



**BRISTOL
OLD VIC**
AT CHRISTMAS

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

EDUCATION PACK

Introduction

FOREWORD

Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* in 1843 having been moved by his experience of Ragged Schools. He described these as schools for children who “*are too ragged, wretched, filthy, and forlorn, to enter any other place: who could gain admission into no charity school, and who would be driven from any church door. They will find some people willing to teach them something, and show them some sympathy, and stretch a hand out, which is not the iron hand of Law, for their correction.*”

There are many parallels with the life Dickens knew in Victorian London and today. Both were times of great technological development. Rapid progress left many people jobless, as machinery then and technology now start to replace people in the workplace. In both eras demand for jobs was high, so pay could be low with precarious job security. London in 1840 was the most advanced city in the world with a rapidly growing population.

The enormous amount of factory production meant that there was a constant black smog of smoke that hung over the city, poisoning the air. Buildings were grimy. Streets were crowded and over populated. There was no sanitary sewage system to cater for the massive influx of people and thus, disease was rife. Some of this is still familiar and some thankfully not.

Today, as then, poverty was rife and there was very little you could do to change your situation. Many people thought that poor people were poor because of bad decisions they had made: gambling, drinking, unwise spending, large families.

As teachers, we are in a position where we can challenge ideas and stimulate discussion within our classrooms while exploring a wide range of performance opportunities. This is a play where there is hope and the possibility of enlightenment. Christmas is celebrated as a time for the family and where it is possible to show generosity, whatever your means. People can change and social responsibility is something we can all show, whatever our circumstances – and that there is an obligation for those who are better off to look out for the less fortunate.

I hope this resource pack is useful. It is good to see Bristol Old Vic continuing to invest in teachers and audiences of the future. We need to fight for a Creative Education and its place in the lives of our young people in an increasingly disconnected world.

Geraldine Hill Male

CONTENTS

- 2.** Introduction
- 3.** Charles Dickens – His Life and Work
- 4.** Charles Dickens – The man who invented Christmas?
- 5.** *A Christmas Carol* – Plot Synopsis
- 6.** *A Christmas Carol* – Characters
- 7.** *A Christmas Carol* – At Bristol Old Vic
- 11.** British Sign Language – Wavy Language
- 12.** How to Write a Theatre Review
- 13.** Other Activities
- 14.** A Note from the Director
- 15.** A Note from the Designer
- 16.** A Note from the Composer

His Life and Works

“The most important thing in life is to stop saying ‘I wish’ and start saying ‘I will’.”

CHARLES DICKENS

CHARLES DICKENS – A TIMELINE		CHARLES DICKENS – A TIMELINE	
1812	Charles Dickens is born Charles John Huffman Dickens was born in Portsmouth. His father was John and his mother was Elizabeth.	1842	Charles visits America Charles visited America for the first time, and he returned later to tour again in 1867.
1814	Moves to London Charles’ youngest brother dies from a brain infection and the family move to London where Dickens starts school.	1843	The Christmas Carol is published After putting out several other stories, Charles wrote <i>A Christmas Carol</i> . It quickly became a Christmas classic.
1824	Charles provides for the family Charles was only 12 years old when his father went to debtor’s prison. Charles went to work at a shoe polish factory to support his family.	1849	David Copperfield Dickens starts <i>David Copperfield</i> , a much more autobiographical novel.
1827	Dickens moves up Charles left factory work and became the clerk for an attorney. A year later he starts writing for London newspapers as a freelance reporter.	1851	Dickens’ wife puts out a book Despite enduring a nervous breakdown, Catherine Dickens published a cook book. It was called <i>What Shall We Have for Dinner?</i> Dickens’ father dies.
1833	Charles’ first writing published It was a short story called <i>A Dinner at Poplar Walk</i> , and it was published in a monthly magazine.	1853	The first public reading Charles began doing public readings of his works. He did many before the doctors told him he had to stop for his health. <i>Bleak House</i> started.
1835	Charles gets engaged to be married Charles becomes engaged to a woman named Catherine, the daughter of a newspaper colleague. They marry the next year.	1854	More classics are written
1836	More writings are published Following the publication of <i>Sketches by Boz</i> , Charles publishes the first instalment of <i>The Pickwick Papers</i> .	1860	During this time Charles put out several classics like <i>Hard Times</i> , <i>Little Dorrit</i> , <i>Great Expectations</i> and <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> . Dickens becomes editor of <i>All the Year Round</i> , a position he holds for the rest of his life.
1837	A growing family The couple’s first son is born, followed by a daughter a year later, and another in 1839. Another son was born in 1841. Altogether, there were ten children born between 1837 and 1852. Eight lived to adulthood.	1858	Charles and Catherine separate Dickens met the actress Ellen (Nelly) Ternan the year before and as result of the affair, Charles separated from his wife Catherine.
1837	A classic is published The first instalment of <i>Oliver Twist</i> was published to instant commercial and critical success. Two years later <i>Nicholas Nickleby</i> was published as a serial novel.	1864	Poor Health Charles Dickens began having health problems. His doctors told him to slow down, that he was working too hard, but he wouldn’t listen.
		1870	Charles Dickens dies Charles died at the age of 58 years old and is buried in Poet’s corner in Westminster Abbey

The Man Who Invented Christmas

***“I will honour Christmas in my heart,
and try to keep it all the year.”***

CHARLES DICKENS

DICKENS:

A Christmas Carol and Charles Dickens have had a significant influence on how we celebrate Christmas. Ever since the Civil War in the seventeenth century the medieval traditions of Christmas had been in decline. Since the birth of the Industrial Revolution in the late 1700's, large factories had given little leisure time to their workers, and had certainly not honoured the 12 days holiday of old.

In 1840 Queen Victoria's German husband, Prince Albert, introduced the German custom of decorating the Christmas tree. This was followed by a rise in the popularity of singing carols and also the new fashion of sending Christmas Cards. Christmas became a holiday where wind, ice, and snow (Dickens' first eight Christmas' were white) were kept outside. A warm welcome was found indoors with parlour games, turkey, and family cheer. Alcoholic drinks were common as much to avoid contaminated water as to induce a feeling of cheer. Smoking Bishop (heated red wine, oranges, sugar, and spices) was a favourite.

Freddie's song reminds us that it is the time for good cheer, a time with family, happiness of laughter, love and song. As Dickens says in another novel, *The Pickwick Papers*;

'Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth; that can transport the sailor and the traveller, thousands of miles away, back to his own fireside and his quiet home!'

Dickens' name had become so synonymous with Christmas that on hearing of his death in 1870 a barrow girl in London asked, "Mr. Dickens dead? Then will Father Christmas die too?"

ACTIVITY: PARLOUR GAMES

Indoor games were very popular in Victorian times and are referred to as Parlour Games. Some are still popular, often played as Drama games, and some no longer played. Well known ones are Charades, Forfeits, 20 Questions and Blind Man's Bluff. Can you try and find some more? Do you recognise any of them?

Have they changed in any way? What games do you play indoors? Try asking some of your older relatives what games they played at Christmas. See if you can find any more you know and play them!

Plot Synopsis

Dickens was prompted to write *A Christmas Carol* as a morality tale having been 'perfectly stricken down' by the appalling revelations published in a parliamentary report on child labour and poverty in 1843. The story explores themes of social responsibility and the stark contrast between the lives of the rich and poor. Scrooge's journey is one of enlightenment and how we can all find the good in life, despite its hardships. Christmas is a time for family, generosity and forgiveness. Why do you think the story is still so popular as the book and play?

Ebenezer Scrooge, a rather unpleasant and mean minded old man, is sitting in his freezing cold counting-house on Christmas Eve with his clerk, Bob Cratchit. Scrooge's nephew, Freddie, arrives and invites him to his annual Christmas party. Scrooge reacts to the invitation and a request for a charitable donation with anger. "Bah! Humbug!" is his response to cheery greetings of "Merry Christmas!"

The ghost of his dead partner, Jacob Marley visits Scrooge later on Christmas Eve. Marley tells Scrooge what happened to his spirit after death. As punishment for his greed he has been condemned to wander the Earth weighted down with heavy chains. Scrooge is told that three spirits will visit him over the next three nights.

The first is the Ghost of Christmas Past who takes Scrooge on a journey into his past. Scrooge revisits times when he was happy such as his childhood school days, his apprenticeship with a merchant named Fezziwig, and his engagement to Belle before this was broken by his love for money. Scrooge is very moved by his experiences.

The Ghost of Christmas Present, seen as Mother Christmas, takes Scrooge to the Cratchit home. He is

again moved as he watches a family enjoy Christmas despite limited funds and the illness of Bob's son, Tiny Tim. The next stop is at his nephew Freddie's house, where again everyone is enjoying themselves so much that Scrooge wants to stay until the end. As the day passes, Mother Christmas shows Scrooge two starved children called Ignorance and Want. Finally, Scrooge notices a tiny figure with a scythe coming toward him.

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come takes Scrooge to a place where people are discussing the recent death of an unnamed man in a variety of ways. There is little affection for the dead man and Scrooge begs to know who it is. After pleading with the ghost, Scrooge is shocked to find out that it is him. He sees a number of scenarios from the future and then desperately begs the spirit to change these outcomes, and promises to change his ways and help others.

Scrooge realises that this is all in his imagination and that it is not too late to save Christmas Day. He rushes out onto the street feeling full of generosity and sends a giant Christmas turkey to the Cratchit house and then much to the guests' surprise, attends Freddie's party. Scrooge promises to honour the spirit of Christmas from now on and to use his imagination to make things better for people. Tiny Tim survives and Scrooge becomes his second father and promises to be a better person.

Characters

EBENEZER SCROOGE

Scrooge has run the firm of Scrooge & Marley since the death of his business partner Jacob Marley seven years ago. We also meet a younger version of Scrooge who is shown to us by the Ghost of Christmas Past. He has a sister called Little Fan and a father who shows him little affection when he is younger. He also has a nephew called Freddie.

LITTLE FAN

Ebenezer's sister who collects him from boarding school and takes him home.

MR FEZZIWIG AND THE FEZZIWIG FAMILY

Scrooge's first employer.

BELLE

She was Scrooge's fiancé but this relationship ends because of Scrooge's obsession with money. She marries Nicholas.

BOB CRATCHIT AND THE CRATCHIT FAMILY

He works for Scrooge and is very poor. He is married and has a son called Tiny Tim who is unwell.

JACOB MARLEY

Scrooge's dead business partner. He has been dead for seven years at the beginning of the story. His ghost visits Scrooge on Christmas Eve.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

The first spirit to visit Scrooge.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT (MOTHER CHRISTMAS)

The second spirit to visit Scrooge.

GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME

The third and final spirit.



At Bristol Old Vic

The play is a perennial favourite and has been performed at Bristol Old Vic in 1963, 1974, 1998, 2018 and 2019.

CHRISTMAS PAST: 1963

- The Big Freeze of 1963 was one of the coldest winters on record. Temperatures plummeted and lakes and rivers began to freeze over. Bristol came to halt under snowdrifts over a metre deep with roads blocked and villages cut off from December until February.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his “I have a dream” speech.
- President John F Kennedy assassinated.
- The Bristol Bus Boycott arose from the refusal of the Bristol Omnibus Company to employ black or Asian bus crews in Bristol.
- There was famine in Bangladesh and floods in Australia.



Images Courtesy of Bristol Archives

At Bristol Old Vic

CHRISTMAS PAST: 1974

- Violence continued in Northern Ireland and the Middle East.
- The Queen's Christmas speech to the nation: 'There can be few people in any country who are not anxious about what is happening in their own countries or in the rest of the world at this time. There have been floods and drought and famine: there have been outbreaks of senseless violence.'
- A bomb was set off in a Guildford pub killing 5 people and injuring 65. The M62 coach bombing in February killed 12 people and injured 38. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) claimed responsibility.
- Leeds United won the Football League. Manchester United were relegated.
- The fascist far-right National Front gained more than 10% of the vote of London elections.
- The first McDonald's opened in London.
- Kate Moss and Robbie Williams were born.
- Prices went up and up with the rate of inflation at 17%.



Images Courtesy of Bristol Archives

At Bristol Old Vic

CHRISTMAS PAST 1998

- The Ghost of Christmas Past symbolises memory.
- The Big Freeze of 1963 was one of the coldest winters on record. Temperatures plummeted and lakes and rivers began to freeze over. Bristol came to halt under snowdrifts over a metre deep with roads blocked and villages cut off from December until February.
- Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his “I have a dream” speech.
- President John F Kennedy assassinated.
- The Spice Girls and All Saints ruled – Girl Power was everywhere. The Union Jack dress worn by the Spice Girl Geri Halliwell was sold at Sotheby’s for £41,320.
- Google was founded.
- Nokia launched the 5110 mobile phone.
- The first Harry Potter novel (*Harry Potter and Chamber of Secrets*) was in bookshops.
- Tony Blair was Prime Minister and Cool Britannia was all the rage.
- The Good Friday Agreement was signed in Northern Ireland and brought peace.
- There was war in Serbia and Croatia amid claims of racial genocide.
- 1998 ended with the most serious financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s.
- The UK nearly joined the Euro.

ACTIVITY

Collect more information about the years of the past productions. Create a mind map or a spider diagram for each year. What are the key themes emerging from each year? Are there any similarities across the decades? Then create an imaginative response to this stimulus material. It could be a short devised performance, a poem or other piece of creative writing, some art work or a short film.



Images Courtesy of Bristol Archives

At Bristol Old Vic

ACTIVITY: MEET THE CAST

Ask yourself and your friends and family some of the questions we asked the performers.

- What does Christmas mean to you?
- Which of the three ghosts would you like to meet?
- If you could be any character in *A Christmas Carol*, which would it be?



Photography Geraint Lewis



CHRISTMAS YET TO COME

ACTIVITY

A Christmas Carol was performed at Bristol Old Vic in 2018 and again in 2019. Have a look at the different photographs from past productions and compare them with the current production. What are the similarities and what are the differences? Design a set or a costume for a production set in Christmas Yet to Come.

Wavy Language

In Bristol Old Vic's adaptation of *A Christmas Carol*, the actor playing Bob Cratchit uses British Sign Language (BSL).

Sign Language is a visual means of communication using gestures, facial expression and body language.

Sign Language is mainly used by people who are D/deaf or who have hearing impairments.

In the UK, the most common form of Sign Language is BSL. It has its own grammatical structure and syntax. BSL is the preferred language of around 145,000 people within the UK



Image British Sign Language

Explore this website www.british-sign.co.uk and practice with a friend. Improvise a short Christmas scene with a friend. Try with both of you speaking, one of you signing and then both of you signing. Notice the similarities and differences.

WAVY LANGUAGE

In this production BSL is called Wavy Language. Why? Who uses it?

Here are the gestures used to say Merry Christmas. Have a practice!



Image British Sign Language

Now try these signs and try and communicate with a friend.

How to Write a Review

Now write your own review after you have seen the play. Before you start, go online and find some reviews of *A Christmas Carol*, either the current production or some of the more recent ones. These will help you get a sense of how to approach your review.

Then on to your own individual review. You will have many opinions about the production and you must remember to justify any statements you make. Always give examples to support the point you are making, use details from the performance such as acting, set, sound, lighting.

INTRODUCTION

- Start with the essential information.
Make sure you mention:
- The full title of the play and the name of the playwright
- The date, time and location of the place you saw this production
- The name of the director
- Names of the main characters and the actors

PLOT

- Give a brief summary of the plot
- Which were your favourite sections?
- Was there a clear message for the audience in the play? What was it?
- Did the production hold the audience's interest?

THE DESIGN

- Describe the set and the position of the audience.
- How appropriate was this to the production and to the space it was being performed in? What did you think of it?
- How did it work for the performers and the audience? Exits and entrances?
- Describe how lighting was used to create atmosphere. Did it add anything to the production?
- How did the designer use music, singing and sound? Did it add to the atmosphere?
- Did the music choices add to the play?
- What were the costumes like? Did they help to express the characters or themes of the play?
- Don't forget to add labeled illustrations and diagrams to support your statements.

THE ACTING

- Describe some of the performances. Choose a couple of characters and analyse the acting: voice/body/facial expression/gesture/proxemics
- voice and movement choices. How did the actors use their bodies differently to show the characters they played and how they felt?
- How did they relate to other characters?
- Give some examples of some actors do that particularly impressed you and justify your choices with examples from the play.

SUMMARY

Was it a successful production? Were you interested and involved all the way through? Would you recommend the play to other people? If so who? You need to pull together all your opinions make a nice punchy final paragraph.

EXAMPLES

"There is greatness striding through its heart"

BRISTOL POST, 2018

"Dickens' classic is as haunting and heart-catching as they come and by the end of this Christmas Carol you will be welling up with festive cheer"

WHATS ON STAGE, 2018

Other Activities

1. A CHRISTMAS CAROL – THE FILM

Ebenezer Scrooge has appeared in over 22 films since the first silent adaptation in 1902. He has been played by the Muppets, Jim Carey, Patrick Stewart and the rapper Ice Cube.

Write a list of the characters in the play. Then try and find modern actors who might play them today.

Storyboard a modern version and create a devised performance from this.

2. TELL THE STORY!

In groups of about 5, tell the story of *A Christmas Carol* in 1 minute. Give yourselves 3 minutes to do this. Then repeat in 30 seconds – 10 seconds – 1 second. What do you notice?

Create five still images to summarise the play. Add thought tracking and a line of narration.

Hotseat the characters. Put them into a range of scenarios – the park, a shop and see what happens. Create short scenes from this.

3. ABSTRACT CHARACTERS

Ignorance: People like Scrooge, who ignore the problems of the poor, create enormous social problems. They create children like this.

Want: because the population has ‘boomed’ in Victorian times, many people want for the basic necessities such as food and shelter.

Can you create a costume design for these two characters?

The ghosts: There are four ghosts in the play. Can you name them?

Create a physical character of each ghost and try not to make them clichés or stereotypes. Take this section of the script and bring it to life:

Scrooge: But pray, Jacob... don't be hard on me... don't be... flowery.

Marley: You will be haunted by three spirits

Scrooge: I-I think I'd rather not.

Marley: Without them you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. The path of agony unspoken. Expect the first tonight, when the bell tolls One. Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third, upon the next night.

4. CHORUS AND ENSEMBLE WORK

Here are the words for the first requiem

A tolling bell. Enter a chorus of ghosts

SONG 1: REQUIEM

Hear us we cry // From the realms of death

Hear us we cry // For the life unloved

Hear us we cry // With tears of ice

Hear us we cry // As we're torn apart

We are the dead

We are beyond love

We can no longer touch the human heart

In groups of around 4 try saying this in different ways to convey the melancholy mood. Look out for timing and movement and keep focused. Try in unison (all together) and cannon (one voice after another) and a mixture of the two. Add echoes and variations of pitch, pace, volume and tone. Choreograph some movement to add to this.

5. CREATE A LOCATION AND AN ATMOSPHERE

A Christmas Carol is set in London.

Could it be set in Bristol?

It is important to move quickly through the play to keep the pace up.

Write a list of the different locations in the play.

Do we see them once or on many occasions?

Can you choose one of these locations and create a set using what you have to hand – chairs, pieces of fabrics, hand held props. Anything you can get easily!

Can you then smoothly change this basic set into another location with minimal impact?

Add some music and movement and see what happens. Can you tell the story in this way?

6. A CHRISTMAS CAROL IN SIX PROPS

These can be used to help focus our thinking about both the contemporary social issues and also the historical themes of the play.

Find 6 props or images of props which are used in the play. Use these as starting points for an improvised piece of drama.

7. THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS

How far can ‘*A Christmas Carol*’ be regarded as a blueprint for the perfect Christmas?

What does the perfect Christmas look like? Does it exist?

Write a short script or story called ‘The Perfect Christmas’.

Can you do this and manage to have any dramatic tension? Do you need to change it and add a subtext or a different ending?

A Note from the Director



I cannot think of a story that is more appropriate and necessary at the present time than Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. When I think of the issues Dickens was writing about, it strikes me that the UK has moved on very little from his time. Anyone who has spent any time outside this glorious theatre on King Street will be especially aware of the epidemic of homelessness that's sweeping across our country. With social division and child poverty on the rise, there is an increasing number of people falling through the cracks of an uncaring system and becoming reliant on food banks and charity.

But alongside this social commentary, Dickens is a brilliant storyteller, and this is first and foremost a compelling tale. The simple story – of Ebenezer Scrooge unearthing the seed of his greed and being offered a way to redeem himself – is a huge reminder of what it is to be human, and what our contribution to humanity might be.

With all this in mind, our story is very much Dickens' story, but the telling of it is rooted in the here and now.

Tom Morris' work has always had a huge impact on me, and the process of working with him on this adaptation has been inspiring. He consistently challenges my thinking, opening up possibilities, while interrogating what the heart of this story really is for us. He's also been very open and responsive to the discoveries that we've made in the rehearsal room. This has allowed us the space to play, and through the thoughts and offers from the actors, the script has evolved throughout rehearsals.

For me, the joy of creating theatre is the process of collaboration. And returning to our beloved Bristol Old Vic with the dream-team of amazing composer Gwyneth Herbert and innovative designer Tom Rogers (the team that brought you *The Snow Queen* in 2016), the process has been particularly joyful. It feels like we've been developing, inside and outside of the room, a seamless dialogue in which the design and music are completely integrated into the heart of the storytelling. The music is the emotional core of the show, the design transports us into the imaginative realm and, in approaching a story which is about connecting our hearts and minds, the process has become emblematic of the narrative itself.

Our *A Christmas Carol* is a celebration of the imagination. And only through the awakening and nurturing of the imagination can empathy truly be discovered and developed. At a time when the creative arts are being diminished in our schools and in the public realm, we wanted to make a show which challenges this. For it is through arts and creativity that we find a connection to our humanity and the humanity of others. I hope we have made something joyful that appeals to our sense of community; something to remind us at this busy time of year that the world could be a little kinder and in this, we all have an important part to play.

Lee Lyford

A Note from the Designer



A Christmas Carol is a classic tale that for many people may evoke 'chocolate box' images of Victorian London, with snow-capped roofs and twinkling bottle-glass shop windows. We wanted to take a different approach, particularly as this was a brand new adaptation (by Bristol Old Vic's own Artistic Director Tom Morris). As a creative team it has been our intention from the outset to find inventive solutions to move beyond a stuffy period piece. Our ultimate aim is to present something that has a resonance with a contemporary audience, whilst staying true to the language and heart of the original Dickens' story.

We have, therefore, looked to include contemporary visual references alongside more traditional features. As you will see, the design incorporates iconic Victorian street lamps and wrought iron railings – but we are subverting the more conventional visual presentation of the period setting by – quite literally – turning these elements on their heads. And this topsy-turvy and often anachronistic approach (we're not averse to using modern shopping trolleys alongside 19th Century furniture!) continues throughout the set and costume design, as it does in all the many other areas of the production.

The central idea of the set design is a stripped-back aesthetic – a raw, skeletal scaffolding structure, peppered with traditional window frames that hint at the dark, winding streets of a gloomy Victorian city, without slavishly recreating them.

We are very much honouring the fact that this is a theatrical presentation of this story, intentionally revealing the mechanics of the theatre as much as we can, rather than the more traditional practice of attempting to mask it from the audience.

In stark contrast to this 'poor theatre' approach, I was interested in exploring the use of some overtly decorative elements, that play directly against the brutal modernity of the surrounding structure. As our adaptation remains strongly rooted in the language of Dickens' world, it felt important to retain some individual design elements that would ground it firmly in the 19th Century. As a designer, I've been

drawn to the atmospheric possibilities of the Victorian Gothic style, and here was the perfect opportunity for me to play with that rich aesthetic, within a really strong narrative framework. This led to the creation of the ornate four poster bed, the grandiose Gothic staircase and Scrooge's imposing front door – all lovingly re-created by the skilled in-house team of builders and painters. These pieces lend a Gothic ambience which helps to bring alive the more eerie elements of the story. It is, after all, a tale of ghosts and things that go bump in the night.

From the very first draft of the script, one of the things that really intrigued me was the idea of the ensemble as a chorus of spectres who manipulate Scrooge and his surroundings throughout the play. This opened the door to an exploration of the story's darker carnivalesque possibilities – reflected, in particular, in the exaggerated shapes of the costume designs. I think this anarchic 'side-show' style – and the freedom for invention that comes with it – are the foundations upon which we've built the visual world for our telling of this tale.

The story takes us on Scrooge's journey – from an emotionally-starved darkness into the light of imagination – and I very much wanted this to be reflected aesthetically. We start in a world of gloomy monochrome (perhaps not your standard Christmas show palette!) but by the end, Scrooge's learning gives us the potential for a riotous explosion of colour that bursts onto the stage. And the costumes themselves (beautifully realised by my wonderful friends at Bristol Costume Services) grow gradually more colourful as Scrooge becomes enlightened by his journey.

After working together on *The Snow Queen* in 2016, it's been a joy to return to Bristol Old Vic, and its brilliant team, for the Christmas production, along with my favourite collaborators (and best buddies) – Lee Lyford (Director) and Gwyneth Herbert (Composer – and the rest). I hope you enjoy the results of our continued collaboration, and our new take on this timeless, classic tale.

Tom Rogers

A Note from the Composer



The thing I love most about the story is that it's full of heart. As we follow poor, meanie Scrooge on his path towards emotional awakening, we ourselves are flipped from fear to laughter to heartbreak and back again... and all this makes for a rich and dynamic musical journey.

Our musical version of the story opens with a Requiem of lost souls, bemoaning their plight as they trudge their weary way from the underworld, each footstep driven by a relentless blow from Scrooge's hammer. It's a dark and eerie beginning for what is, after all, a ghost story – but just as the last groans die away we're swept up and off and into Scrooge's world of busy business. The music here is inspired by the unfaltering rhythms of his working life – the slice of the guillotine, the clink of the money – each stamp and pass and pile of paper. But this mechanical regularity is interrupted as the outside world starts to intrude – charity collectors bounce their way through a cheerful pitch, Freddie breezes on with a rush of melodic laughter, carol singers creep round and sneak in and pipe up with chirpy optimism – all to be banished by an increasingly furious “BAH HUMBUG!!!”

This constantly shifting musical landscape sets the tone for the whole show... Marley's “*Link By Link*” is, of course, both a sinister warning and a terrifying call to arms, but I also really wanted to give it a sense of impishness. This year's new arrangement has been particularly inspired by the timbre of Ewan's voice and the playfulness of his characterisation.

In fact that leads me to one of the most joyful aspects of making – and revisiting – this piece for me: so much of the music itself has been born out of a sense of play, in the rehearsal room with wonderful director Lee Lyford and our extraordinary actors. New melodies have grown from the language of their movements, the flow

of their speech, the characters that have been re-found and refined.

The mean, brutal crankiness of John's Scrooge at the beginning of his journey has led to darker textures that underscore the opening scenes. The tenderness of his sibling relationship with Little Fan – alongside Becca's pixie-like, heart-drenched voice – has given rise to a brand new song that runs through the very heart of the piece itself. And the brilliant musicality of the entire cast has inspired new harmonically rich, intricate vocal arrangements.

Working with and learning from Stephen this year has been a particularly special experience. When I first witnessed our original Bob Cratchit, Nadia Nadarajah, speaking through BSL, the mischievous ballet of her movements instantly sung to me – I could hear melodies intertwining, rhythms in conversation, crescendos and diminuendos... as if she were conducting a silent symphony. Stephen has his own, beautiful and impishly intimate way of signing which has come to inform a whole new dimension to the musical language.

Then of course we have the Rubber Wellies, who've been a part of my musical family for nearly 20 years. As well as being the most delightful lads with about a hundred instruments between them, they are such generous and inventive musicians with a great, natural instinct for story. Working together over the years we've developed a short hand that enables us to communicate so easily in the room, and their rascally, folky sensibility runs all the way through the show. It's a joy to be back in “scaffolding band corner” with them again, and this year, we've become a more integrated element of the onstage action!

Another thing that's really inspired the musical palette is Tom Rogers' extraordinary designs that play with concepts of dark, gothic Victoriana. Twisted music hall is dragged over the grubby cobblestones and spiked with a dash of the spooky, and as colour might start to invade the dusty greys and blacks, so the twinkling music of imagination may find itself flooding in.

In terms of what people take away from the show, I hope their bellies rattle with the freedom of releasing their inner fools. That they carry Belle's melody in their hearts long after the last beat has gone. That their minds are filled with all the many, different stories that make up a Christmas in Bristol... and that they pass them over... pass them on... For our world, like that of Dickens', is full of light and darkness, joy and sadness. And it's only through opening our eyes, our ears and our hearts to it all that we become vividly alive, and – with a little kindness, and a dash of imagination – might have the power to bring colour to the world.

Gwyneth Herbert