



FIFTH THIRD BANK

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

based on the book by Charles Dickens

adapted by Barbara Field | directed by Drew Fracher

NOV. 23 - DEC. 23, 2019

PLAY GUIDE

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ABOUT THIS PLAY GUIDE

This play guide is a resource designed to enhance your theatre experience. Its goal is twofold: to nurture the teaching and learning of theatre arts and to encourage essential questions that lead to an enduring understanding of the play's meaning and relevance. Inside you will find information about the plot and characters within the play, as well as articles that contextualize the play and its production at Actors Theatre of Louisville. Oral discussion and writing prompts encourage your students to reflect upon their impressions, analyze key ideas and relate them to their personal experiences and the world around them. These prompts can easily be adapted to fit most writing objectives. We encourage you to adapt and extend the material in any way that best fits the needs of your community of learners. Please feel free to make copies of this guide, or you may download it from our website at actorstheatre.org. We hope this material, combined with our pre-show workshops, will give you the tools to make your time at Actors Theatre a valuable learning experience.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL STUDENT MATINEES & THIS PLAY GUIDE ADDRESS SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES:

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5
Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6
Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

TH.Re7.1 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

TH.Re8.1 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

TH.Re9.1 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

TH.Cn10.1 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

TH.Cn11.1 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

If you have any questions or suggestions regarding our play guides, please contact Abigail Miskowiec, Learning & Creative Engagement Associate, at 502.584.1265 ext.3065.

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The cast of *A Christmas Carol*, 2017. Photo by Bill Brymer.

SYNOPSIS

Ebenezer Scrooge is a mean old businessman who thinks that Christmas is a frivolous holiday, just an excuse for people not to work. Despite his vast fortune, Scrooge hoards money, refusing to give to charity because he believes that the poor are just lazy and deserve no such help. He doesn't even pay his hardworking and loyal clerk, Bob Cratchit, a fair wage! Despite Scrooge's heartlessness, his nephew and only living relative, Fred, still wants to spend Christmas with his uncle, but the miser rejects him. On Christmas Eve, Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley, who is now paying dearly for the heartlessness and lack of generosity with which he lived his life. Marley tells Scrooge that three spirits—the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come—will visit him that night. These phantoms will show old Scrooge how he became this hard-hearted, what he's missed because of it, and what will happen to him if he keeps going down this path.

—Tara Duffy

SETTING

London, from the slums to middle-class homes to wealthy mansions, during the Victorian era.

CHARACTERS

EBENEZER SCROOGE A wealthy but miserly businessman who has no sympathy for the poor, nor any Christmas cheer. He is transformed when visited by three Ghosts on Christmas Eve.

BOB CRATCHIT Scrooge's overworked and underpaid clerk. Bob is struggling to support his wife and six children but remains loyal to his boss.

JACOB MARLEY Scrooge's business partner who died seven years ago. His ghost walks the earth in chains as a punishment for the greedy way he lived.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST This spirit shows Scrooge the events in his past that have made him into the man he is today.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT This spirit shows Scrooge what he has ignored or cut himself off from in the present.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS FUTURE This spirit shows Scrooge the likely end results of his current ways and attitudes.

FAN Scrooge's kind-hearted sister, who cared a great deal about her brother, but died young.

FRED Scrooge's nephew and only living relative. Like his mother, Fan, he is a cheerful person and wants to spend Christmas with his uncle.

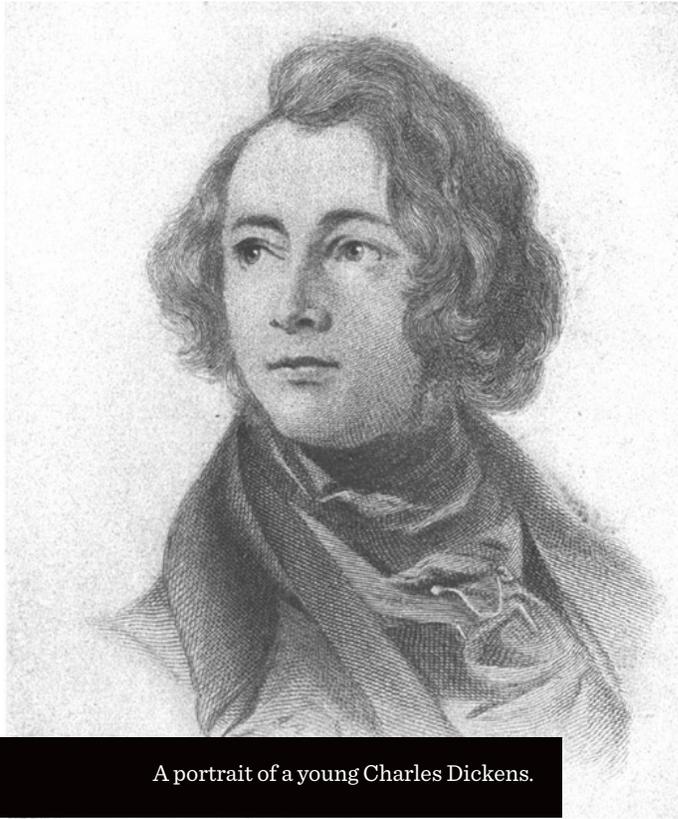
FEZZIWIG The owner of the warehouse business where Scrooge was an apprentice as a young man. This jolly man threw lively Christmas parties years ago and was a kind employer to Scrooge.

BELLE Scrooge's former fiancée. Though she loves him dearly, she becomes alienated by his obsession with money.

TINY TIM Bob Cratchit's youngest son, who is very sick but remains merry and grateful during the holiday.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: CHARLES DICKENS

READ MORE ABOUT HOW THE BRITISH NOVELIST DERIVED MUCH OF THE INSPIRATION FOR THE SETTING AND CHARACTERS OF *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* FROM HIS OWN LIFE.



A portrait of a young Charles Dickens.



An artist's depiction of Dickens' childhood work.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was no stranger to the kind of poverty that is graphically depicted in *A Christmas Carol*. Born in Portsmouth, on England's south coast, in 1812, Dickens enjoyed a comfortable childhood typical of an English middle-class family of the era. John Dickens, his father, worked as a clerk for the Navy Pay Office, which allowed Charles to go to private school for a few years. He spent much of his free time reading novels like *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tom Jones*, which taught him to carefully observe the people and events surrounding him. So when his father, unable to pay all the family's bills, ended up in debtors' prison, the seriousness of the event was not lost on the twelve-year-old Charles. His father wouldn't be released from the jail until the debt was paid, so as the oldest son, Charles began working ten-hour days at a shoe polish factory pasting labels to containers. The dangerous, dirty and cruel environment of the factory had a huge impact on his life. Dickens described the factory as "a crazy, tumble-down old house... literally overrun with rats." The stories he later wrote sought to enlighten readers about the conditions in which the poor had to live and work.

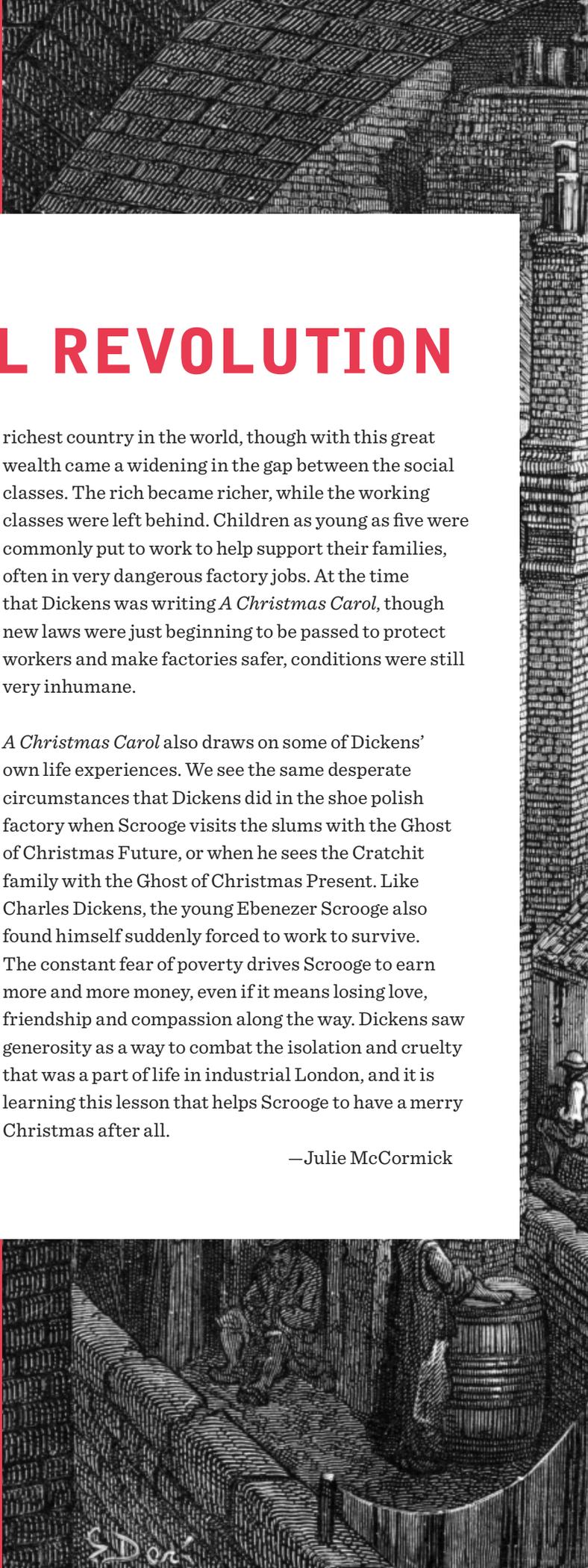
By a stroke of luck, John Dickens received an inheritance that he used to pay off his debt and get out of prison. Charles returned to school, but it wasn't long before the family's shaky finances forced him back to work, this time as a junior clerk at a law firm. In his spare time he learned a type of shorthand used by journalists, and left the law offices in order to become a freelance reporter. His time as a journalist further exposed Dickens to the disparity between the classes, an issue that would frequently appear in his novels as a way to encourage readers to do something about it.

Dickens eventually became the editor of a literary magazine and published many of his novels in monthly installments. He would later compile all the sections and publish a book. This format—known as serialization—is like modern television storytelling, where every week the audience finds out a little more about the larger story arc. In fact, the term "episode" comes from literature. Can you see individual episodes in *A Christmas Carol*?

Dickens was one of the most popular writers of the 19th century, both in his native England and abroad. His other famous works include *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*. He visited America twice—the first time was in 1842, just before the publication of *A Christmas Carol*. In the travelogue he published, *American Notes for General Circulation*, he criticized the sanitary conditions in American cities, proving that urban blight seen in his novels was not just confined to London.

During his second visit to America in November, 1867, Dickens became ill, possibly suffering from a stroke. He returned home to give farewell readings from his most beloved stories for the next two years, as his health continued to worsen. Dickens died in 1870 at age 58.

— Tara Duffy



CAROL IN CONTEXT: THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* during the Industrial Revolution, a period marked by the rapid development of industry that took place in England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. New machines, power sources and methods of production led to the creation of urban industrial centers and a whole new way of life. New machines such as the spinning jenny and power loom produced cloth in a fraction of the time it took to make it by hand. The Industrial Revolution also led to a shift in the methods of production. Instead of highly skilled craftsmen working on a product from start to finish, factories started dividing the work up into smaller tasks that would be completed by many people on an assembly line. In the past, one person might have taken weeks to make a shirt—spinning the cotton into thread, weaving it on a loom, cutting it and then sewing it by hand. Think about how much work that would be! With the help of assembly lines and new machines, however, a large team of unskilled laborers could make dozens or even hundreds of shirts in one day. This lowered the cost of everyday items and meant that people could use their time for other things, like education or leisure.

These new developments encouraged urbanization. By 1850, more than half of the population lived in cities and worked in industry. Britain was becoming the

richest country in the world, though with this great wealth came a widening in the gap between the social classes. The rich became richer, while the working classes were left behind. Children as young as five were commonly put to work to help support their families, often in very dangerous factory jobs. At the time that Dickens was writing *A Christmas Carol*, though new laws were just beginning to be passed to protect workers and make factories safer, conditions were still very inhumane.

A Christmas Carol also draws on some of Dickens' own life experiences. We see the same desperate circumstances that Dickens did in the shoe polish factory when Scrooge visits the slums with the Ghost of Christmas Future, or when he sees the Cratchit family with the Ghost of Christmas Present. Like Charles Dickens, the young Ebenezer Scrooge also found himself suddenly forced to work to survive. The constant fear of poverty drives Scrooge to earn more and more money, even if it means losing love, friendship and compassion along the way. Dickens saw generosity as a way to combat the isolation and cruelty that was a part of life in industrial London, and it is learning this lesson that helps Scrooge to have a merry Christmas after all.

—Julie McCormick



An engraving of the urban overcrowding in London.

HOW CAROL CHANGED CHRISTMAS

HOW DICKENS' TIMES AND HIS CLASSIC TALE TRANSFORMED THE HOLIDAY

People started celebrating Christmas as we know it right around the time that Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol*. One thousand, six hundred years ago, in the time of the Roman Empire, many civilizations celebrated Dies Natalis Solis Invicti (or, the “Birth of the Unconquered Sun”) at the end of December, by feasting and listening to music. In the Middle Ages, people kept this tradition by having large dinners, caroling and watching nativity plays. Puritans turned Christmas into a solemn religious occasion when they ruled Britain in the 17th century, but it was once again becoming the festive, cheery holiday it once was by the time Dickens had been born.

The Industrial Revolution also had a big impact on Christmas. It led to the emergence of an urban middle class and made family life more important. Now that people had more money and leisure time, they could spend it on gifts for their families and friends. The meaning of Christmas was starting to change, to become not only a time of fun, but also a time of love and generosity towards others. *A Christmas Carol* gives us a perfect example of this new holiday spirit through Scrooge’s transformation from miserly humbug to generous friend. People immediately loved the *Carol* story and started retelling it and acting it out, passing on this new idea of Christmas from one generation to the next.

So in many ways, Charles Dickens is responsible for Christmas as we know it!

Some other Christmas traditions that started at this time:

- The Christmas tree—Prince Albert, Queen Victoria’s husband, brought it to England with him from Germany.
- Christmas carols—though people had been singing carols for hundreds of years, some of our favorites, like “Good King Wenceslas,” were written at this time.

—Julie McCormick



The British royal family with their Christmas tree.



Cartoonist Thomas Nast's depiction of Santa Claus in the late 19th century has become the iconic image of the jolly old man.



John Preston as Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, 2017. Photo by Bill Brymer.



Michael Caine in *The Muppet Christmas Carol*.



Bill Murray in *Scrooged*.

WHAT A SCROOGE!

WHY DICKENS' CHARACTER HAS THRIVED THROUGH THE YEARS

Even though Ebenezer Scrooge was first introduced all the way back in 1843, the old guy is still as popular as ever more than 160 years later. His surname has entered our daily vocabulary to describe anyone who is cynical about the holiday season, who hesitates to part with even a penny, or who is just a generally unpleasant person. “Scrooge” is even an entry in the Merriam-Webster dictionary!

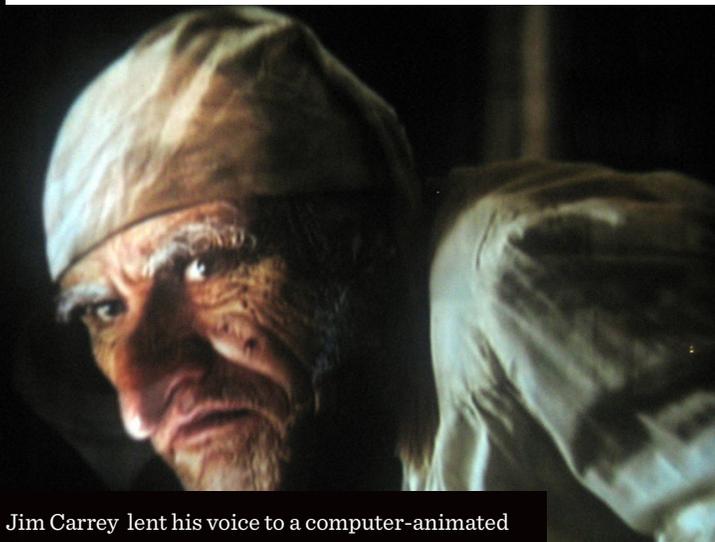
Scrooge's notoriety explains his many appearances and reinventions throughout the decades, in the numerous *A Christmas Carol* adaptations. Many famous actors have tackled the role of Scrooge as the traditional Victorian miser, like Michael Caine in *A Muppet Christmas Carol*, Jim Carrey in the computer-animated movie, Kelsey Grammer in a musical version, and Patrick Stewart in a TV movie of the classic tale. Others have reimagined Scrooge in modern-day contexts, like Bill Murray playing a greedy television executive in *Scrooged* or Vanessa Williams as the demanding singer, Ebony Scrooge, in *A Diva's Christmas Carol*.

The reason why Scrooge can transform into these contemporary jerks, and remains an icon, is that his bad attitude resonates in the 21st century as much as

it did in the 19th. While Dickens may have lived in and written about London circa the Industrial Revolution, the sentiment of putting business and wealth before people's well-being still prevails today. It seems like Scrooge, with his insatiable appetite for far more money than he needs and his complete disregard for the everyday people his business will hurt, would fit in perfectly on Wall Street. Dickens wrote not only to entertain readers, but to advocate for social reform by showing the hardships of the poor—issues that resonate today as much as they did more than a century and a half ago.

But don't worry—it's not all depressing! We usually think of Scrooge at the beginning of the story (the hostile old man) and not what he's like after he's visited by his deceased business partner and the three Ghosts. The reason Scrooge has survived and thrived through the ages is not just because he is a grumpy geezer, but because he is a grumpy geezer who changes. With the character of Scrooge, Dickens proposes that all humans, deep, deep down, are caring creatures. Some may just need a major wake-up call to realize it!

—Tara Duffy



Jim Carrey lent his voice to a computer-animated Scrooge.



Scrooge, as played by Patrick Stewart, has an epiphany.

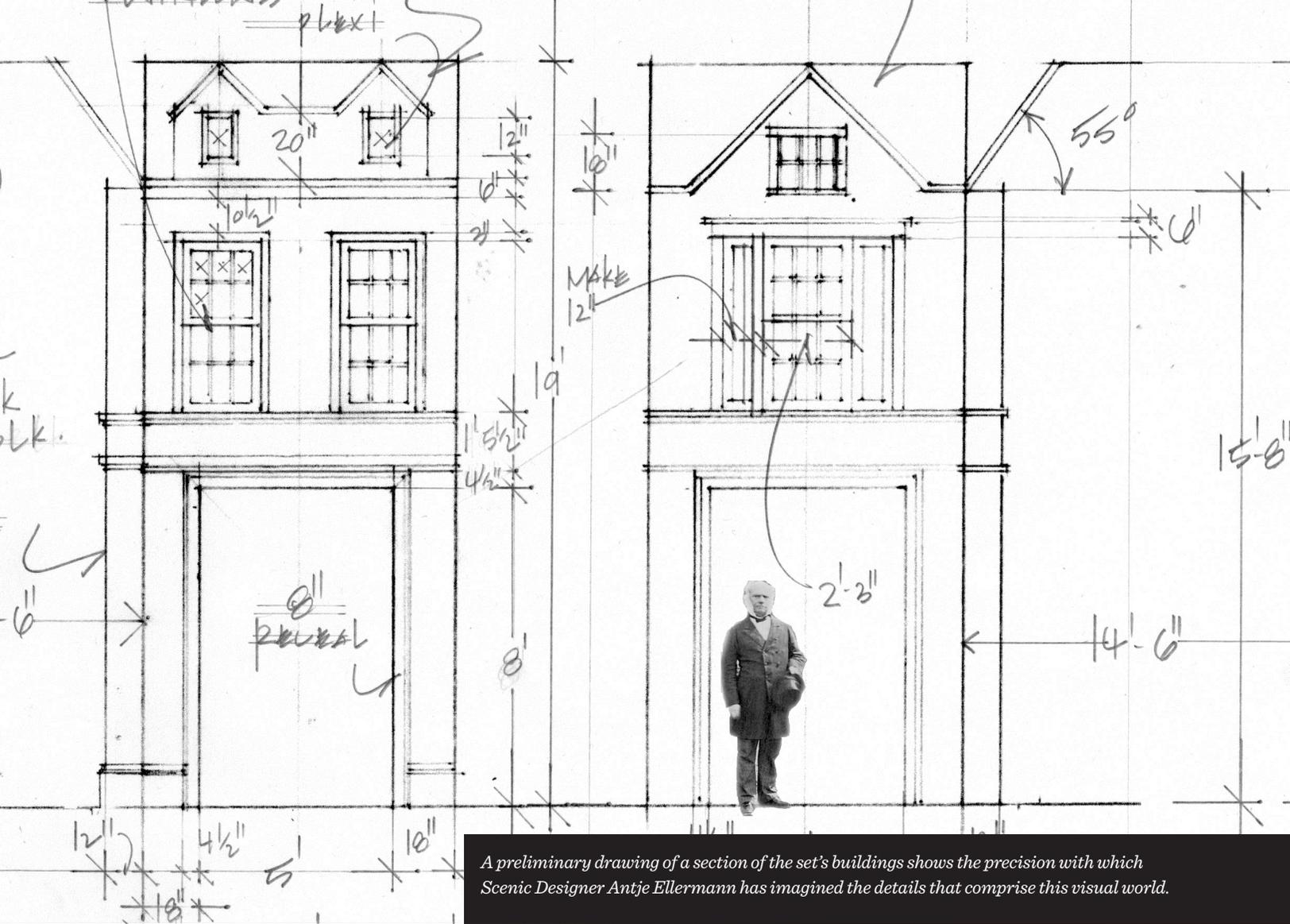


Redesigned costume for the Ghost of Christmas Present. Coat designed by Kristopher Castle. Photo by Philip Allgeier.

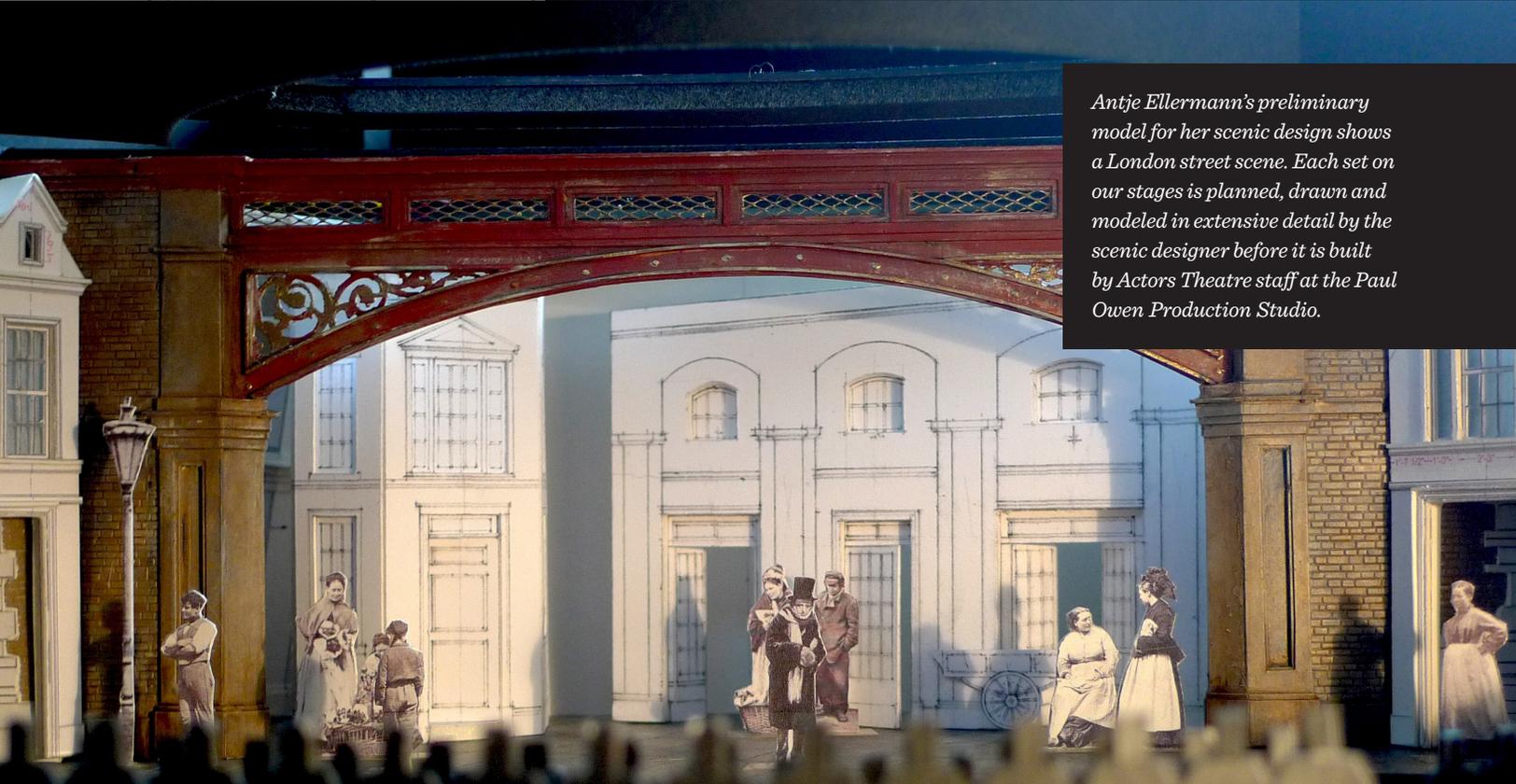


FIFTH THIRD BANK

***A CHRISTMAS
CAROL:*** NEWLY
IMAGINED FOR
TODAY



A preliminary drawing of a section of the set's buildings shows the precision with which Scenic Designer Antje Ellermann has imagined the details that comprise this visual world.



Antje Ellermann's preliminary model for her scenic design shows a London street scene. Each set on our stages is planned, drawn and modeled in extensive detail by the scenic designer before it is built by Actors Theatre staff at the Paul Owen Production Studio.

// We set out to devise a new production, authentic to our particular sensibility as artists, while also honoring the history of the piece here in Louisville. It was great to work with Drew Fracher, who has been so familiar with the show—and many of its returning actors—while also being open-minded and curious about what we might change. We’ve talked about *A Christmas Carol* being a ghost story, and I hope that it will be startling and scary at times. Apart from the ghosts and their appearances on stage, what I find frightening, and moving, is seeing the potential in one’s adult life to set the wrong priorities and to wind up alone and impoverished at the end of it.

This year we will be employing projections, designed by Philip Allgeier, to complement the physical scenery. One of the challenges we set for ourselves was to create a sense of London in the 1800s as well as moments when the stage appears empty. There will be scenes that look warm and lively, complete with food and Christmas decorations, and others that evoke how vast the world can be, for better or worse, around a greedy and solitary person. //

—Antje Ellermann, Scenic Designer for *A Christmas Carol*
(previous work at Actors Theatre includes *Appropriate*, *Gnit*,
and *Long Day’s Journey into Night*)



During the building process, the unfinished A Christmas Carol set stands in the Paul Owen Production Studio. Working from the scenic designer’s detailed drawings and specifications, Actors Theatre staff make all of the scenic elements at our 9th and Magnolia Production Studio before transporting them over to the theatre space at Third and Main Streets.



Top: Costume Designer Kristopher Castle holds his sketch of Scrooge's nephew Fred's suit, while actor Andy Gaukel models the fully realized creation. Bottom: Mrs. Fezziwig's beautifully detailed dress on view in the Costume Shop.



My goal as Costume Designer was to translate the vast societal shift, from the beginning of Scrooge's life until his epiphany, through the clothing. The 'present day' for our new production of *A Christmas Carol* is set in 1837, Queen Victoria's first year on the throne and fifty or so years into the Industrial Revolution (also, coincidentally, the same year the Old Bank of Louisville building—now Actors Theatre's lobby—was built). Scrooge's memories of his school days and of Fezziwig's party are set in the 1770s and 1780s, at the dawn of that Revolution, and during a somewhat simpler time, before rampant capitalist greed and machines had considerably devalued human labor.

The costume department built nearly every costume piece in this production—including those finishes that are outside of the everyday cutting and sewing: embroidery, trapunto, crocheting and knitting...along with all of the wigs, hats and accessories. It was important to me that as many costume pieces as possible be made by hand, as living proof that skilled human labor is vital and should be celebrated.

—Kristopher Castle,
Former Costume Director at Actors
Theatre and Costume Designer for
A Christmas Carol (Recent work
at Actors includes *Luna Gale*, *For
Peter Pan* on her 70th birthday, and
Wellesley Girl, among others.)



Kristopher Castle's colorful costume design renderings hang on the wall of the Costume Shop, complete with samples of the fabric choices for each piece of clothing.

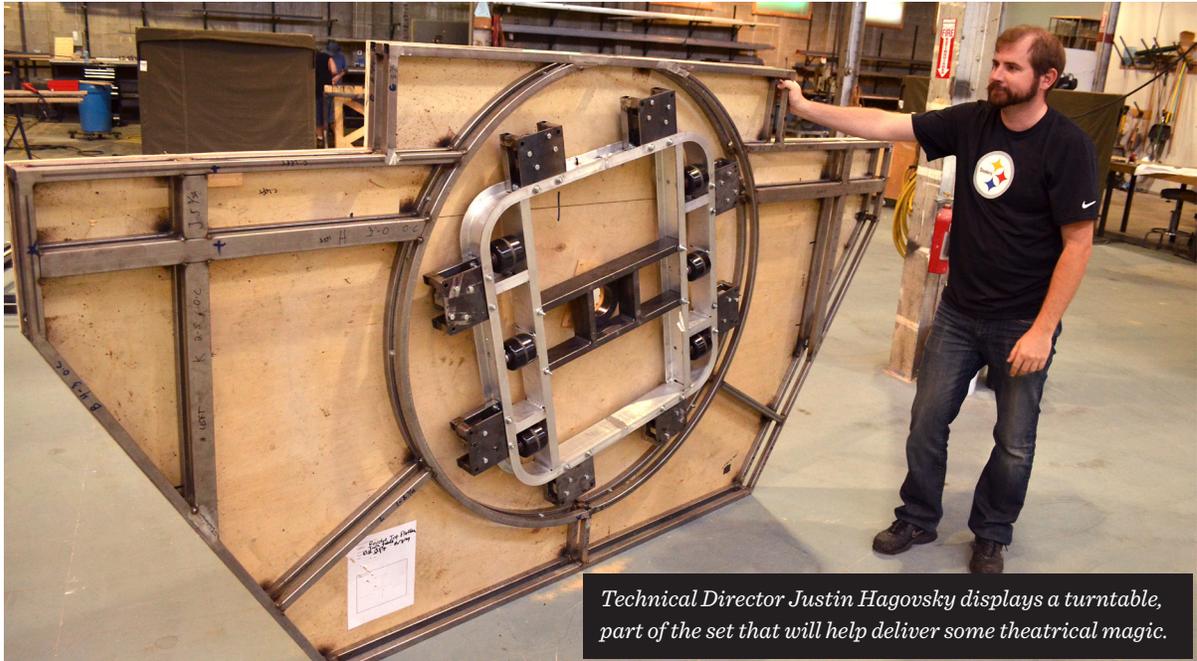


Festive carolers bring warmth to the wintry streets of London. Pictured are Celina Dean, Kate Hall, Alexandra Milak, Bailey Ramirez, Annalise Finch and Whit K. Lee.



Left: Ebenezer Scrooge (John Preston) watches his beloved Belle (Alexandra Milak) share a quiet moment with his younger self (Calum Bedborough). Right: The colorful extravagance of the holiday season comes to life with the charismatic Ghost of Christmas Present (Chaz Rose).

All photos by Bill Brymer, 2017.



Technical Director Justin Hagovsky displays a turntable, part of the set that will help deliver some theatrical magic.



Left: Properties Director Mark Walston, Props Carpenter Artisan Karl Anderson, and Scenic Designer Antje Ellermann work together to arrange an unsettling figure beneath a shroud on Scrooge's bed. Right: A piece of the set is carefully painted by Scenic Charge Kieran Wathen at the Production Studio. The color and texture of every detail is meticulously realized.

—compiled by Hannah Rae Montgomery and Amy Wegener
—photography by Philip Allgeier

WRITING PORTFOLIO

NARRATIVE: CCRA.W.3

In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge's encounters with the three spirits change his opinions about how he should treat his fellow human beings. Write about someone who has changed your mind about how you should behave with other people. What did this person do or say to change your point of view? How did your thinking and/or behavior change as a result of this experience?

ARGUMENTATIVE: CCRA.W.1

Although Charles Dickens wrote fictional novels, he based many of the circumstances on the struggles of the poor that he witnessed in London. If Dickens wrote *Carol* today, what contemporary issues would Dickens write about? Back up your claims by connecting modern social issues with your knowledge of the characters and circumstances of *A Christmas Carol*.

INFORMATIVE: CCRA.W.2

Write a review of the performance of *A Christmas Carol* that you saw at Actors Theatre of Louisville. Describe what it was like to watch the play—but be sure to write about more than just the plot. Think about how the production tells the story. Make the experience come alive for the reader by using lots of sensory details while writing about several of the play's elements, such as the costumes, lights, props, music, how the actors said their lines, and how the director realized his vision of the play. Let the audience decide for themselves if the play is worth seeing.

Actors Theatre of Louisville
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-SHOW

1. Have you ever reached out to someone who was intentionally cutting himself/herself off from a group of friends or family members? Did you feel like that person's behavior was justified? What were some ways you tried to get him/her to rejoin the group?
2. Seeing *A Christmas Carol* has become a holiday tradition for many people. What are some holiday traditions in your family? Do you think any of those traditions are related to events and actions in *A Christmas Carol*?

POST-SHOW

1. Because *A Christmas Carol* is such a beloved holiday classic, many people already know the plot before they see the production at Actors Theatre of Louisville. What did you know about the story before you went? Did seeing the play remind you of aspects of the story that you had forgotten, or never really thought about very much?
2. Can you pinpoint any defining moments in your past that have made you who you are today? What transformed in you in those moments? Do those moments seem different in retrospect? Can you gain any insight by reflecting on those moments?



The first Christmas card was produced in the Victorian era.

IF YOU LIKED A *CHRISTMAS CAROL*, CHECK OUT...

BOOKS:

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens
Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens
Great Expectations by Charles Dickens

FILMS:

It's A Wonderful Life (1946), dir. Frank Capra
The Muppet Christmas Carol (1992), dir. Brian Henson
The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993), dir. Henry Selick
Scrooged (1988), dir. Richard Donner

The cast of *A Christmas Carol*, 2017. Photo by Bill Brymer.



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