



A CHRISTMAS CAROL

PLAY GUIDE | 2019



A Contemporary Theatre

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WELCOME TO ACT THEATRE



Thank you for joining us for our 2019 production of *A Christmas Carol*! This is ACT's 44th production of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, adapted by Gregory A. Falls. Directed by Kelly Kitchens, this celebrated adaptation follows the original Dickens tale by taking audiences along on Ebenezer Scrooge's transformational journey through time during the Christmas season. We hope that your journey through this story is a rewarding and memorable experience as well. Enjoy the show!

Tracy Hyland
Education and Engagement
Manager, ACT Theatre

Photo by John Ullman.



ABOUT ACT THEATRE

Mission

ACT is a contemporary theatre where artistic ambition and civic engagement unite.

Vision

ACT envisions a world where the power of theatre expands our collective understanding of community and our own humanity.

History

A Contemporary Theatre (ACT) was founded in the summer of 1965 by Gregory A. Falls (1922-1997), head of the University of Washington's theatre department at the time. The theatre thrived in a former community hall at the base of Queen Anne Hill until 1996 when they moved into their new home, the historic Eagles Auditorium in downtown Seattle. The Eagles Auditorium Building is an eight-story historic theatre and apartment building built in 1924-1925. Designed by noted local architect Henry Bittman, it was erected by the Fraternal Order of Eagles, Seattle Aerie No. 1 in 1924-1925. Since its construction, the Eagles Temple was in continuous use as the lodge for F.O.E. Aerie No. 1 until August, 1981. The building also has a national history for those who have spoken or held concerts at this location. The Eagles Auditorium is where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke at his one and only visit to Seattle on November 10, 1961. The building served as a major rock concert venue from the mid-1960s until 1970. Some of the legendary rock bands that utilized the venue included The Grateful Dead, The Doors, Chicago, Richard Berry, Pink Floyd, Duran Duran, and more. For ACT, the building provides five performance spaces, supporting our mission to nurture new and seasoned artists and connect audiences to many stages of the creative process.

ACT produces five primary programs to fulfill our mission: Mainstage, ACTLab, Young Playwrights Program (YPP), Core Company, and the New Work Initiative. We support these with efforts multiple complementary initiatives to engage audiences, develop new works, and keep the art accessible.



❧ A CHRISTMAS CAROL: SYNOPSIS ❧

A Christmas Carol tells the story of miserly curmudgeon Ebenezer Scrooge. Set in London, England, in 1843, the tale begins on Christmas Eve, seven years after the death of Scrooge's business partner, Jacob Marley. That night, the burdened ghost of Jacob Marley appears before Scrooge and warns that he will be visited by three spirits who will save Scrooge from a tortured afterlife. Three Christmas ghosts descend on Scrooge throughout the night, fulfilling the prophecy of Marley's Ghost. The first, the Ghost of Christmas Past, takes Scrooge on a journey through his youth, which stirs the miser's past hurts and regrets. The second spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Present, shows Scrooge how other people demonstrate the Christmas spirit. The third spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, warns Scrooge of the bleak future that only Scrooge has the power to change with an awakened heart. *A Christmas Carol* is a journey to discover the meaning of generosity, kindness, compassion, and the true spirit of Christmas.



NOTES FROM DIRECTOR KELLY KITCHENS

The holidays are a complicated season for many of us. It is a season and times both of merriment and delight. It is also a time in which loss, lack, and loneliness are amplified. A time, as Dickens says, when want is keenly felt, and abundance rejoices. One of my favorite past times this season is walking through the decked-out streets of Seattle – there are these moments of unexpected joy that open up before me. And then I turn a corner - metaphorically or literally - and there's moments of melancholy and grief. Where we're confronted with the loss of a loved one, or the suffering and inequality that exist in our world, and that cries out for me. All of those things are wrapped up together in this time of year.

I've been drawn back time and again to this story of Dickens because it, too, is complicated. This beautifully complex and ultimately hopeful story takes us on a journey through hard hearts, through heartaches, and hearts that in the face of everything, do have the capacity for growth – and we have the ability to choose joy.

Dickens is speaking of times that could very well be today. This story speaks of socio-economic inequality, the lack of meaningful programs of support for the working poor and those unstably housed, of families with food instability and lack of access to healthcare, the growing epidemic of poverty, and of systems and oppressions that have created those systems. The story speaks about how people in power can create a culture that harms or helps; of employers who have the ability to care solely about the bottom line regardless of the impact on the humans that are their employees, or who can encourage an inclusive community in the workplace and show appreciation for employees with acts of kindness and generosity that really don't take much. This story speaks of the destruction wreaked by ignorance and want, and how – rather than attempting to cure those diseases – choosing to deny their existence only makes them worse. And that we must guard against these forces in our hearts. This story speaks of hard truths around recognizing the difference between cost, value, and worth. It speaks to our responsibility to something greater than ourselves. Our responsibility to care for our community and for those around us. In the end, the story reminds us that humankind is indeed our business. That we are indeed fellow passengers to the grave. And as such, we are called upon to open our hearts and care for each other in whatever ways possible.

WHO'S WHO IN THE PLAY

There is a large cast of characters in *A Christmas Carol*. Some of the major characters in this adaptation include the following:

Ebenezer Scrooge

The miserly owner of a London counting-house, a nineteenth century term for an accountant's office. Scrooge is the central character of the story.

Bob Cratchit, Tiny Tim, and the Cratchit Family

Scrooge's clerk, Bob Cratchit, is a kind, mild, and very poor man with a large family. Though treated harshly by his boss, Cratchit remains a humble and dedicated employee. Tiny Tim is the youngest member of the Cratchit family, crippled from birth. The Cratchit family humanizes the tribulations of poverty in the story.

Fred

The son of Scrooge's deceased sister, Fan. Fred is a genial man who loves Christmas. He invites Scrooge to his Christmas party each year, only to be refused by his grumpy uncle.



A Christmas Carol at ACT Theatre, 2017

Ghost of Jacob Marley

In life, Marley was Ebenezer Scrooge's equally selfish partner. Marley died seven years before the narrative opens. He appears to Scrooge as a ghost condemned to wander the world bound in heavy chains. Marley hopes to save his old partner from suffering a similar fate.

Ghost of Christmas Past

A childlike apparition that takes Scrooge on a tour of Christmases in his past.

Ghost of Christmas Present

A majestic spirit clad in a green robe. His lifespan is restricted to Christmas Day. He escorts Scrooge on a tour of his contemporaries' holiday celebrations.

Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

A silent phantom who presents Scrooge with an ominous view of the future.

Belle and the Fezziwigs

Belle was Scrooge's beloved when he was a young man. In the scenes conjured by the Ghost of Christmas Past, we see Scrooge and Belle together in happier times at the Christmas party of the Fezziwigs. Later, Belle breaks off their engagement as Scrooge became consumed with greed and the lust for wealth.



*Bradford Farwell as Marley
~ 2015*

G. Valmont Thomas as Spirit 2 ~ 2013

❧ AUTHOR CHARLES DICKENS ❧



Charles John Huffam Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, at Portsea (later part of Portsmouth) on the southern coast of England, to John and Elizabeth Dickens. Charles was the second born of eight children. His father was a pay clerk in the navy office. Because of financial difficulties, the family moved about until they settled in Camden Town, a poor neighborhood in London, England. At the age of

twelve Charles worked with working-class men and boys in a factory that handled “blacking,” or shoe polish. While his father was in debtor’s prison, the rest of the family moved to live near the prison, leaving Charles to live alone. This experience of lonely hardship was the most significant event of his life. It colored his view of the world and would later be described in a number of his novels.

Charles returned to school when his father received an inheritance and was able to repay his debts. But in 1827, at age fifteen, he was again forced leave school and work as an office boy. In the following year he became a freelance reporter and stenographer (using shorthand to transcribe documents) at the law courts of London. By 1832 he had become a reporter for two London newspapers and, in the following year, began to contribute a series of impressions and sketches to other newspapers and magazines, signing some of them “Boz.” These scenes of London life went far to establish his reputation and were published in 1836 as *Sketches by Boz*, his first book. On the strength of this success Charles married Catherine Hogarth. They had ten children together before Dickens fell in love with an actress and separated from his wife in 1858.

Dickens was successful during his life as a writer and magazine editor and the most celebrated novelist of his time. His contributions to literature include many iconic characters, such as Ebenezer Scrooge (*A Christmas Carol*), Oliver Twist (*The Adventures of Oliver Twist*), and Mrs. Havisham (*Great Expectations*). Dickens’s novels were, among other things, works of social commentary. He was a fierce critic of the poverty and socio-economic inequities of Victorian soci-

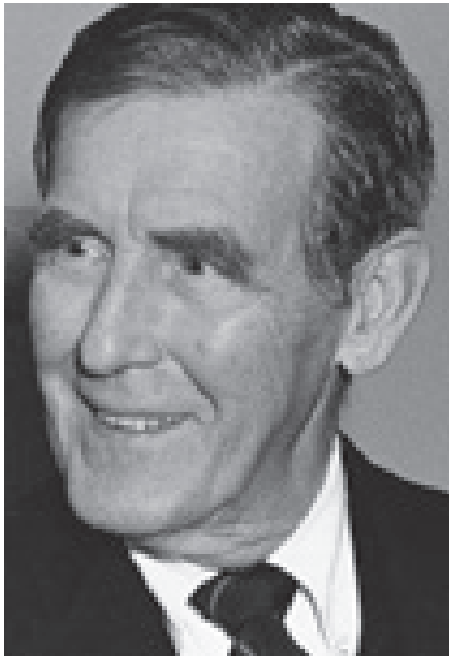
ety. Dickens's second novel, *Oliver Twist* (1839), shocked readers with its images of poverty and crime: it challenged middle class polemics about criminals, making it impossible for upper classes to ignore the gritty existence for those who lived in poverty.

In 1842 Dickens, who was as popular in America as he was in England, went on a five-month lecture tour of the United States, speaking out strongly against slavery and in support of other reforms. On his return he wrote *American Notes*, a book that criticizes American life as being culturally backward and materialistic (characterized by the desire for wealth and material goods). His novel *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–1844), describes the hero finding that survival on the American frontier is more difficult than making his way in England. During 1847, when *Chuzzlewit* appeared, Dickens also published *A Christmas Carol*.

Dickens died of a fatal stroke on June 9, 1870, leaving the novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, unfinished. The day of his burial was made a day of national mourning in England.



PLAYWRIGHT GREGORY FALLS



Gregory A. Falls, a former chair of the University of Washington School of Drama who is credited with creating Seattle's vibrant theater scene, died April 3, 1997. He was 75 when he died unexpectedly of pneumonia. More than any other individual, Falls was "most responsible for the theater boom in this town," says Arne Zaslove, artistic director of the Bathhouse Theatre at Green Lake. "He was the impresario of bringing it all together."

Falls founded A Contemporary Theatre more than five decades ago. He was ACT's artistic director for 23 years until his retirement in 1987 due to early indications of Alzheimer's disease. Falls, who founded theaters wher-

ever he went, he started Ohio's Mad Anthony Players and ran the University of Vermont's drama program and Champlain Shakespeare Festival, before coming to Seattle in 1961. He then decided to create ACT in 1965; he wanted to produce plays that revitalize the American theater.

"He was a gentle gentleman, a gifted theater man, and a theater teacher," says Peter Donnelly, president of the Corporate Council of the Arts.

A native of Russellville, Arkansas, Falls was always interested in theater. He was active in high school plays, and his mother was known to complain about him loaning out their furniture for theater productions.

A Fulbright scholar, Falls came to Seattle in 1961 to head up the UW School of Drama. He founded the highly acclaimed Professional Actor Training Program and the school's doctoral program. In addition, he actively engaged as a playwright and play director at the University of Washington and ACT Theatre. A former president of the National Theater Conference and Washington Association of Theater Artists, Falls was inducted into the prestigious College of Fellows of the American Theatre in 1994. He is survived by his wife, two sons, and two daughters.

THEMES

Christmas

Dickens has had significant influence on the way that Anglo-centric cultures observe the Christmas tradition today.

Before Queen Victoria's rule in England, also called the Victorian era (1837–1901), there was not a widespread celebration of Christmas in Great Britain. This was due partly because under the earlier puritanical leadership of Oliver Cromwell, traditional medieval celebrations of Christmas were vehemently discouraged as they combined pagan rituals with the observation of the birth of Christ. The Industrial Revolution also left factory workers with little time to celebrate Christmas with their families.

A romantic revival of Christmas customs emerged when Queen Victoria married Prince Albert of Germany. Prince Albert promoted the German customs of decorating a Christmas tree and singing carols and made them fashionable in England. However, it was the Christmas stories of Charles Dickens, especially *A Christmas Carol*, which rekindled the cheerful spirit of Christmas in Great Britain and the United States. Today, the story of *A Christmas Carol* continues to be culturally significant, sending a message that cuts through the commercial trappings of the season to stir the soul and inspire authentic connections to the holiday.



Pictured:
Costume Designs by
Deborah Trout for
A Christmas Carol
hung in the rehearsal
room.

Wealth and Poverty

The relationship between Scrooge and Tiny Tim is a condensed depiction of the relationship between two social classes: the wealthy and the impoverished. Tiny Tim's fate is linked very closely to Scrooge's fate. If Scrooge does not change his miserly ways, Tiny Tim is sure to die. Likewise, if the wealthy do not do their part to support the impoverished, the impoverished are sure to struggle. That Dickens framed this relationship with Christmas seems to suggest the immense need for decreasing the distance between English social strata. The proximity of the Christmas spirit to the issue of social strata lends a sense of community to Dickens' message, urging the well-to-do upper class to consider the dependent poor, especially during the holiday, but year-round as well.

Industrial Revolution and Child Labor

The Industrial Revolution took place during the late 18th century and early 19th century. This was a time when a primarily agricultural society was transformed by technology and a new focus on factory-style efficiency. The increase in output per worker made possible by new machinery moved much of the agricultural workforce from the countryside into large urban centers of production. This caused overcrowding in areas with little supporting infrastructure and led to many problems, including sanitation and health. Since there was little opportunity for education, many poor children were put to work to help their families.

Dickens witnessed many of the appalling conditions that workers faced. In early 1843 he toured the Cornish tin mines, where he was angered after seeing children working in abusive conditions. The suffering he witnessed there was reinforced by a visit to the Field Lane Ragged School, one of several London schools set up to educate the capital's half-starved, illiterate street children.

In February 1843, after Charles Dickens read a parliamentary report on the realities of child labor in the factories of Victorian England, he wrote to one of the commissioners. His plan, he informed the commissioner, was to publish a pamphlet entitled, "An Appeal to the People of England, on behalf of the Poor Man's Child." A few days later he wrote the commissioner again to say that he had other plans: "I am not at liberty to explain them any further, just now; but rest assured that when you know them, and see what I do, and where, and how, you will certainly feel that a Sledge hammer has come down with twenty times the force – twenty thousand times the force – I could exert by following out my first idea."



Dickens's "sledge hammer" blow for the poor turned out to be *A Christmas Carol*, written in a six-week rush and published at his own expense on December 17th, 1843. *A Christmas Carol* sold more than 6,000 copies on its very first day in the bookshops and spoke to Victorians as no pamphlet could have done..

Tiny Tim's Illness

In the December 1992 issue of the *American Journal for Diseases of Children*, a doctor and professor of medicine theorized that Tiny Tim suffered from a kidney disease that made his blood too acidic.

The disease, distal renal tubular acidosis, was not recognized until the early 20th century, but therapies to treat its symptoms were available in Dickens's time. Dr. Lewis explains in his research that Tiny Tim's fictional case of the disease, if left untreated due to poverty and poor access to medical care, would produce the symptoms and outcomes alluded to in the story of *A Christmas Carol*.



The cast and crew of *A Christmas Carol* 2019 look forward to welcoming you to the theatre!

FUN FACT

The original desk used by the character Bob Cratchit on the set of *A Christmas Carol* in 1976 is still in use today!



QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS

Have you ever seen a different adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* or read the original story? How does this production compare with other versions or your own imagination? Does it look different? Sound different? How so?

Did you empathize with any characters in the play? If so, which one(s) and why?

Which parts of the play were confusing or needed more explaining for you?

If you could be an actor in *A Christmas Carol* and play any role, which part would you like to portray? Why?

Deep Dive

Which stories from cultures that do not celebrate Christmas also encourage a spirit of generosity?

At what age did you start working for money? What do you think is a proper age for kids to go to work and earn wages? Why? What are current child labor laws? Do you think they are fair?

"Are there no prisons? Are there no poorhouses?" Scrooge asks these questions early in the play, and then later we hear them repeated by the Ghost of Christmas Present. What do you think Scrooge meant when he said this, and why do you think the Ghost of Christmas Past repeats it?

Suggested Exercises

Write a review of the play. Include: a headline, introduction, brief overview of the plot, moments you liked, moments that left you with questions, and reflections on the design elements of the show (lights, sound, costumes). Conclude with your overall impression of the show.

If you could add a scene to the play, what would it be? Which characters would be in it? Write that scene with dialogue for the characters or draw the scene that you would like to add into the play.



❧ SOURCES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ❧

More about A Christmas Carol:

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/christmascarol>

More about Charles Dickens:

<http://www.notablebiographies.com/De-Du/Dickens-Charles.html#ixzz4xJ8sz6rE>

<https://www.biography.com/people/charles-dickens-9274087>

More about the Victorian Era:

<http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael9/section/volE/overview.aspx>

<https://victorianchildren.org/victorian-child-labor/>

Article: "What Was Wrong with Tiny Tim?"

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/516441>



QUESTIONS? FEEDBACK?

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