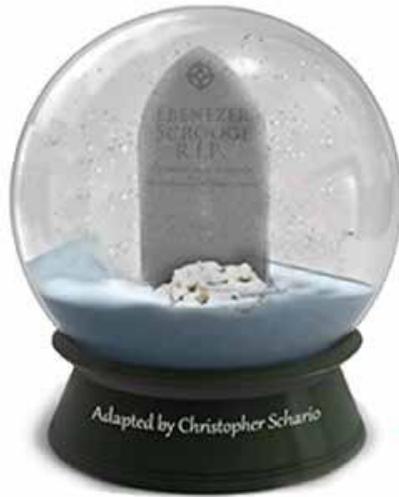


A Christmas Carol

By Charles Dickens



Nov. 28 - Dec. 21, 2014

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by Robin Minnick

This time of year in 1843, Charles Dickens could be found standing before a mirror, face suitably drawn, brow furrowed. His voice is deliberately high-pitched, re-arranging words of dialogue. He repeats them several times with different inflections, scribbling a change - the actor's interpretation informing the writer's words.

Descendant Gerald Dickens relates how his great-great-grandfather developed characters before the looking glass, later taking his works to the stage. Although it wasn't written as a play, there were eight dramatic adaptations of "A Christmas Carol" before the book was two months old. Begun in September, written in under six weeks, and published less than a week before Christmas, the novella sold out its initial printing of 6,000 copies in four days.

Astonishing, since there was little interest in a jolly Christmas holiday at that time. Although Christmas had once been celebrated widely and well, no one went about with "Merry Christmas" on their lips in mid-Victorian times (in part because Dickens hadn't

yet coined the phrase). His memories attested to a time when Christmas was a festive occasion full of merriment, but contemporary culture looked away from that...much as it looked away from the poor and hungry.

What Dickens initially conceived to write was a political tract warning Londoners to their lot, if they did not help the needy. He knew from his own childhood the deprivation a child endured when forced into the workhouse. Circumstances were so bleak when he began "A Christmas Carol" that half the funerals in London were for people under ten - children.

Dickens wanted to save the children. Instead of a ranting pamphlet that could be cast aside, Dickens thought to reach broader audiences by extolling the virtues of caring and generosity, of goodwill and "God bless us every one!" "A Christmas Carol" bears a clear message about "keeping Christmas" that has struck hearts throughout the years.

Today, Gerald Dickens tours the world presenting shows of and about Charles Dickens's works. He delivers his one-man performances with what could be the same charismatic energy of his ancestor.

In this year's Gilbert Theater production of "A Christmas Carol," director Robyne Parrish uses a dozen actors in an adaptation, she finds, "to be more the speed here at the Gilbert. It is intimate, dark and family-friendly. The actors are showcased in a way that is challenging to them and exciting for us, in that they play multiple roles throughout the play."

Some call Charles Dickens the father of modern Christmas. Would he disdain our creeping pre-Christmas sales and holiday decorations? Maybe. Maybe not. People are drawn to shiny baubles and brilliant lights. Such things spark secret plans, put carols on our lips, and ready us to empty our pockets for loved ones and needy alike. Maybe Dickens' response would be, "God bless us, every one!"

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