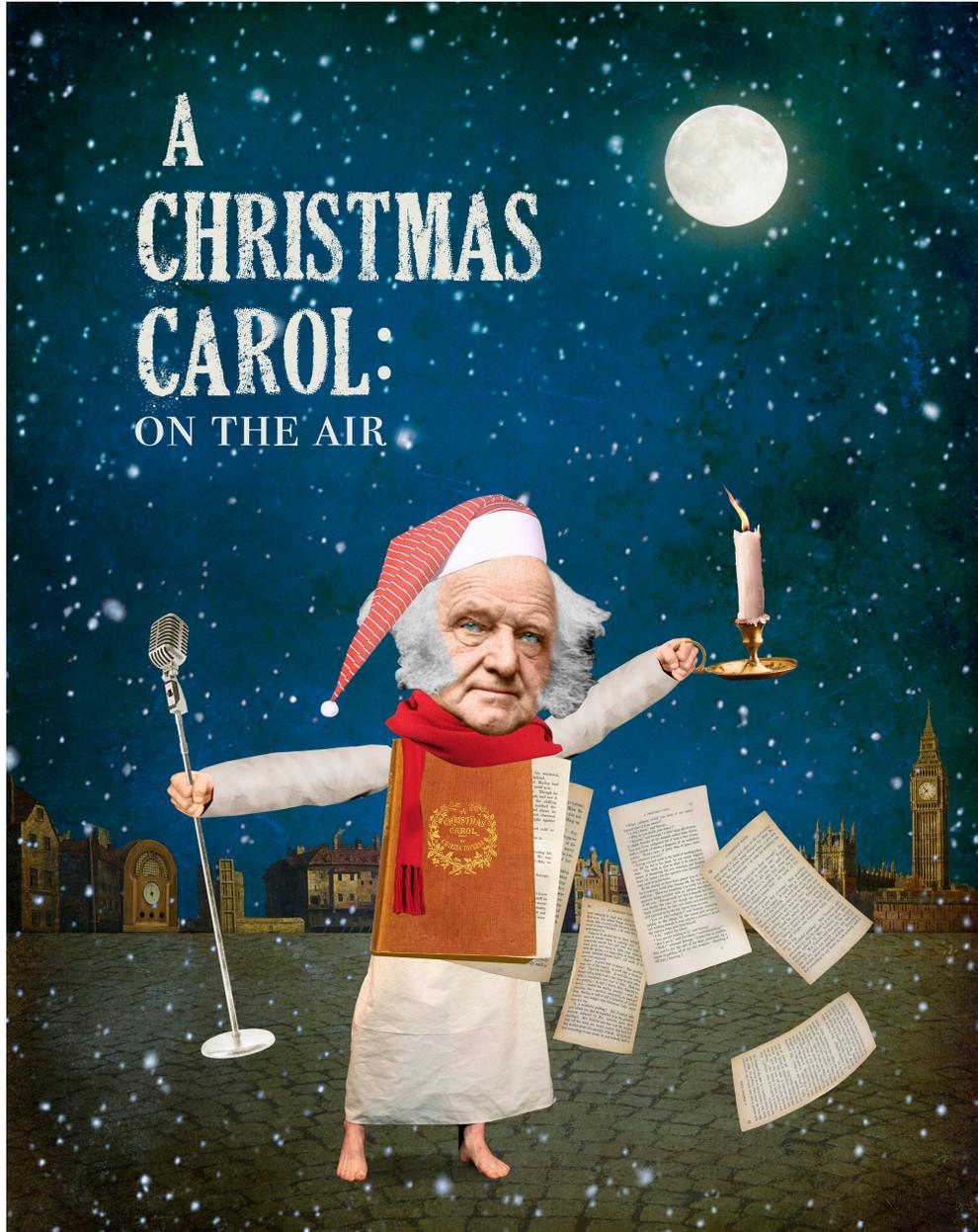


Pacific Theatre Presents
A CHRISTMAS CAROL: ON THE AIR
By Peter Church



DISCUSSION GUIDE

10 Things You Didn't Know About A Christmas Carol

1. The great historian Thomas Carlyle went straight out and bought himself a turkey after reading Dickens's tale of the redemption of Scrooge. Novelist William Thackeray, not always an admirer of Dickens, called A Christmas Carol a "national benefit"; one American entrepreneur gave his employees an extra day's holiday. Publication had been a huge success, selling in excess of 6,000 copies. Dickens had begun writing his "little Christmas book", as he called it, in October 1843 and worked on it feverishly for six weeks, finishing it at the end of November, just in time for Christmas.
2. As he wrote, Dickens wept and laughed and wept again and would often take long night walks through London, covering anywhere between 15 or 20 miles "when all sober folks had gone to bed". When he completed the book, he "broke out", as he himself described it, "like a madman".
3. The story is loosely based on Gabriel Grubb, a character in The Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton, which appeared in Dickens' first published novel, The Pickwick Papers. In the story, a gravedigger determined not to make merry at Christmas, is kidnapped by goblins and convinced to change his ways.
4. Two months after the publication of A Christmas Carol, Parley's Illuminated Library pirated it. Dickens sued and won his case. The pirates, on the other hand, simply declared themselves bankrupt, leaving Dickens to pay £700 in costs, equal to £56,364 today.
5. Within six weeks of its publication, the book hit the London stage in an adaptation by Edward Stirling, which ran for more than 40 nights before transferring to New York's Park Theatre. Also in the same city, a musical version was staged which was hampered badly on opening night, when brawling broke out, drowning out the bass drum that ushered Marley's ghost as he rose through a trapdoor.
6. In 1853, 10 years after its publication, Charles Dickens gave the first public performance in Birmingham's town hall. He performed it in front of a rapturous crowd of 2,000, all working people from the town, and it lasted just under three hours. Before this time, no great author had performed their works in public and for profit, which many thought beneath Dickens' calling as a writer and a gentleman.

7. On performance days Dickens stuck to a rather bizarre routine. He had two tablespoons of rum flavoured with fresh cream for breakfast, a pint of champagne for tea and, half an hour before the start of his performance, would drink a raw egg beaten into a tumbler of sherry. During the five-minute interval, he invariably consumed a quick cup of beef tea, and always retired to bed with a bowl of soup.
8. He always presented himself to his audience in full evening dress, with a bright buttonhole, a purple waistcoat and a glittering watch-chain. His stage equipment consisted of a reading desk, carpet, gas lights and a pair of large screens behind him to help project his voice forward.
9. Without a single prop or bit of costume, Dickens peopled his stage with a throng of characters, it is said, "like an entire theatre company... under one hat". The arrival of Scrooge always created a sensation: Dickens became an old man with a shrewd, grating voice whose face was drawn into his collar like an ageing turtle. During the Fezziwigs' party, his fingers would dance along the reading table in a mad array of little hops and pirouettes. It is reported that the audience "fell into a kind of trance, as a universal feeling of joy seemed to invade the whole assembly".
10. Dickens began with *A Christmas Carol*, and he ended with it. His last reading of the little book took place in London at St James's Hall, on March 15, 1870. At the end of the performance, he told his audience: "From these garish lights, I vanish now for evermore, with a heartfelt, grateful, respectful, and affectionate farewell." There was a stunned silence, broken by a tumult of cheering, hat-waving and the stamping of feet. With tears streaming down his face, Dickens raised his hands to his lips in an affectionate kiss and departed from the platform for ever. He died three months later, aged 58.

Originally published in *The Telegraph*:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/charles-dickens/9724579/Gen-things-you-never-knew-about-Charles-Dickens-A-Christmas-Carol.html>

ABOUT CHARLES DICKENS

Charles Dickens was born February 7, 1812 in the southern coast of England. As a child, his family moved to Camden Town, then a poor neighbourhood in London. His father was sent to a debtor's prison in 1824, when he was only 12 years old, forcing him to take work in a boot-blackening factory. He later described feeling abandoned and betrayed by adults who were supposed to take care of him.

He was briefly allowed to go back to school at age 15 before being pulled out to work as an office boy - a job that led to work as a freelance reporter at the law courts of London where he witnessed much of life for those on the edges of justice.

As his writing career developed, his past life as an impoverished child, working in factories, and witnessing the realities of poor houses, inspired much of his writing.



Source: <http://www.biography.com/people/charles-dickens-9274087#fame>

ABOUT LIVE RADIO PLAYS

Radio Dramas performed in English date back to 1921 in America with the brief sketch *A Rural Line on Education* that aired on Pittsburg's KDKA. Quickly after that, radio dramas began to proliferate, with entire Broadway musical comedies taking to the air by February 1922.

The first regular radio serial drama came from New York's WGU in the fall of 1922, with the WGU Players performing a weekly broadcast of full-length stage plays. By 1923 there were over 20 listed regular radio dramas available.

It became clear in the mid-1930s that adapting stage plays for the radio did not always work well, despite the BBC producing more plays than London's West End.

Audiences ate up radio drama – both over the air and attending live recordings of radio shows, until the introduction of television in the 1950s. This led to a steep decline in radio drama, as most broadcasters decreased or completely cut radio drama programming by the 1960s.

Since the year 2000 with the advent of "New Media", radio drama has enjoyed a revival. Online streaming media like podcasts have made radio drama more accessible and available on demand, leading to both the re-broadcast of old serials and the creation of new programs.



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radio_drama

PACIFIC THEATRE'S RADIO TROUPE

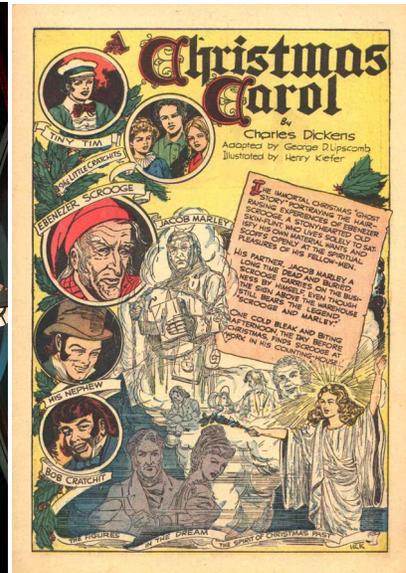
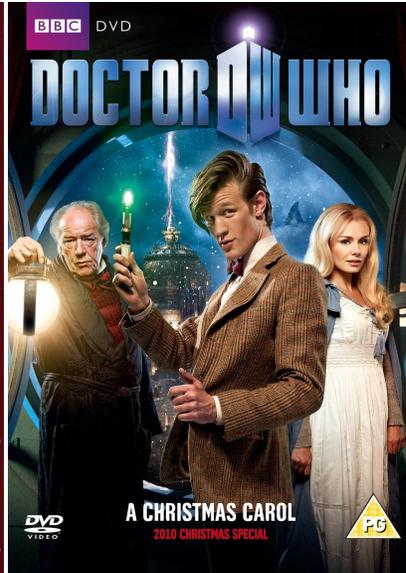
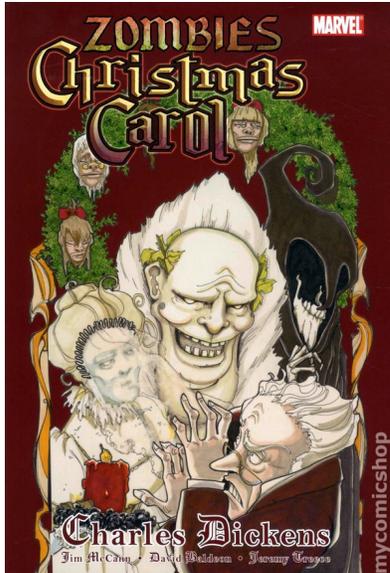
Last year Pacific Theatre delved into the world of radio drama with *It's a Wonderful Life Radio Show*. This year, the company has assembled the same creative team with the idea that the same radio studio stages annual Christmas shows, adapting a different classic for the airwaves each time. This year, they are performing *A Christmas Carol*.

Returning from last year's line up are Peter Church, Chris Lam, Diana Squires, and Kirsty Provan on stage, Sarah Rodgers directing, and the design team of: Amy McDougall, Kougar Basi.



A CHRISTMAS CAROL, ADAPTED

There have been a long string of books, movies, plays, comics, and other adaptations of this famous story. Here are images from a few:



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This story has been produced and adapted in abundance – why do you think that is?
2. Do you think Charles Dickens is successful (in the original story) in his efforts to highlight the needs of the less fortunate, and the opportunity for the rich to help them?
3. Do you think audience members walk away from the theatre changed in any way?
4. This adaptation presents the piece through the lens of a 1940s Radio Play – what do you think that adds, or takes away from, the story?
5. What are your thoughts on the use of live Foley (sound effects) in the piece? How did seeing where the sounds came from affect your experience of the piece?
6. Discuss the use of the language in the piece.