger at Scrooge and we immediately hear a sudden stab of spooky music, which seems to pierce Scrooge through the heart. He falls to his knees.***

SCROOGE Mercy, dreadful apparition! Why do you trouble me?

MARLEY Do you believe in me now?

SCROOGE I do. I must. But why do spirits walk the earth and why do they come to me?

MARLEY It is required of every man that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow men, and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is

condemned to do so after death.

SCROOGE Jacob, old Jacob Marley, tell me why you have sought me out. What would you have with me?

MARLEY A very little time is permitted to me. Listen to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house. In life, my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole.

SCROOGE You must have been very slow about it, Jacob. Seven years dead and still travelling.

MARLEY No rest. No peace. Only the incessant torture of remorse.

SCROOGE You must have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years.

MARLEY Why did I walk through crowds of fellow beings with my eyes turned down?

SCROOGE I don't know, Jacob. Why?

MARLEY Hear me! My time is nearly gone.

SCROOGE I will, but don't be hard on me.

MARLEY I am here to warn you that you have yet a chance of escaping my fate.

SCROOGE Thank you, Jacob. You were always a good friend to me.

MARLEY You will be haunted by three Spirits.

SCROOGE Haunted? Is that the chance of escape you mentioned?

MARLEY It is.

SCROOGE I think I'd rather not take it.

MARLEY You have no choice. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls one.

SCROOGE Couldn't I take them all at once and get it over with?

MARLEY **his voice fading slightly** Expect the second on the following night at the same hour ... the third upon the next night, when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to sound.  
 ....Look to see me no more.... [**His voice fading even more.**] ... And look that you remember what has passed between us.

**He vanishes.**

SCROOGE **looking around for him** Jacob, where are you?

MARLEY **voice only** Remember what has passed ...

SCROOGE Jacob, I cannot see you...

MARLEY **voice only** Remember ...

**The sound of an eerie wind can be heard. The strains of the Christmas Carol 'Silent Night' is heard...**

EXTRACT THREE

CHRISTMAS PAST **pointing** Look there!

SCROOGE Good heavens! I was born in this place. I was a boy here.

CHRISTMAS PAST Your lip is trembling. And what is that upon your cheek? A teardrop?

SCROOGE Nothing! It is nothing. A pimple, nothing more!

CHRISTMAS PAST You remember the way?

SCROOGE Remember it? I could walk it blindfold.

CHRISTMAS PAST Strange that you have forgotten it for so many years.

SCROOGE My school.

**We see Scrooge as a Child with a book and a quill pen in his hand.**

CHRISTMAS PAST The school is not quite deserted. A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still.

SCROOGE I know. I remember.

CHILD SCROOGE *enthusiastically to Scrooge* Do you remember Ali Baba?  
 And the Sultan's groom turned upside down by the genii?  
 And the parrot? Green body and yellow tail, with a thing like  
 a lettuce growing out of the top of his head? And poor  
 Robinson Crusoe when he came home again after sailing  
 around the island?

SCROOGE I remember. Of course I remember.

CHILD SCROOGE 'Robinson Crusoe, where have you been,  
 Robinson Crusoe?' 'There goes Friday, running  
 for his life to that little creek!' You remember?

SCROOGE Of course I remember. But I wish ...

CHILD SCROOGE Yes?

SCROOGE But it's too late now.

CHILD SCROOGE What is the matter?

SCROOGE Nothing. Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas  
 carol at my door last night ... I should like to have  
 something, that's all.

given him A boy like me?

CHILD SCROOGE Yes, a boy like you. [*Scrooge's facial expression  
 suddenly goes hard again.*] Enough! Enough! [*Scrooge  
 waves his arms and the child departs.*] Let us see  
 another Christmas!

***A girl, Fanny, comes in.***

FANNY Hello, Ebenezer.

SCROOGE It's Fan! My sister, Fan!

FANNY I have come to bring you home, dear brother.

SCROOGE Home, Fan?

FANNY Yes, home, for good and all. Home for ever and ever. You are to leave  
 this dreadful school. Father is so much kinder now. I asked him if you might  
 come home and he said, Yes, you should - and sent me in a coach to  
 bring you.

SCROOGE Oh Fan, how wonderful, how wonderful to be going home and leaving this  
 wretched school. I have been so unhappy.

FANNY You are never to come back here again. We're to be together all  
 Christmas long and have the merriest time in all the world.

SCROOGE You are quite a woman now, little Fan. I am so looking forward to  
 spending Christmas with you.

FANNY Come, let us pack your box. We must not delay ... Quickly ...

***Fanny moves backwards, away from Scrooge.***

SCROOGE Fan! Don't go away! Wait for me! Wait for me!

FANNY I've got to go, Ebenezer, I've got to go... [*Voice fading.*] ... I've got to  
 go...

SCROOGE No! Come back! Come back!

***Fanny disappears.***

SCROOGE Where is she? Where has she gone?

CHRISTMAS PAST Always a delicate creature whom a breath might have  
 withered. You know where she went to, Scrooge. She's  
 dead.

SCROOGE No! God forbid! Don't remind me, Spirit.

CHRISTMAS PAST But she had a large heart.

SCROOGE So she had. You're right, Spirit - I'll not gainsay it.

CHRISTMAS PAST She died a woman and had, as I think, children.

SCROOGE                    One child.  
CHRISTMAS PAST        Your nephew....

#### EXTRACT FOUR

SCROOGE                    I hear the sounds of children singing. ... Clinking glasses ... Laughter  
...                    Merriment ...

***We see the Cratchit family - Mr and Mrs Cratchit, Peter, Martha and Tiny Tim.***

THE WHOLE FAMILY    A Merry Christmas to us all. God bless us!  
TINY TIM                God bless us, every one!  
MRS CRATCHIT        We may be poor but we enjoy ourselves, don't we, Tiny Tim?  
TINY TIM                We do, Mama. I love Christmas.  
MRS CRATCHIT        And what about you, Martha?  
MARTHA                I'm sorry I was so late, but they kept us at work.  
MRS CRATCHIT        Like your poor father. He was lucky that Mr Scrooge let him have  
the day off.  
PETER                 Mama, why does Mr Scrooge not like Christmas?  
MRS CRATCHIT        Because he's a miserable old skinflint, Peter, that's why!  
BOB                    Come, come, my dear. Let us be charitable.  
MRS CRATCHIT        No, Bob. I'm fed up with that Mr Scrooge trying to work you all the  
hours God sends. It's about time you told him what you think of  
him!  
BOB                    How can I, my dear? He'll dismiss me and then where would we  
be?  
MARTHA                Father's right, Mama.  
PETER                 I think Mr Scrooge is a loathsome creature. If I were a man, I  
would                tell him what I thought of him!  
BOB                    Fortunately, Peter, you're not a man, otherwise you would  
end up without any work.  
TINY TIM                Why is Mr Scrooge so unhappy?  
MRS CRATCHIT        I don't know, Tiny Tim. And I don't care. I just don't want your  
father to continue working for such an unfeeling and  
unrepentant man.  
TINY TIM                Is Mr Scrooge married, father?  
BOB                    No, my son. He has no family.  
MRS CRATCHIT        He doesn't want to share his wealth with anyone, not even a  
wife.  
TINY TIM                But surely he wants to have a family and to be happy?  
MRS CRATCHIT        No, Tiny Tim, he does not.  
TINY TIM                I am sorry for Mr Scrooge.  
BOB                    God bless you, Tiny Tim, for saying that.  
TINY TIM                God bless us, every one.  
CHRISTMAS PRESENT    The sounds of your clerk, Bob Cratchit's, family. You hear  
what they are saying about you at this very moment?  
SCROOGE                Spirit, tell me if Tiny Tim will live.  
CHRISTMAS PRESENT    I see a vacant seat in the chimney corner, and a crutch  
without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows  
remain unaltered by the future, the child will die.  
SCROOGE                Oh no, kind spirit. Say he will be spared.  
CHRISTMAS PRESENT    **quoting**                'If he be like to die, he had better do it and  
decrease the surplus population.' You remember your own  
words?  
SCROOGE                I remember.  
CHRISTMAS PRESENT    Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It  
may be that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless

BOB and less fit than millions like this poor man's child.  
I give you a toast. To Mr Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast.

MRS CRATCHIT The founder of the feast indeed! I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have good appetite for it.

BOB My dear, it's Christmas Day.

MRS CRATCHIT It should be Christmas Day, I am sure, on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr Scrooge.

BOB Oh, my dear.

MRS CRATCHIT You know he is, Robert. Nobody knows it better than you.

BOB My dear ... Christmas Day.

MRS CRATCHIT I'll drink 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.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT Are you listening, Scrooge? Do you hear what the world says about you?

SCROOGE I hear....

#### EXTRACT FIVE

***A solo violin plays a sad lamentable dirge as Scrooge and the Phantom stand in the centre of a circle of six people, three Drinkers and three Merchants. They walk in a slow circular motion, like a clock, around Scrooge and the Phantom. When the Phantom points at them, the music stops and the three Drinkers come forward. The others all freeze.***

DRINKER 1 No, I don't know much about it either way. I only know he's dead.

***They all laugh.***

DRINKER 2 When did he die?

DRINKER 3 Last night, I believe.

DRINKER 1 Why, what was the matter with him? I thought he'd never die!

DRINKER 2 God knows what he died of.

DRINKER 3 What's he done with all his money?

DRINKER 1 I haven't heard. Left it to his Company perhaps. He hasn't left it to me, that's all I know!

***They all laugh.***

DRINKER 2 It's likely to be a very poor funeral, for upon my life, I don't know of anybody who will go to it.

DRINKER 3 Suppose we make up a party and volunteer?

***They all laugh.***

DRINKER 1 I don't mind going if drink is provided!

***More laughter.***

***The violin music resumes and the circular motion of people continue to move around Scrooge and the Phantom. The Phantom points again and the music stops. The 3 Merchants come forward and the 3 Drinkers freeze.***



MERCHANT 1 How are you?  
 MERCHANT 2 How are *you*?  
 MERCHANT 3 Well, the Old Devil has got his own at last, eh?  
 MERCHANT 1 So I am told. Cold, isn't it?  
 MERCHANT 2 Damned seasonable for Christmas time. You're not going skating, I suppose?  
 MERCHANT 3 I thought I might. Take the whole family, I thought.  
 MERCHANT 1 What a good idea.  
 MERCHANT 2 I'm going tonight, before it gets much colder.  
 MERCHANT 3 We'll all turn into lumps of ice before long.  
 MERCHANT 1 Like that poor old devil himself.  
 MERCHANT 2 Yes. He must be pretty cold by now.

***They all laugh.***

MERCHANT 3 No need to worry about burying him, eh? Poor devil!  
 MERCHANT 1 He certainly won't stink in this weather!  
 MERCHANT 2 He stank enough before!

***They all laugh.***

MERCHANT 3 Oh well, let's be charitable. After all, it is Christmas!

***They all laugh and return to the circle.***

***The violin music plays again and they resume their circular movement around the Phantom and Scrooge. The music stops when the Phantom points again, this time at the trio of the Laundress, the Charwoman and the Undertaker. They come forward, passing through the circle of others, carrying oil lamps and a bundle of clothes.***

CHARWOMAN Every person has a right to take care of themselves. *He* always did.  
 UNDERTAKER Why then, don't stand staring as if you was afraid, woman. Who's the wiser? We're not going to pick holes in each other's coats, are we?  
 LAUNDRESS No, indeed. We should hope not.  
 CHARWOMAN Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose.  
 UNDERTAKER No, indeed.  
 LAUNDRESS If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, why wasn't he natural in his lifetime?  
 CHARWOMAN If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself.  
 UNDERTAKER It's the truest word that ever was spoke. It's a judgment on him.  
 LAUNDRESS I wish it was a heavier one. And it should have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else.  
 CHARWOMAN I know pretty well that we were helping ourselves before we met here. It's no sin.  
 UNDERTAKER What do you call these?  
 LAUNDRESS Bed curtains.  
 UNDERTAKER You don't mean to say you took 'em down, rings and all, with him lying there?  
 LAUNDRESS Yes, I do. Why not?  
 UNDERTAKER You were meant to make your fortune and you'll certainly do it.  
 CHARWOMAN I certainly shan't hold my hand for the sake of such a man as he

was, I promise you. Don't drop that oil upon the blankets  
now.  
UNDERTAKER His blankets?  
CHARWOMAN Who's else, do you think? He isn't likely to take cold without 'em, I  
dare say.  
UNDERTAKER I hope he didn't die of anything catching, eh?  
LAUNDRESS This is the end of it, you see. He frightened everyone away from  
him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead!

***They all cackle with laughter and go off.  
Scrooge comes forward.***

SCROOGE Spirit! What is this? Is there not any person in the town who feels emotion  
because of this man's death?

***The Phantom is silent.***

SCROOGE Spectre, tell me what man that was.

***The Phantom points at Scrooge.***

SCROOGE Where do you point?  
PHANTOM ***in a sinister whisper*** Scrooge. Ebenezer Scrooge!...

EXTRACT from Production Notes and Technical Cues

## **INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTION.**

The play is a new rendition of Dicken's story. Rather more than other versions, I think this traces Scrooge's personal journey to enlightenment in an extremely clear way. Some of Dicken's own words are kept, particularly in the speeches allotted to the Readers, though the language all has a Dickensian feel to it. This serves to set the period and the atmosphere.

The focus on Scrooge undergoing what is a very 'steep learning curve' [!], gives a more psychological bent to the tale than is usual. It is clear that Scrooge has become what he has become because of a childhood where there was little enjoyment and love, except from his sister Fanny - and she has died. Denied love, Scrooge has learned to put his trust only in the tangible - money - and his own efforts, which have been perverted towards personal gain alone. Because he has had to struggle, he has little sympathy for the poor - who must be poor because they have not worked hard enough. And love, in the person of Fanny and later his fiancée, Nell, has also deserted him - though the latter through his own fault. Yet the capacity for love and warmer feelings is there and, as this version shows, not far under the surface either.

The simple style of the piece, which could be done without any setting if desired, makes it an ideal piece to present as part of a Christmas show. It extolls the Christmas messages of good cheer, loving and giving. Scrooge ends by joining in the Christmas spirit fervently, making the play a celebration of Christmas in its own right as well as a celebration of the cracking of the ice round Scrooge's heart.

## **CHARACTERS**

Apart from the character of Scrooge, nearly all the characters in this piece are ciphers that stand for something and serve as pointers to Scrooge on his journey. Some, therefore, I will group together.

**EBENEZER SCROOGE** As I have said above, Scrooge is given considerable understanding in this rendition. He had a hard childhood, brought up by a strict father without love. We see him left at school even over the Christmas period. Mother is dead and the only maternal sort of love comes from his sister Fanny. Scrooge remembers a childhood Christmas, when Fanny begged for Scrooge to be allowed home, as a high-spot. But Fanny was taken away from him, since she died in childbirth. His nephew, Fred, did he but realise it, is willing to share home and family fun with him, but perhaps Scrooge blames the young man for his dear sister's death, and this in some way explains his refusal to allow himself this pleasure.

Whatever the reasons for Scrooge's mean character, it is clear from our visits to the past that the younger Scrooge was not like that. He remembers with affection his old and generous employer, Old Fezziwig. Had he remained under this man's influence, Scrooge would have turned out very differently. But instead he fell under the influence of his second employer, Jacob Marley, who moulds young Scrooge into his likeness. And Scrooge was easily and quickly influenced. His engagement to Nell shows this. The loving and kind young man of the early engagement turns to the mean-spirited man that is the later Scrooge remarkably quickly. This second Scrooge begrudges Nell's lack of dowry and regrets his engagement to someone who will bring him no pecuniary advancement. Sensing this, Nell breaks the engagement off. From here on, Scrooge has no softer influence in his life. Under the spell of Marley, he is moulded into a humourless, emotionless, hard man who cares nothing for his fellow human beings and everything for money. Money won't let him down; money can be trusted.

But underneath this, and very close to the surface according to this version, is a softer and generous Scrooge, aching for the love and companionship of his fellow human beings. It is this Scrooge that is revealed by the kindly intervention of the three Ghosts, themselves sent by a repentant Jacob Marley, whose one generous action - to save his own soul - is to save Scrooge's before it is too late.

To make this change convincing, the actor must show the war that is going on inside Scrooge from the arrival of the Ghost of Christmas Past onwards. Up to then, he needs to be played as an unsympathetic character, curmudgeonly and curt. Emphasise the gruffness of his voice and the scowling, stooped gait of a man who has created a shell around himself. Perhaps, as his true self begins to emerge, this can be mirrored by a straightening of his posture and a warmth to his voice. But this must not be too sudden. There should be a transition phase, where we see hints of 'good' Scrooge, which keep being firmly battened down.

**THE READERS** One is supposed to be Dickens himself and the other a female. The contrast of the voices is good done this way - using both sexes -, adding variety and interest to these longer descriptive passages. There is no characterisation as such, so concentrate on giving the voices plenty of atmospheric 'colour.' Often, their role is to build up tension, as well as to paint a picture of place and period to appeal to the audience's eye.

**NEPHEW - FRED** His role is to show us how people should be at Christmas time - loving, forgiving and generous. He is unfailingly cheerful, despite Scrooge's put-downs. He introduces the lessons that Scrooge will have to learn - that of love and concern for one's fellow human beings, if not through practical charity, at least through a charitable heart and a kind nature. He offers practical charity by continuing to invite Scrooge to Christmas dinner, despite annual rebuff, though he is not well-off himself and could not afford to give to the poor, as Scrooge must learn to do. Through his warm nature, we glimpse what Fanny must have been like.

His voice needs to be warm and determinedly hearty against Scrooge's opposition. He remains bright and cheery even with his less generous wife and sister-in-law. Stance and gestures should be open, expansive, rather larger than life. A jolly laugh is needed too.

**NEPHEW'S WIFE & HER SISTER** These two are less generous to Scrooge. They

have no patience with his constant bad temper and don't want to even think about him, as to do so would spoil their day. This is a contrast to the Nephew, who would like to see Scrooge cheer up and learn from his own example of cheeriness and generosity of spirit. There is a rather cruel streak to the wife and sister. They think the Nephew is stupid to keep trying; why should one persist in wanting to help someone who is only 'cutting off his own nose to spite his face'?

Tones of voice should be sharper, more shrewish, at times rather cruel. Quick and irritable, to contrast with the Nephew. Stance and gestures to match.

**BOB CRATCHIT and ALL THE CRATCHITS.** Bob is the famous poverty-stricken clerk, an employee of Scrooge. He and his family are there to stand for all the poor and needy, who need active Christian loving and giving at Christmas time. They have little enough to feed themselves and the youngest, Tiny Tim, is a deliberately dear little boy who is crippled and not likely to live. Despite having so little, being poor and cold and hungry, Bob feels no personal animosity towards Scrooge. In fact, he is grateful for a job at all, despite the fact that Scrooge must be the meanest employer in the world - begrudging him any time off at Christmas and never giving him a raise. His wife and Peter, one of his sons, are angry and bitter at Scrooge, giving the opportunity for Bob to put in a plea for Christian Charity, even towards his employer. Tiny Tim strikes the note which should be emphasised. He feels sorry for Scrooge, who has not the comfort of a large loving family and he rightly stresses that Scrooge must be very unhappy. This warms us to Tiny Tim - who is a chip off the old block of his generous-spirited father. It is clear that Martha is another one like her father, also hard-done-by at work, but uncomplaining. In fact, the family are divided: Bob, Martha and Tiny Tim needing to persist in warm kind-toned voices, despite being hunched and cramped with cold and malnutrition, whilst Mrs Cratchit and Peter may allow resentful tones to creep in and a more impatient attitude.

**CHARITABLE PEOPLE** These stand for the need for active Christian Charity at Christmas - not being wrapped up in one's own family, but looking out for the poor and needy and trying to do one's bit to alleviate their hard lives, particularly at this time of year when it is cold and when, surrounded by the cheer and happiness of Christmas, the poor feel by contrast even more wretched. Despite the worthiness of their message, there is no need why one couldn't have a little bit of fun with their characters. Try perhaps making one very tall and pious, with sonorous deep tones [Number 1]; another being a bustling, tut-tutty do-gooder of the sort given to organising jumble-sales and church bazaars [Number 3]. Go for contrasts, to make their characters more interesting. Perhaps the third could be an angry-young-man type, incensed by Scrooge's meanness. This last one could be very 'working-class' and proud of it, hardly able to bite back angry retorts in front of Scrooge [Number 2].

**GHOST OF MARLEY** is usually the most traditional of the ghosts. Clanking chains and hollow groans. This is appropriate for Marley who is in perpetual torment for being the way he is. This is the one generous action of his life and after-life - to attempt to save Scrooge from a similar fate. He should be played with all the accoutrements of the traditional ghostly figure. Make sure that moaning and groaning is a feature - he is a soul in torment and needs to show that.

**GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST** played as a child. This ghost should not be too ghostly in appearance. In fact, Scrooge has to check that he is one. His voice should be bland and not condemning - not judgmental. His job is to make Scrooge confront his past and what has made him like he is; there is some sympathy in him, I feel. When Scrooge breaks down at the end of this Ghost's stay, sympathy is shown by the fact that he does not 'torture' him with more pictures of his past; he realises that Scrooge has learned what he needs to. This Ghost can take Scrooge by the hand, put an arm round his shoulder as he sobs, and his voice should be light and kindly.

**SCROOGE AS A CHILD** Go for a sorrowful lonely little figure, hunched and tearful.

Contrast is shown when he sees his sister, when his face lights up and his posture opens out.

**FANNY, SCROOGE'S SISTER** The author has chosen to use the word 'Fan' as an abbreviation in the script, presumably expecting modern youngsters to find the name inappropriately comical with its modern sexual overtones. Though called 'Little Fan', I feel it is better - and more appropriate to what she says - if Fanny is played as older than Scrooge as a child. Perhaps she is physically small - frail - as the Ghost of Christmas Past says later. She should be played quite maternally - she is the nearest thing Scrooge has to a mother - her voice full of warmth and sympathy. But keep the idea of frailty too - perhaps a cough at the end of her 'stay' to remind us of her death to come.

**OLD FEZZIWIG, SCROOGE'S OLD EMPLOYER** is a dappy, endearingly vague old man, hearty of voice and generous of spirit. Keep the voice bright rather than too quavery. Though old, he works best as the hale and hearty sort, high of colour, who has probably dropped dead of a heart-attack from good living rather than any debilitation. He must be likeable and fun.

**DICK WILKINS, SCROOGE'S OLD FRIEND** Not much opportunity to make much of a character, keep his replies warm, patient and full of a similar jollity and lightness as his employer. Like Old Fezziwig, he must be played with energy.

**NELL, SCROOGE'S FIANCEE** The voice should be soft and reproachful, full of a sad regret for what Scrooge was and how he has changed. There is some bitterness in the tone when she asks him if he would ever have got engaged to her now - now that money has become all-important to him. Like Fan, Nell must be the embodiment of feminine softness and love.

**GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT.** This one is probably best done as a traditional Christmas figure - perhaps as Father Christmas - or at least, decked out in red and green, with holly attached to him and crowning his head. Despite his friendly and jovial looks the tone of this Spirit is harsh and inexorable. He rubs poor Scrooge's nose into his faults and will not let him off the hook. Movement as well as voice should therefore be stern, belying his looks.

**THE DRINKERS** Simply there to show popular opinion about Scrooge's character. Much laughter and merriment about the old skinflint. Never overdo drunkenness - it is only funny if kept quite controlled. Regional accents and loud raucous voices.

**THE MERCHANTS** Act as a contrast to the Drinkers. Opinion doesn't vary about Scrooge - the Drinkers laugh coarsely about him whilst the Merchant class - the businessmen - talk in cultured voices and with a stiff formality - which cracks on the last but one line, showing their true opinion. This line - 'He stank enough before.' - should be blurted out, almost as if the speaker cannot help himself. It will be funny if the formality weakens for a moment and then they quickly pull themselves together.

**LAUNDRESS & CHARWOMAN** are almost identical in their grasping 'lowlife' characters. They are there to show a total lack of pity for Scrooge and to emphasise how unlikeable he is. Best if they are groaning under the weight of his belongings. Strong regional accents and loud coarse voices.

**UNDERTAKER** He is more lugubrious in character. Many of his lines reveal his admiration of the daring of the two women, but he hasn't quite lowered himself to do the same - or at least not to the same extent. It might be comical if he had something like silver candlesticks sticking out of his pockets. His voice should be a bit pious ... 'It's a judgement on him' is the tone. Self-righteous. Better voice than the other two, though perhaps obviously trying to disguise his regional accent.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS FUTURE has very little to say but considerable presence. He is the most scary of the Ghosts, being a representation of Death himself. His movements should be very slow and deliberate, milking the effect of his pointing to the utmost. When he does speak - perhaps a magnified whisper, or hoarse croaking voice.

BOY a street urchin with a strong accent and chirpy character. His cheekiness must be brought out. His presence marks a turning point in the story, so voice should be clear, bright and cheerful and his actions large exaggerated, full of life.

## **SETTING**

I personally favour little to no setting at all for this play. I think it is best done with lights to define areas. Of course, the choice is up to you and if you like you could go to town on a period backdrop, depicting a street scene. However, it can all be left to the imagination and the way it is written encourages that approach.

To one side of the stage, slightly angled but basically side on, place a fairly large table, with an upright chair with arms behind it, for Scrooge. Three other chairs will be needed later, to be kept in the wings on this side. On the other side of the stage, place a smaller table, similarly, with a hard wooden chair behind it. Four other chairs will be needed at this side of the stage, ready to be brought on later. Various props [See props list] may be brought on at times to dress the setting.

The readers will need two chairs, either on the stage, in one corner, or perhaps in front of the stage...