

**P.L.A.Y.**

**(Performance = Literature + Art + You)**

# **Student Matinee Series**

# Christmas Carol



**Geva**  
Theatre  
Center

By **Charles Dickens**

Adapted by **Richard Helleesen**

Music by **David de Berry**

Directed by **Mark Booher**

Student Matinee  
2003/2004

**SEASON**

## Dear Educators,

Everyone has things that they do to get into the holiday spirit. Hanging lights, singing carols or drinking hot cider. In my family we "hang the Hulk."

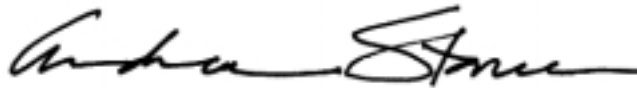
You see, when I was seven I made a Christmas tree ornament in the shape of the Hulk for my mom and dad. Somehow, over the years, hanging that decoration has become quite an event. The Hulk is always the last ornament to be hung on the tree and my brother, sister and I usually fight over who will do the honor. It's an honor because in my family the holiday doesn't officially begin until someone hangs the Hulk. As silly as it may sound, it has become a Stoner family tradition.

We all have traditions. They bring people together and give us time to reflect as we celebrate each new season. For many, hearing the story of Ebenezer Scrooge is a wonderful way to welcome in the Christmas spirit. With *A Christmas Carol* Charles Dickens takes us on a compelling journey that delights audiences of all ages with its timeless message. We at Geva are thrilled to be sharing this tradition with all of you.

Included in this guide are a variety of resources to prepare your students for their trip to the theatre. In addition, I would like to invite you to our **teacher workshop November 18 from 4-5:30pm**. We will be bringing together some of the artists who created the show to speak first hand about their intensions and experiences with the production.

Thank you for coming to *A Christmas Carol*. Have a happy and warm holiday season full of celebration, wonder and tradition.

Sincerely,



Andrea Stoner  
Associate Director of Education  
232-1366 x3058

## Cast of Characters

There are more than 80 characters in *A Christmas Carol* played by 25 actors. When you arrive at the theatre, you will receive a playbill listing all the actors and the characters they play.

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*"No space of regret can make amends for life's opportunities misused."* Jacob Marley

## The Story



Photo of Robin Chadwick as Ebenezer Scrooge by Ken A. Huth

Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* has become a familiar and traditional story: maybe that is part of the reason that we at Geva produce the play every year. The simple plot is one of redemption. Dickens' hero and villain, Ebenezer Scrooge, is transformed during the course of the play. In one night, led by ghosts down memory lane, around the streets and into the homes of his present day London, and finally into the future, the miserly Scrooge remembers the value of human life and human kindness. At the beginning of the play, Scrooge treats everyone around him very badly. He

is cruel to his nephew, Fred: he refuses an invitation to dinner with a curt and cynical reply. He won't allow his clerk, Bob Cratchit to take a day off, or to add a coal to the fire to keep himself warm. He is stingy with his money. He turns away a pair of men who ask for charity. But when Scrooge goes home on Christmas Eve, he is visited by the ghost of his old partner, Jacob Marley. Bugged down by chains, Marley warns Scrooge about his greed and mean-spiritedness, and tells him that he will be visited by three ghosts: the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come. The Ghost of Christmas Past reminds Scrooge of a time when he was not so miserly, and when he loved Christmas. The Ghost of Christmas Present reveals that his nephew truly does want to have him for dinner, and that the Cratchits are struggling on Bob's scant salary. Christmas Present also reveals that Tiny Tim Cratchit is dying and needs nourishment and care. The Ghost of Christmas Future reveals that Scrooge will die a very lonely and painful death should he continue to be so greedy and cruel. Scrooge chooses to change his outlook on life, and resolves to help the Cratchits and to love his family.

**Redemption:** *salvation from sin and its consequences*

**Transformed:** *changed in nature, form or appearance*

**Miserly:** *stingy, giving or spending reluctantly*

**Charity:** *help or relief to the needy*

**Resolve:** *to make a firm decision to do something*

## About the Author

Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, the second of three children of John and Elizabeth Dickens. Charles started school at the age of 9. He loved to read, to explore, and to observe. But most of all, young Dickens loved the theatre, and he thrived on fantasy. He adored fairy tales and played at acting from the time he was very young. It is said he spoke his stories out loud before he considered writing them down.

Unfortunately Dickens' father was careless with money. In those days debt could send a person to prison. When Charles was 12 his father was sent to debtor's prison and Charles was sent to a factory to help support his family. He worked pasting labels on bottles of shoe polish and was paid 6 shillings a week. Luckily John Dickens inherited money from a relative which enabled him to pay off his debt. Charles was able to leave the factory and return to school and his family.

Charles left school at age 15 to become a law clerk and then a reporter. He began writing stories in 1836 under a pseudonym. The stories, called *The Pickwick Papers*, were published in monthly installments. He became the editor of a magazine that published his next novel, *Oliver Twist*, again in monthly installments. Dickens went on to write 13 more novels, the last unfinished at his death in 1870. Many of his works deal with social issues and reforms of the day, especially poverty and education, certainly the influence of his time as a child laborer.

**Debt:** *something, such as money, owed by one person to another*

**Pseudonym:** *a fictitious name assumed by an author*

<http://www.talkingto.co.uk/talkingto/> – Log on to the Talking To... website to read questions about Dickens' life answered by the author himself.

Dickens traveled to America in 1842 to fight for international copyright laws. What is copyright? Why might Dickens have been so concerned about it?

*"There's more of gravy than of grave about you. You're a humbug, I tell you - humbug!"* Scrooge

## From the Director Mark Booher

An interview with Andrea Stoner, Associate Director of Education



Mark Booher

*Have you worked on a production of A Christmas Carol before?*

This will be the seventh time I've worked on the play *A Christmas Carol*, and the second time I've directed it. I had the great pleasure and privilege of directing last year's production at Geva and am delighted to be returning. The wonderful thing about the theatre is that every production, and indeed every performance of every production, is absolutely unique. It is made up of a unique combination of individuals every time. Who the cast and crew are in a particular production and who the audience is at any given performance makes it different every time – hopefully very alive! We will have many returning cast members this year, but some of them will play different roles and we'll have several new members of the ensemble as well. I'm very happy especially to have the opportunity to work again with Robin Chadwick as Scrooge. I learned a great deal from him last year, as I did from many of the cast, and look forward to another interesting collaboration. Another thing that will stay the same this year is that we're still telling one of the greatest stories ever written. I feel confident in saying that because, though I've worked on the play many times, and some of our audience has seen the story many times, it still touches me and changes me – I think for the better – every time I experience it. So, I hope I'm the thing that will be different this time.

*Why do you think Scrooge's story has been so popular for such a long time?*

I think its popularity comes from its truthfulness. We see this story and we recognize ourselves. And frankly, we like to look at ourselves. I'm amazed how much time my young son, Jesse, can sometimes spend playing in front of a mirror. We all have that fascination with reflection, even from a very early age. The great thing about the theatre is that the reflection we see, the play, is a mirror of many aspects of humanity – and it plays for us. We see ourselves portrayed. Some of the reflection is beautiful, some of it ugly. But in the case of *A Christmas Carol* we see that it's a true reflection and people throughout time have appreciated that, and still do.

*Why should young people see this play?*

Well, often we shy away from giving our real answer to this question because it seems pompous or preachy to say. I think the real answer is: young people should see this play because it teaches a great lesson about how to live a good and meaningful life. There, I said it. I think they should also see this play because it's really good art, and experiencing good art is a part of living a good life. Here's the last reason; young people should see this play because Charles Dickens wrote it for them – specifically for them, for the benefit of young people. Not to be seen by young people in the theatre necessarily, but to improve the lives of young people in the real world. London, England in the time of Charles Dickens was a brutally difficult place to live and it was especially hard on children. Dickens spent much of his literary career writing stories to illuminate his own society to the plight, and hopefully improve the lot, of children. In many ways he succeeded. I think the fact that we're still telling this story, and that it still touches our world today, is a testament to that success. The world

**Make a list of your family's holiday traditions. Which are your favorites? Why? What makes them special? What makes them different from another family's traditions?**

**Young people are a major element in the story of *A Christmas Carol*. Discuss how they contribute to the telling of the story as you remember it from previous experiences with this story/novel/play. Watch for those examples and any you may have missed as you view the current production.**

**How do young people figure in the stories of the world that are happening around us today?**

**Pompous: an exaggerated show of dignity or self-importance**

**Testament: any proof or tribute that serves as evidence**

*"Ceaseless journeys lie before you, Ebenezer." Marley*

today can be pretty hard on young people. If we learn the lessons of this play it could really impact and improve the lives of people of all ages.

*How does the score influence your (or the actors') work?*

The musical score of the play is an enormously important component of how the story is expressed in this production. Though Dickens didn't write *A Christmas Carol* as a piece of musical theatre the story has a lot of musical references and uses music as a key element in advancing the plot. That, and the lyrical, poetic style of much of the language, makes it really well suited to a musical adaptation. David de Berry's gorgeous, haunting score is one of the reasons this remains my favorite stage version of the story. So, more than influencing the work, it is integral and essential to the work. The music is woven so beautifully through the story that it influences everything we do. The underscoring – music that plays under the spoken dialogue – gives the production a kind of cinematic feeling. We're really used to underscoring from film, but it's less common on stage, even in musicals. I think it really helps the actors and the audience enter the story. Music sort of bypasses the brain and gets straight to the heart. So the score is really one of the essential movers of the story into the heart of the audience.

**Score:** *the written form of a musical composition*

**Lyrical:** *expressing deep personal feelings or thoughts*

**Is Scrooge a bad person, in your opinion? Why or why not?**

**Create before and after portraits of Scrooge.**

*How does your directing change with children in the cast?*

Very little. We have a big diversity of age among the cast, but they are all actors. We're all working together to tell the same story. Sometimes how I express an idea may change with a younger or older actor, but mostly I find that the younger actors are really sophisticated and honest about the process. It takes a lot of discipline to be an actor – concentration, confidence, physical and vocal control, imagination – so a lot is demanded from the young actors. I respect the work and the discipline they bring to the process and I expect a lot from them. I enjoy working with young actors. They keep me honest. They often inspire me. They'll be the ones telling this story when I'm a part of Christmas past.

*If there was one thing you'd want an audience to know, what would it be?*

That we do all that we do for them. They are the reason we work and play so hard. They are a part of the story that happens in the theatre. If they weren't there, we wouldn't be there either. So, they should value and enjoy the time in the theatre. It should be precious and fun.

*What do you love about being a director?*

I love the privilege of getting to participate in every aspect of the production. I love to serve the play. I love that I get to work with so many creative, friendly, smart, lovely people. I love that sometimes those people listen to me – because I'm the director. I love telling a good story.



Photo of Lauren Bricklemyer as the Beggars Child by Ken A. Huth



Photo of Robin Chadwick and Andrew Veenstra as Scrooge and Young Ebenezer by Ken A. Huth

*"This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both - but most of all, beware this boy. For Ignorance is Doom, unless it be erased." The Ghost of Christmas Past*

## Fog In London

### Ascertain: to find out

“The fog in London was very real. Just why it was the color it was no one has ever been able to ascertain for sure, but at a certain time of the year – it was worst in November – a great yellowness reigned everywhere, and lamps were lit inside even during the day. In November, December, and January the yellow fog extended out some three or four miles from the heart of the city, causing ‘pain in the lungs’ and ‘uneasy sensations’ in the head. It has been blamed in part on the coal stoves. At eight o’clock in the morning on an average day over London, an observer reported the sky began to turn black with the smoke from thousands of coal fires, presumably for morning fires to warm dining rooms and bedrooms and to cook breakfast. Ladies going to the opera at night with white shawls returned with them gray.... The fog was so thick, observed a foreigner mid-century, that you could take a man by the hand and not be able to see his face, and people literally lost their way and drowned in the Thames. In a very bad week in 1873 more than 700 people above the normal average for the period died in the city, and cattle at an exhibition suffocated to death.” (Excerpted from *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew* by Daniel Pool)

**Thames: a river in Southern England which runs through London**



Photo of Tina Stafford as the Ghost of Christmas Past by Ken A. Huth

## Fog at Geva



through a nozzle at high pressure which creates a hot, white, fog-like substance. To make the fog lie close to the ground it needs to be chilled. Low-lying fog is sent through a refrigerator box, which cools the fog. The fog is then run through hoses to vents all around the stage floor. We use a fair amount of fog during the two-hour performance of *A Christmas Carol*. It is safe for our actors, and you, to breathe. After all the actors have to stand in it, act in it, and sing in it for 44 performances!

The fog you see on stage at Geva is very different from the fog that hung over the city of London in the 19th century. Our fog is created by machine from a water-based clear liquid. The “fog juice” is poured into a machine that pumps the fluid through a heating element, and then

**How do we use fog to alter the mood of the show? What did you notice about scenes with and without fog? How were they different?**

**Why would we need the low-lying fog to be cold rather than hot?**

*“The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without that the houses opposite...were merely phantoms.”* First Labourer

## Money & Poverty in Victorian England

Bob Cratchit earned 15 shillings a week; approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a pound – giving him an annual salary of about 40 pounds. Martha Cratchit earned 7 shillings a week at the milliner's, adding about 18 pounds a year to the family income. Peter's imminent situation, of 5 shillings/sixpence a week would add an additional 14 pounds a year – allowing the family of seven to live on 72 pounds a year, plus any extra Mrs. Cratchit might bring in. By contrast Robert Browning's father, after forty-nine years as a clerk at the Bank of England, earned 275 pounds a year – allowing his family of four to live very comfortably in the suburbs.

**Annual:** *happening or appearing every year*

### British Money of the 19th Century

Penny or pence = 240 pence to a pound

Sixpence =  $\frac{1}{2}$  shilling

Shilling = 12 pence, also known as a "bob"

Half-crown = 2 shillings

Crown = 4 shillings

Pound = 20 shillings, or 5 crowns (a quid)

Potatoes – 6  $\frac{1}{2}$  pence per peck

Tin teakettle – 1 shilling, 2 pence

Bamboo fishing rod – 2 shillings

A pound of black tea – 4-5 shillings

Tooth filling – 5 shillings

Postage stamp – 1 penny

Toothbrush – 3 pence

Gentleman's morning coat – 18 shillings

Seasoned feather bed – 18 shillings – 5 pounds

Boarding school – 27 pounds per year

**“Workhouses** – The publicly supported institution to which the sick, destitute, aged, and otherwise impoverished went, the theory being that they would get food and shelter there in exchange for work. After 1834, apparently in an effort to make sure lazy people did not take advantage of the workhouses, they were made grim beyond belief. Husbands and wives were separated once inside their walls, children were taken from their parents, and all inmates had to wear a dismal uniform.... The work consisted of breaking stones or picking oakum, and after 1833, unclaimed workhouse bodies were given to anatomists for dissection. The poor hated and feared the workhouse.” (from *What Jane Austen Ate...*)

**“Poor Law** – The original Poor Law dated from Elizabethan days and called for the overseers of the poor in each parish to provide relief for the poor, the sick, the aged, and needy children. The New Poor Law of 1834 aimed at making the workhouses in which the poor were sometimes lodged extremely unattractive to what it imagined to be hordes of lazy and undeserving poor. The consequent regimentation and grimness of life inside the poorhouse soon became such as to make them a byword among the poor for misery. Under this new system, a central board of commissioners in London oversaw the work of local, elected boards of guardians that took the place of the overseers.” (from *What Jane Austen Ate...*)

### Comparing English Currency to the U.S. Dollar in 1800

1 penny = \$.02

1 shilling = \$.25

1 crown = \$1.25

1 pound = \$5

**Oakum:** *loose fiber from old ropes used for caulking seams in wooden ships*

**Regimentation:** *to force to conform to a systematic order, as by rigid discipline*

Compare and contrast the “welfare system” of 19th century England to that of 21st century United States using the New Poor Law of 1834 and our recent welfare reform policies. What factors led to the change in policy and legislation in each time period?

Visit <http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/dietwh.htm> which is part of a larger site (<http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/terrace/adw03/peel/pltopic.htm>) about the Poor Law of 1834. This site tells us the typical diet of a poor house worker. Use the USDA website, <http://www.usda.gov/cnpp/>, to assess and compare the poor house diet and an average diet of today. What effects might the poor house worker's diet have had on his or her health?

*“What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money - for finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer.”* Scrooge

## From the Set Designer Ramsey Avery

[The director's] first comment to me about this play was to remember that it was a play about dead people, much as Dickens asks us, at the beginning of his book, to remember that Marley was dead "...or nothing wonderful can come of this story...". That "wonderful" thing is the redemption of a man. It is important to this play then, that the spirits don't scare Scrooge into changing his ways. Instead, they show him his history and his options. He then *makes the decision* to become a better person. This led us to create a world around Scrooge that reflects the way he sees it at the beginning of the play – cramped, dark, and oppressive. It is a world that only shows its rich colors and many lights at the end of the story.

**Oppressive:** *difficult to bear, causing physical or mental distress*

**Represent:** *to stand for, symbolize*

**Etch:** *to impress or imprint clearly*

Following this thinking, the set is a physical representation of Scrooge's mind. It is a world that contains his history, so it not only shows the architecture of his Victorian London, but also the images of his memories. Maps of his business ventures, tables of accounting figures, engravings of locks, and other images of items Scrooge has seen in his life, or had forged into it, are etched in the surfaces of each building. In addition, more graphic images are projected onto the sets with slides to help create or reinforce each memory the Spirits show. Finally, it is important that all the set pieces appear to come from within the architecture, the same way memories float up in our minds. So walls open up, stairs roll out further into the world, and tombstones rise from the floor, all recreating the worlds of Scrooge's memories and futures. Fortunately, the Spirits do their work well, and Scrooge learns that he can be a joyous man again. The world then brightens up, the sky glows, and "Merry Christmas" glows from every wall.

See if you can find a list of mathematical figures in the set. They echo Scrooge's relationship with money and business. See if you can find words written into the walls. They may reflect Scrooge's love of books as a child or the play's literary source: a novel. Time is also a big part Scrooge's life. Clocks are often referred to and there is one very large image of a clock on the set. Where is it?

There are many sources of light in this production: street lamps and lanterns, candles and fireplaces, the moon, stars, and at the end, the beams of "golden sunlight." See how many different sources of light you can find. The set also has many doorways and alleys; places where shadow and darkness live. How does this help to tell the story of Scrooge's journey and redemption?



*"Answer me one question: Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or of the things that May be only?"* Scrooge

## From the Costume Designer B. Modern

One of the most important things to remember about Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is that every scene takes place at Christmas, in the coldest month of the year. On stage we see the full spectrum of London society indoors and out, at work and at play: beggars, laborers, wealthy merchants, servants, schoolchildren, the humble hard-working Cratchits and the hard-hearted Ebenezer Scrooge, making their way from the cold darkness of winter to the warmth and light of Christmas Day.

**Spectrum:** a broad range of related qualities, ideas or activities



After a great deal of research into the many periods represented in *A Christmas Carol* (the story spans the years between Scrooge's childhood, around 1785, to his old age in 1843), the director and I worked together to create real people dressed with an authenticity which reflects the truth of their lives in 19th century England, their social status, and their individual characters. Scrooge is wealthy but miserly so his clothing is warm, serviceable, even relatively rich, but devoid of any frivolous ornament. His merchant colleagues and their families are much more fashionable and luxurious. The Cratchits are very poor but every member of Bob's large family is neat, clean, and well cared for by a resourceful and loving mother.

**Frivolous:** trivial; inappropriately silly



Color is another key to the story of *A Christmas Carol*. Much of the play takes place in Scrooge's dreams; we see the play through his eyes and his heart so color can reflect how he feels about the important people and places in his life. When his dear sister Fan comes to rescue him from the drab, lonely, cold world of his boarding school, she is dressed in a winter coat of deepest red, like a Christmas rose bringing warmth and joy. At the Fezziwigs' Christmas party, the family and guests are decked out in a cornucopia of lively colors and patterns like a lavish holiday banquet. We can see and feel that Scrooge remembers this as the happiest time of his life, full of love and promise. And in the last visitation the ominous blackness of Scrooge's last Christmas Ghost shows us all too clearly the dark cold fate he can expect if his dreams are ignored.

**Drab:** lacking interest, dull

*"Would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give?"* The Ghost of Christmas Past

## Glossary of Words You Will Hear During the Show

**Counting-house:** *A businessman's office*

**Bedlam:** *A contraction for the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem, an insane asylum that was run by the City of London*

**Tavern:** *An inn and restaurant where travelers ate and rested*

**Pawnbroker:** *A person who lends money at interest for personal property left as security*

**Milliner:** *A maker of women's hats and other articles of clothing. Martha Cratchit works for a milliner.*

**Plum Pudding:** *Made of beef suet, flour, sugar, milk, raisins and other ingredients (no plums). The Cratchits would have boiled their pudding in a copper pot used for laundry. Hence the line, "Take Tim to the washhouse to watch the pudding boil."*

**Coal-scuttle:** *The container in which coals were carried to a fireplace and stored next to it*

**Charwoman:** *A cleaning woman, to char was to do one's chores*

## Tell Us What You Think

We love to get letters and pictures from our audience members, especially when you can tell us not only whether or not you liked the play, but also what was...

The part you talked about on the bus on the way back to school

The first thing you told your family about the play when you got home

The part you'd like to see again

The part you thought about the most after

The moment where you noticed the set

The minute where you noticed a costume

The most interesting sound you heard

The part where something unexpected happened



*Photo of Guy Bannerman as the Ghost of Christmas Present by Ken A. Huth*

Send letters to: Andrea Stoner, c/o Geva Theatre, 75 Woodbury Boulevard, Rochester, NY 14607 or email them to [astoner@gevatheatre.org](mailto:astoner@gevatheatre.org).

*"It should be Christmas Day, I am sure, on which one drinks the health of such a stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge"* Mrs. Cratchit

## Staff

**Skip Greer**  
Director of  
Education/Acting  
Artistic Director\*

**Andrea Stoner**  
Associate Director  
of Education

**Shawnda Urie**  
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Administrator

**Arthur Brown**  
**Christopher Gurr**  
Conservatory  
Associates

**Marge Betley**  
Literary  
Manager/Acting  
Artistic Director\*

**April Donahower**  
Literary Associate

**John Quinlivan**  
Managing Director

**Nan Hildebrandt**  
Executive Director

\*Mark Cuddy is on  
sabbatical during  
the 2003-2004  
season.

## Elementary

Blishen, Edward. *Stand Up Mr. Dickens: a Dickens anthology*.

Johnson, Spencer. *The Value of Imagination: the story of Charles Dickens*.

<http://www.west.net/~cybrary/Dickens>. This interactive web site for educators and students created by teachers in California will give you ideas for projects based on Dickens' work and many links to other Dickens sites.

## Intermediate

Glancy, Ruth F. *The Student Companion to Charles Dickens*.

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/PRdickens.htm>. This British Educational site includes a historical encyclopedia and information on poverty in London as well as biographical information on Charles Dickens.

## Advanced

*Oxford Readers Companion to Dickens*. ed. Paul Schlicke.

Pool, Daniel. *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew*.

<http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens>. An excellent website including biographical information, a timeline, a bibliography and a map of Dickens' London.

## Reading for Teachers

Ackroyd, Peter. *Dickens*.

Miller, William. *The Dickens Student and Collector*.

<http://humwww.ucsc.edu/dickens/DEA/DEA.index.html>. The Dickens Electronic Archive has teaching resources and a Dickens Filmography.

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*"Welcome what has been, and what never was,  
and what we hope may be - all our bright visions  
of Christmas Day."*

Bob Cratchit

# Tickets Still Available



**By Arthur Miller**  
**Directed by Skip Greer**

**March 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, April 1 and 2**  
**at 10:30 am**

**Suggested for high school audiences**



**75 Woodbury Boulevard**  
**Rochester, New York 14607**  
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