

# The Education of Ebenezer Scrooge

The Education of Ebenezer Scrooge is, first of all, a concert vehicle for mixed chorus and soloists. Secondly it is a faithful retelling of Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol employing a narrator, 12 readers (who neither act nor sing) and a mime. Thirdly it is a community event which is intended to promote the active participation of many different members of that community.

Throughout the two acts of this 90 minute event, the chorus is at the center of the story – as carolers, as the voice of the poor, as enthusiastic square dancers, as personification of the thoughts and actions of the principal characters themselves. The musical score contains eleven original numbers: eight for chorus (two of which also include soloists), a duet, a trio and a quartet. These account for 45 minutes of vocal music – one half of the production time. Additionally the chorus supplies background sound effects and incidental music during the recitation and individual chorus members are called upon to assume brief speaking roles as well.

The chorus, the narrator and Scrooge are on stage throughout the entire performance, while supporting characters enter and exit according to the requirements of their role. The cast - with the sole exception of the costumed mime who performs Christmas Future - are dressed normally (i.e. no costumes and without make-up, as if this were a family reading) and are seated in front of the lectern from which the narrator is speaking. There are no props and there is no stage scenery other than chairs and a lectern. No acting is required though proper diction and appropriate expression are, of course, important in projecting each character's personality during the reading. In the first performance of this work (St. Stephen's School, Rome, Italy), the script was read by members of the school faculty. On this occasion, one – and only one - general rehearsal proved to be sufficient to prepare the reading and correlate the chorus performance with it. (This restricted rehearsal time was essential in securing the co-operation of those members of the community who otherwise would simply not have had the time to participate.)

The script, of course, could also be read by actors and, for that matter, could also be given a far more elaborate theatrical presentation if the occasion warranted. The present format, however, is particularly well suited to the Christmas season since, by permitting a large number of community members to participate in a common effort, it can promote an attractive, family-like atmosphere which reinforces the community values honored by Dickens' text and creates a uniquely festive occasion. From a musical point of view, this format provides a practical way of incorporating a Christmas choral concert into a cohesive dramatic presentation which recounts one of the best loved stories in the English language while yet maintaining the event's focus on music and the choral performance.

In adapting Dickens' work to this choral format, I have taken a few liberties in order to better integrate music and text. Of necessity, given the amount of time devoted to the musical numbers, I have also eliminated a few episodes of the original story. On the other hand, I have attempted to maintain Dickens' masterful text – his choice of words and rhythm of phrase - as purely as possible and, by the same token, I have attempted to faithfully interpret his message, in all of its many diverse aspects, through the lyrics and music which have been interpolated.

The musical styles which characterize each musical number vary according to the sentiment expressed and range from – to describe only a few - a gospel-like number, Lighten Up, Christmas Present's advice to Scrooge; to the medieval quality of Christmas Day, the *a cappella* carol which opens the performance; to The Fezziwig

Jig which is sung over recurrences of the “Roger de Coverley” slip jig - the 17th century tune which Dickens’ indicates actually finished the Christmas ball at the Fezziwig counting house.

The musical accompaniment is distributed as follows: two of the numbers are performed *a cappella* while the remainder are accompanied by piano. One number, The Fezziwig Jig, requires additional forces as well – violin, violoncello and piano, 4 hands or, alternatively, two pianos, 8 hands.

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