Charles Dickens

A Christmas Carol

Read by Anton Lesser
Stave 1: Marley’s Ghost

1. ‘A merry Christmas, Uncle!’
2. This lunatic, in letting Scrooge’s nephew out
3. Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern
4. The same face: the very same. Marley in his pigtail,
5. ‘Jacob,’ he said imploringly. ‘Old Jacob Marley, tell me more.’

Stave 2: The First of the Three Spirits

6. It was a strange figure – like a child:
7. They walked along the road.
8. Scrooge’s former self grew larger
9. Although they had but that moment left the school behind
10. In came a fiddler with a music-book,
11. His former self turned down the lamps
12. They were in another scene, and place;

Stave 3: The Second of the Three Spirits

13. Holly, mistletoe, red berries,
14. And perhaps it was the pleasure the good Spirit had
    in showing off this power
Such a bustle ensued

At last the dinner was all done

By this time it was getting dark,

It was a great surprise to Scrooge

After tea they had some music.

Much they saw, and far they went,

**Stave 4: The Last of the Three Spirits**

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed,

The Ghost conducted him through several streets

‘Spectre,’ said Scrooge, ‘something informs me

that our parting moment is at hand.’

**Stave 5: The End of It**

It was a Turkey.

But he was early at the office next morning.

Total time: 3:13:09
A Christmas Carol, first published in 1843, is the best-known and best-loved of Dickens’ ‘Christmas books’. Indeed, for the English-speaking world the story, characters and themes of this novella have become almost as much part of the Christmas tradition as carols and plum pudding: many film versions (for example) have been made, so that even those who have never read the book will be familiar with Scrooge, the four ghosts and Tiny Tim.

The story is plain enough. Scrooge, the old miser, is visited on Christmas Eve by the ghost of his former partner, Jacob Marley. He, too, had been a tight-fisted materialist, but now comes to warn Scrooge that unless he mends his ways he will be condemned after death to an eternity of suffering in which he will be compelled to witness injustice and misery without being able to alleviate it. The ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future will successively show Scrooge a series of visions. Scrooge is first shown himself as he was, before the desire for wealth corrupted him; this is followed by contrasting views of ‘Christmas Present’; finally, and most terrifyingly, he is shown his own death in the future and the unflattering response to it of those who had known him. It will come as no surprise to say that Scrooge triumphs over his own inhumanity…

The whole story, in fact, is built on elements of strong, simple contrast. The intensely selfish values of Scrooge and Marley are set against the pure morality of the spirits but also (more memorably) against the cheerful Christian charity embodied by two families – his nephew’s and that of his clerk, Bob Cratchit. Significantly, the Cratchits are almost penniless, yet still find something joyful in their meagre celebrations: our sympathy for them is increased by the fact that one of the children, Tiny Tim, is frail, moves on crutches and seems to be not long for this world. If this seems shamelessly sentimental on Dickens’ part – and it is – it is nevertheless true that few listeners are likely to remain unmoved by the Cratchit story. Without wishing to overload A Christmas Carol with undue thematic weight, it is perhaps worth noting that what drives the narrative, as almost always in Dickens, is a powerful yearning for the sort of stable, loving family life which the author himself
never experienced, either as child or adult. The effect of this, in conjunction with Dickens' stylistic and story-telling wizardry, is to make genuinely moving what would otherwise be intolerably sentimental. A Christmas Carol is, in fact, a small masterpiece. Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth. His father was imprisoned for debt and the twelve-year-old Charles sent to work in a blacking-factory: these experiences influenced (for instance) Little Dorrit and David Copperfield. Having learnt shorthand, he became a parliamentary reporter and began to submit magazine pieces. In 1837 The Pickwick Papers brought Dickens fame, and the rest of his literary career was almost uninterruptedly successful. His personal life was less happy: eventually he separated from his wife Catherine, partly as a result of his growing intimacy with Ellen Ternan, the actress, and he died relatively young in 1870, his last novel, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, unfinished.

Notes by Perry Keenlyside

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

THE MYSTERY OF CHRISTMAS
The Elora Festival Singers, Noel Edison, director

CASELLA PAGANINIANA • SERENATA • LA GIARA
Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, Christian Benda

Sir Roger de Coverley dance played by Bryony Lang

Music programming by Nicolas Soames
Other works on Naxos AudioBooks

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Cover picture: Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol courtesy AKG Images, London
Charles Dickens

A Christmas Carol

Read by Anton Lesser

A Christmas Carol is the best-known and best-loved of Dickens’ ‘Christmas books’, and the story of the miser Scrooge’s redemption has become as much part of the Christmas tradition as plum pudding and carols themselves. Will Tiny Tim live to see another Christmas? Can Scrooge recover his humanity and learn to love the fellow-men he seems to despise? Dickens will make you laugh and make you cry as you follow Scrooge’s supernatural adventures on Christmas Eve…

Anton Lesser is one of Britain’s leading classical actors. He has played many of the principal Shakespearean roles for the Royal Shakespeare Company, including Petruchio, Romeo and Richard III. Appearances in major TV drama productions include The Cherry Orchard, Troilus and Cressida, The Mill on the Floss and The Politician’s Wife. He also reads Milton’s Paradise Lost, Homer’s The Odyssey and The Iliad and Dickens’ A Tale of Two Cities, David Copperfield, The Pickwick Papers, Hard Times and Great Expectations for Naxos AudioBooks.


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