

# EVERY CHRISTMAS STORY EVER TOLD (AND THEN SOME!)

by Michael Carleton, Jim FitzGerald,  
and John K. Alvarez

original music by Will Knapp

## ACT I

*(Stage is dark. The sound of sleigh bells and distant singing of Christmas carols. A spotlight comes up center stage, and JIM strolls into the light. He is dressed to the Victorian nines – frock coat, long scarf, fingerless gloves, top hat – straight out of Dickens. He carries a large, leather-bound volume, which he opens and proceeds to read from, in grand style.)*

JIM. Marley was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. And Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to.

Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail...

*(As he reads, JOHN enters and stands in the edge – very un-dramatically – of the light, looking at JIM. He is dressed as Marley's ghost – wrapped in rags, dragging chains, white make-up. JIM notices, but tries to ignore him, carrying on with the reading.)*

I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadiest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it.

JOHN. Hey, Jim...pssst. Hey...

JIM. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

JOHN. Jim...I can't do this.

JIM. Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. (*Whispering out of the side of his mouth, trying to carry on:*) What?!

JOHN. I can't do this.

JIM. (*Still trying to carry on, forcing a smile and speaking sotto voce:*) What are you talking about?

JOHN. This. I can't do *this*. I can't do another Christmas Carol.

JIM. John, we ARE doing Christmas Carol. Right now. Here. There are people here. Watching us. Doing Christmas Carol...

JOHN. I know, man, but...

JIM. We've rehearsed Christmas Carol for three weeks. These people are expecting Christmas Carol. It's a Beloved Holiday Classic. Now go...

*(He tries to carry on as if nothing has happened.)*

Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner...

JOHN. But it's been done to death!

JIM. What!?

JOHN. Everybody's seen it. Everybody knows it...God bless us, everyone... Bah humbug... Nice Ghost, Fat Ghost, Scary ghost... yadda, yadda, yadda... I've done a gazillion Christmas Carols. First time I did it I was Tiny Tim, now I'm the old dead guy... I just can't do it again...

JIM. This is *not* the time to bring this up...

JOHN. And what makes it a "Beloved Holiday Classic"? I mean, it's not like I automatically think "Christmas Carol" every December... I mean, yeah, I *do*, but that's just because every theatre I've ever worked at does it, and I'm just doing this one because I need the insurance weeks...

(MICHAEL enters, dressed as the ghost of Christmas present – big Cloak, garlands, fruit-dripping headpiece, vaguely Carmen Miranda-ish.)

MICHAEL. Hey, guys, what's up? (He pleasantly, casually acknowledges the audience.) Hey!

JIM. John doesn't want to do Christmas Carol. He *hates* Christmas!

JOHN. Oh, dude, that is *so* not fair! I do not hate Christmas. I love Christmas. I was just saying that "Christmas Carol" is not my personal *idea* of Christmas...

JIM. Humbug!

MICHAEL. He's got a point.

JIM. What!?

JOHN. Yeah!

MICHAEL. Don't get me wrong, Christmas Carol's a great story. Fezziwig, redemption, God bless us everyone, Nice ghost, Fat ghost, Scary ghost... but honestly, I'm just doing this 'cause I need the insurance.

JIM. Oh, come on! Christmas Carol is a classic! Loved by millions worldwide...

JOHN. And everybody does it!

JIM. Yes!! Exactly! *Exactly!* Everybody does it! Which is why *we're* doing it, which is why *we're here*, why *they're* here. They expect it. It's a tradition! That's *why* everybody does it. Because it's a tradition. Traditions are traditional, and traditionally we...tradi...this. Traditionally!

MICHAEL. Actually, it's only a tradition in the English-speaking world, and even then only a small portion of the English-speaking world. There are vast parts of the globe where Christmas is celebrated entirely differently. For instance, did you know that if you wanted to say "Merry Christmas" to an Easter Islander, it would be, "Mata-Ki-Te-Rangi. Te-Pito-O-Te-Henua!"

(He heavily strikes an "island idol" pose.)

*(They both stare at him.)*

JIM. What are you talking about?

MICHAEL. I've been doing some research.

JOHN. Besides, we've never even watched Christmas Carol at my house. Except for the Muppets...

MICHAEL. Kermit the Frog as Bob Crachit. Perfect example of anthropomorphic cross-culturalism.

JOHN. Yeah! Or Mr. Magoo!

MICHAEL. Pop culture tie-in, animation as a viable medium. A classic in its own right.

JIM. Oh, come on, guys! We're talking Christmas Carol! Okay, okay... how about the 1951 classic film version, starring... starring... oh god, what's his name... Alistair something...

JOHN. Truth is, there's a lot of other Christmas stories I think of before Christmas Carol...

JIM. It was black and white...

JOHN. Why don't we do some of those?

JIM. ...Alistair Cooke... Alistair Crowley... Ally Sheedy...

MICHAEL. Cool! Sort of bring it into a relatable context. Explore what Christmas really means to today's audience!

JIM. You're not serious...

MICHAEL. Sure! We've got everything we need! Today's audience... *(Indicating the audience.)* They're not going anywhere for the next hour and a half. Right?

JOHN. Yeah, and we could even get some of their ideas! Like a focus group!

JIM. Focus group?!

JOHN. I've been doing some research.

MICHAEL. C'mon, Jim, it'll be fun! Get in the spirit! "Mata-Ki-Te-Rangi!"

(Both JOHN and MICHAEL strike an "island pose.")

JIM. How can we do everybody's idea of Christmas in an hour and a half? Without rehearsing? It's impossible.

JOHN. We'll do it fast.

MICHAEL. Very fast.

JOHN. Streamlined...

MICHAEL. Distilled. Pared down to its dynamic essence. A... minimalist version.

JOHN. (*Announcer at a wrestling match:*) CHRISTMAS EXTREME! LET'S GET READY TO JINGLE!!

JIM. This is *not* happening...

MICHAEL. Think of it as a *new* tradition, Jim... imagine ol' Chuck Dickens sitting down for the very first time, imagine that thrill... snow falling, candles burning, clock ticking, figgy pudding... fig-ging... nice cuppa hot tea steaming at your elbow, mind afire with the possibility of capturing for all posterity the true *spirit* of Christmas... Jim, that could be *you*. Can you do that, Jim? Can you *feel* the spirit? Can you BE the spirit?

JOHN. We got spirit...

MICHAEL. Yes, we do...

JOHN. We got spirit...

MICHAEL. How 'bout you?

JIM. (*Torn, but acquiescing:*) Okay...but we do Christmas Carol, too. That's part of the deal, that's part of *my* idea of Christmas...

MICHAEL. Yeah, sure, cool. Christmas Carol, no problem. This is gonna be great! (*Shouting to booth:*) Hey, Ebenezer, can we get some house lights here?

(*House lights come up.*)

Hey! Howya doin'?

JOHN. (*Big and expansive:*) MERRRRRRRRY CHRISTMAS!!!!