A 1940s Radio Christmas Carol

Book by
Walton Jones

Music composed and arranged by
David Wohl

Lyrics by
Faye Greenberg

A Samuel French Acting Edition

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A non-musical early draft of ***A 1940s RADIO CHRISTMAS CAROL*** was first produced at Bas Bleu Theatre in Fort Collins, Colorado on November 20, 2007. The performance was directed by Terry Dodd and Wendy Ishii, with sets by Dennis Madigan, costumes by Sandra J. Frye, property design by Michael Gorgan, and lighting by Jimmie Robinson. The production stage manager was Lisa Mason. The cast was as follows:

CLIFTON FEDDINGTON ..... Bruce Bergquist
DON STERLING ..... Don Kraus
BARRY MOORE ..... Rich Hicks
MOE AMBROSE-COHEN ..... Scott Rathbun
FRITZ CANIGLIARO ..... Rob Seligmann
JUDY DAVENPORT ..... Niccole Carner
BUZZ CRENSHAW ..... Dan Tschirhart
ESTHER LEWIS PIRNIE ..... Wendy Ishii
FLAPS BENNIGAN ..... Dick MacDonald

A 1940s RADIO CHRISTMAS CAROL was first produced at Bas Bleu Theatre in Fort Collins, Colorado on November 15, 2008. The performance was directed by Walton Jones and assistant directed by Jessica Lee Rogers, with sets by Dennis Madigan, costumes by Sandra J. Frye, property design by Michael Gorgan, Hair Design by Kirsten Hovorka, and lighting by Dennis Madigan. The production stage manager was Faith Harbert. The cast was as follows:

CLIFTON FEDDINGTON ..... Michael Stone
WILLIAM ST. CLAIRE ..... Jonathan Farwell
FRITZ CANIGLIARO ..... Chris Valcho
CHARLES "CHOLLY" BUTTS ..... Scott Rathbun
ISADORE "BUZZ" CRENSHAW ..... Dan Tschirhart
"LITTLE" JACKIE SPARKS ..... Joshua Savage
MARGIE O'BRIEN ..... Maggie Tisdale
JUDITH DAVENPORT ..... Julia Uthe
SALLY SIMPSON ..... Elizabeth Nodich
ESTHER LEWIS PIRNIE ..... Wendy Ishii
TOOTS NAVARRE ..... David Wohl
HAROLD MULLINS ..... Matt Strauch

CHARACTERS

CLIFTON FEDDINGTON – 55 year-old Mutual Announcer, front man for WOV's Nash-Kelvinator Mystery Theatre. Formerly producer of the "Mutual Manhattan Variety Cavalcade," which Mutual removed from its lineup just after Christmas, 1942. Now broadcasts his Friday night "Man with No Tomorrow" private eye radio drama which originates from a studio near the transmitter in Newark, NJ. A pioneer in "spot advertising." Wears wire-frame glasses like Glenn Miller. Known for being cheap. Has a crush on Judith.

WILLIAM ST. CLAIRE – 70 year-old, retired star of stage and screen with a long list of Broadway credits, 46 films, including the 1916 British film, "The Right to be Happy," aka "Scrooge the Skinflint." With a great mane of dramatic white hair, William is a bit of a curmudgeon and looks down on radio as one of the bastard children of the stage. William's 31 year-old son David served as a pilot in the US Ninth Air Force. His son was killed when his P-47 was shot down over the French city of Toulon in June 1943. Mr. St. Claire, a widower, lives alone on the Upper East Side in Manhattan. He keeps with him a photograph of his son and the telegram that notified him of his son's death. A guest performer in tonight's show, Mr. St. Claire plays Scrooge.

CHARLES "CHOLLY" BUTTS – 35 year-old funny man. Has a day job as a baker at Weequahic Diner (where his specialty is the nesselrode pie). A little stout. Lives in Jersey City, with his wife, Midge, has no kids, and has a hopeless and unrequited crush on Margie. As a regular, plays Mishke Bibble among other cameos.

FRITZ CANIGLIARO – Once an east-coast Florsheim Shoe salesman (and still plugs them whenever he gets an opportunity for a little commission), now a WOV regular, Fritz plays private eye Rick Roscoe, star of Clifton's usual (and very popular) Friday night offering, "The Man with No Tomorrow." Last year, Rick Roscoe had a Christmas show on Christmas Eve (called "Silent Knife, Holy Knife"). Fritz is a little disappointed that the tradition didn't continue. The resident masher, cynic and wise-guy, Fritz plays Frank Nelson cameos in comedy sketches. Always nattily dressed and well-groomed. Wears an Adolph Menjou moustache. In his early 40s.

"LITTLE" JACKIE SPARKS – Not actually "little," but young. A tenor with a high speaking voice. Having just graduated from high school, Jackie, only 17, lives with his mom in suburban Newark. Calls home probably a dozen times a day. Teased a lot. Still has a Sunday paper route. In the winter, wears ear muffs and galoshes. (Think Dennis Day.)

JUDITH DAVENPORT – Although quite the cutup herself, Judith is the resident "leading lady" playing all such roles as a regular. Has two kids and two ex's and wants no more of either. Determined and stubborn. Lives in a brownstone on West 75th Street at Broadway in Manhattan. Considers herself a "legit" actress, Judith has appeared in two New York City stage productions including a role in the chorus of the Mercury Theatre production of "The Cradle Will Rock" four years ago. Day job working as a switchboard operator at Stickel Advertising Agency in Manhattan. Has Clifton's eye. In her 30s.

MARGIE O'BRIEN – Brassy, flippant, with a voice to match (think Ginger Rogers in "Stage Door"). As a show regular, plays the comic roles. This 30 year-old Irish-American comedienne lives with her two sisters, Zazu and Vi, in a two-room apartment in Queens. She works days as a bookkeeper/typist/stenographer/receptionist for William Dougherty, MD, an oculist in Queens. Margie has appeared on countless radio programs, including frequent appearances on the Allen's Alley segment of the Fred Allen Show and is a favorite on The Horn & Hardart Kiddie Hour. Like Cholly, a ham.

SALLY SIMPSON – 20 year-old Sally seems sweet and gentle, but is a tough lady. Lives on the lower east side of Manhattan. As a show regular, plays all animals, babies, insects, little kids. In addition to being a radio personality at WOV, Sally makes the long train ride to Babylon, Long Island, three days a week, to contribute to the war effort by working for Republic Aviation operating drill presses and riveting guns. Sally (whose personal best is 2,155 rivets in one shift) was dubbed "The Home Front Girl" in the company newspaper. Always trying to recruit the other WOV women to join "the cause."

ISADORE "BUZZ" CRENSHAW – His life is his work. The 24 year-old "sound effectician" at WOV. Has a sharp wit and is always agreeable, whistling, and in a good mood. Born and raised in Bayonne where he was valedictorian at Bayonne High, Class of '37. Raised by his Aunts Lulu and Gilly. Moved back to Bayonne when the Cavalcade became Nash Mystery Theater and began broadcasting from Newark. Although he does sound effects for several other shows broadcast by WOV, some in Manhattan, it is clearly Clifton's weekly broadcast that is the biggest challenge and most fun. Wears an FDR button. Spends a lot of time with Sally Simpson. Buzz lives alone.

TOOTS NAVARRE – Musical director, composer and pianist/organist for the Mystery Theatre. (Could be a man or woman.) Besides his/her usual musical chores for WOV, he/she and his/her wife/husband Faith/Frank provide both underscoring to the radio drama as well as their new and old holiday songs for the broadcast. [Underscoring is left to the discretion of the musical director. The piano and organ are used as contrasting colors, as desired.]

ESTHER LEWIS PIRNIE – backstage audio engineer and transmitter supervisor for WOV Radio. [Optional character. BUZZ can take ESTHER's business and lines, lines in post-show can simply be cut.]

HAROLD J. MULLINS – Concierge of the Hotel Aberdeen in Newark. [Optional character. CLIFTON can take his announcements and business or cut them.]

Note: the characters of **MARGIE** and **JUDITH** could be collapsed into **JUDITH**, as could **FRITZ** be absorbed by the character of **CLIFTON**. As noted above, **ESTHER** and **HAROLD** are optional.

SETTING

WOV-Radio Satellite Studio in the lobby level of the Hotel Aberdeen at 10-12 Washington Place at the foot of Elizabeth Avenue, between Frelinghuysen Avenue and East Peddie Street in Newark, NJ., Bigelow 5-7979.

TIME

Friday, December 24, 1943, 7:30 PM

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Although *A 1940s RADIO CHRISTMAS CAROL* is scored only for keyboards, producers could cast actors who also play instruments to supplement and fi ll in the orchestrations.

It's worth noting that radio actors frequently used under-the breath ad libs to help coordinate their lines with the sfx. Also, during live radio dramas performers would often drop loose sheets of script onto the fl oor to avoid the sound of turning pages. Although impractical for the stage, it could be something a few others do which might puzzle St. Claire.

Except where specifi cally noted, the entire cast is onstage all the time. During the broadcast, their lives, as revealed in the pre- and post-shows (silent behavior or dialogue), continue to be played out for the live audience, things that the radio audience would not see.

A NOTE ON THE MUSIC

Whoever is cast as Toots is encouraged to improvise underscoring, although an indication of underscoring motifs will be provided to those licensing the musical play for performance.

CLIFTON. How about it, Judith?

JUDITH. What is it with you guys? Depends on the weather. And my cab fare.

FRITZ. How about we all go The Palm after the show?

SALLY. That's a great idea.

CHOLLY. The Palm?

MARGIE. A steakhouse two doors down from the Apollo.

TOOTS. Across the street from the Hotel Theresa.

SALLY. 125th Street.

JACKIE. I can't drive into Manhattan.

FRITZ. We'll take cabs. On Clifton.

CLIFTON. Thanks.

MARGIE. Geez.

JUDITH. Thanks, Clifton.

CLIFTON. Well, I was thinking of something a little quieter.

JUDITH. The Palm is loud, right?

FRITZ. Can't hear yourself think!

JUDITH. Sounds perfect.

FRITZ. The 5 Red Caps, Ivie Anderson, and Oscar Pettiford are joining the Duke tonight. It's better than anything cookin' on 52nd Street.

TOOTS. I'm in.

JUDITH. What time does it start?

TOOTS. Life doesn't start 'til midnight, gang.

BUZZ. I did a broadcast gig there a month ago. They don't even take their instruments out 'til 2.

JACKIE. What does it cost?

BUZZ. I can loan you a couple bucks.

SALLY. You're only seventeen.

CHOLLY. *(glum)* I can't go. I'm delivering a sandwich.

JACKIE. You going, Sally?

CLIFTON. Okay, everyone.

(Sudden bustle, **CLIFTON** *hands out last minute changes to the script, etc. Everyone huddles around* **CLIFTON**, *talking at the same time, the audience should not be able to hear specifically what is being said until...)*

(Toilet flush offstage. **CHOLLY** *re-enters.)*

CLIFTON. *(to all but particularly to* **CHOLLY**, *entering)* Oh – please don't flush the toilet during the show. The mics will pick it up.

CHOLLY. Check!

CLIFTON. And – good news – the Federal Radio Commission has approved increasing our power to 1000 watts!

(The **CAST** *applauds weakly.)*

FRITZ. Wow. I guess my mom might be able to pick us up now.

CHOLLY. Where does she live?

FRITZ. Across the street.

*(***CAST** *laughs.)*

CLIFTON. With the right weather, we'll be up and down the east coast – where you used to sell shoes, Fritz.

FRITZ. Still do.

BUZZ. Where's Mr. St. Claire?

CLIFTON. The car service is bringing him. He'll be here –

ALL. Car service?!

CLIFTON. Back off. We were lucky to sign him. It was the least we could do.

JUDITH. Where's he live?

CLIFTON. Manhattan.

SALLY. He could-a picked us up!

CLIFTON. He's coming from Philadelphia.

FRITZ. Philadelphia?

CLIFTON. Visiting his sister.

CHOLLY. Philadelphia, P.A.

MARGIE. Philadelphia, P.U. *(like "pee yew")*

*(***CHOLLY** *laughs.)*

CLIFTON. The car picked him up at Penn Station at 6:30.

FRITZ. St. Claire's son is overseas right?

CLIFTON. Yes. His son David, uh, was a pilot in the Air Force...

SALLY. Was?

*(***CLIFTON** *lowers and shakes his head.)*

CHOLLY. You're kidding.

CLIFTON. His manager told me.

JUDITH. When?

CLIFTON. June.

MARGIE. *(hands to her mouth)* Oh, God.

(There is a pause.)

FRITZ. How'd it happen?

CLIFTON. He died when his plane went down somewhere over France.

MARGIE. Oh, no.

SALLY. Gee.

(pause)

JACKIE. Anybody know how late Bamberger's is open tonight?

MARGIE & CHOLLY. Jackie!?

(beat)

JACKIE. What? I still need to get something for my girl.

MARGIE. How *is* your mom, Jackie?

*(**HAROLD** has entered with a small theatrical trunk that carries St. Claire's stock properties and costumes. **WILLIAM ST. CLAIRE** enters. There is a pause and, slowly, one by one, everyone looks at him. His shocks of long white hair are classically dramatic. He wears a cape. **HAROLD** exits.)*

FRITZ. *(rushing to meet him, shaking his hand)* Mr. St. Claire, it is such a privilege. I'll be doing Marley and Christmas Present.

ST. CLAIRE. *(putting his hat in **FRITZ**'s outstretched hand)* Will you take my coat and hat?

*(**FRITZ** takes St. Claire's coat, hat, gloves, etc. to the coat rack.)*

BUZZ. Mr. St. Claire, I am the sound effectician here at WOV. I saw your "Hamlet" when I was a little boy.

ST. CLAIRE. You must have been very little indeed.

*(**JUDITH** approaches the old actor, she shakes his hand-she speaks in her best mid-Atlantic accent.)*

JUDITH. Mr. St. Claire, I am Judith Davenport. I'll be playing Bella, and Mrs. Cratchit in tonight's performance.

CHOLLY. *(to **MARGIE**)* What's that accent?

JACKIE. *(takes **ST. CLAIRE**'s hand)* Hey, John Sparks, and I play Young Scrooge and Tiny Tim.

MARGIE. *(to **CHOLLY**) John* Sparks?

*(**JACKIE** shushes **MARGIE**.)*

SALLY. I play all the kids. And dogs, animals, bugs...and the spooky stuff.

CHOLLY. Bob Cratchit, and any ethnic characters.

MARGIE. I do Christmas Past and all things funny.

CHOLLY. Can we get you anything, Mr. St. Claire? Coffee? Tea? Water?

FRITZ. *(making a joke)* Scotch?

ST. CLAIRE. *(looks around, sizing up the cast)* Water only, please. Hot, but not too hot, with a slice of lemon and a drip or two of honey.

SALLY. We were so saddened to hear about your son.

ST. CLAIRE. Mm?

MARGIE. How're you holding up?

ST. CLAIRE. I miss him.

JACKIE. Sally makes P-47s in Long Island.

CHOLLY. *(scolding him)* Jackie.

ST. CLAIRE. David pilots a P-47.

SALLY. *(with raised eyebrows)* He does. *(haltingly)* Well, then he should be fine. Those P-47s are fine aircraft. And safe. Too. I mean, I know them inside and out. So...

ST. CLAIRE. I need a little quiet now to prepare for my per-

FRITZ. *(sings)*

...O – V!

CLIFTON. W-O-V for victory time is 8...

(SFX: TRIANGLE)

...*[whatever the time is]*, Eastern War Time. We'll be right back with Chapter Two of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." But first, I've got a message to all you moms out there. Among the many challenges we are facing these days, there is none more tragic than

the shortage of meat. And it doesn't matter if you have *100* brown ration stamps; there's just *no meat to buy with them.* You might be faced with the inconvenience of having to serve vegetables for dinner.

*(***CAST** *is disgusted by the thought.)*

CLIFTON. *(cont.)* Do what we do at our house. Mrs. Feddington has found a sure way to make vegetables acceptable to our family.

*(***CAST** *looks around:* **CLIFTON** *isn't married.)*

Well, we have three mothers in our studio right now who will speak for millions about Nucoa *[pron. NEW-ko]* Margarine. Mrs. Russell from the Bronx, New York.

WOMAN (MARGIE). *(with heavy Bronx accent)* Oh my Gawd... Nucoa Mahgarine is so delicious, you wouldn't believe. This stuff is bettah than buttah. And it's scientifically controlled. I know exactly what I am giving my children.

CLIFTON. Here's Mrs. W.D. Wilson, Maple Grove, Minnesota.

WOMAN (MARGIE). *(with thick Minnesota accent)* The money Nucoa saves us sure shows up on our food bills, you betcha. Nucoa is the sensible way to stretch food dollahs, doncha know.

CLIFTON. Finally, here's Mrs. Hendley of Ludowichi, Georgia *[pron. loo'duh-wee'-see].*

WOMAN (MARGIE). *(with Southern drawl)* Nucoa is so dahgestible. So different from the old-tahm oleos.

CLIFTON. Thank you, ladies.

MARGIE. Thank you, Clifton.

CLIFTON. This delicious modern margarine fits ideally into today's "nutrition for defense" program. It enriches family meals in flavor and food energy at a low, low cost...For table use, tint Nucoa golden yellow with the pure "Color Wafer" included in every package; for cooking, use it just as it comes: pure, natural white! Nucoa, the wholesome vegetable oleomargarine.

(MUSIC: PIANO "DECK THE HALLS", SOFTLY)

Return with us now to the Nash-Kelvinator Mystery Theatre presentation of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." This portion of our program is brought to you by Lucky Strike cigarettes. Join the fight for freedom by *smoking* Luckies.

"A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. Chapter Two: The Ghost of Christmas Past.

*(SFX / MUSIC: SUDDEN REPRISE OF PHANTOMS, BACK WHERE WE WERE BEFORE THE BREAK [***CLIFTON** *ALWAYS "CONDUCTS" THE PHANTOMS, USING A CONDUCTOR'S BATON HE STOLE FROM TOOTS])*

CLIFTON. W-O-V for victory time is 8 –

(SFX: CHIME [TRIANGLE])

[ACTUAL TIME], Eastern War Time. We'll be right back with the next chapter of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." But first an important message from BVDs.

(SFX: SCOOTING CHAIR BACK, CLEARING DISHES, FOLLOWING DIALOGUE)

PERRY (FRITZ). How 'bout a cigar, Tom?

TOM (CHOLLY). Naw, I gotta get goin'. Thanks for the dinner, Betty.

BETTY (MARGIE). Oh, we're glad you could come, Tom. Any time. Must be lonely this time of year, living alone and all.

TOM. Yeah, well I just haven't found the right girl yet, Betty. There's only one of you.

BETTY. Oh, look at the snow. You'll never get home in this.

PERRY. Just stay over, why don'tcha?

TOM. Well, it *is* Friday night. No work tomorrow. *(massively disappointed)* Oh, but I don't have anything with me.

PERRY. That's OK, Tom, we've got an extra toothbrush and I've got an extra pair of BVDs.

TOM. Oh no, I couldn't.

PERRY. Sure you can. Come on in the bedroom and take a look.

(MUSIC: "TRAVELLING" BRIDGE. [SUGGESTION: MODERATE "SHUFFLE" OR "SOFT SHOE"])

(SFX: DOOR OPENS AND SHUTS)

PERRY. Look at these: the costume of a sleep champion, Tom. BVD's Slumberalls: stretchy seat and stretchy knee so you can bend without bind, double thickness where it counts.

TOM. Well, don't talk as though I never heard of BVDs, Perry. I've got some on. Just look at these briefs: BVD's gift to comfort-loving guys like me.

PERRY. You're right. They're real nifty. Just look at that smart warm-brushed cotton and plush-backed waistband. They're good lookin'...

TOM. And good sleepin' too!

(SFX: OPENING DOOR)

BETTY. Hey, what are you guys doin' in here?

PERRY. I told Tom he should just stay over tonight and I was showing him my extra pair of Slumberalls.

TOM. They're good lookin'.

BETTY. And good sleepin' too.

CLIFTON. Hi, folks.

BETTY. Why, it's radio personality Clifton Feddington.

CLIFTON. Happy Holidays.

BETTY. What are you doing in our bedroom?

CLIFTON. Well, I couldn't help it, hearing all this talk about BVDs. You know, the BVD collection includes briefs, woven boxers, just look at my boxer briefs.

TOM & PERRY. Mmmm.

CLIFTON. Don't accept cheap substitutes, folks. Always look for the BVD tag hand-sewn into every garment. "Stretch...right in the seat of your pants."

FRITZ. Say, Clifton, the folks at Nash-Kelvinator have a slogan too, you know. "First you dream. Then you plan. And tomorrow it will all come true."

CLIFTON. Tell us about it, Fritz.

FRITZ. When this war is won, Nash-Kelvinator, now devoted to equipping us for fighting, will return to equipping us for living. Postwar homes will be equipped with electronic gadgetry you can only dream of. Gadgets like Nash-Kelvinator's personal entertainment center, something we call "Television."

(The **CAST** *is mystified.)*

FRITZ. *(cont.)* Yes, the time is near when *everyone* will be able to enjoy the thrill of home television.

Think of the excitement of seeing a circus parade in your own living room, the drama of a chess tournament in your den, quilting bees in your kitchen – the possibilities are endless!

When Victory comes, so will *television.*

(SFX: APPLAUSE SIGNS FLASH)

CLIFTON. Why, it's a dream come true. Really exciting. *(pause)* Of course, it will never take the place of radio...

*(***CAST** *loses their enthusiasm, mutter agreement. Among them,* **BUZZ** *says "obviously not.")*

...but it *would* be such a wonderful addition to any living room. Put a family photo on top of it, maybe a plant, an ashtray – there's never enough space for those things...

*(***CAST** *agree.)*

(MUSIC: CHEERY "DECK THE HALLS")

CLIFTON. Now we return to Chapter Three: The Ghost of Christmas Present. Brought to you by Ting!

(MUSIC: MUSICAL FIGURE)

CLIFTON. We will return to WOV's Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" after this important announcement from the Acno Corporation.

BOY (JACKIE). Gee, my complexion's so bad I hate to even go out.

CLIFTON. Don't be such a square, Jackie. Buy Ting.*

(MUSIC: **TOOTS.** *[CHOLLY IF NECESSARY] PLAYS THE HIGHEST "G" ON PIANO [OR, IF CHOLLY, ON XYLOPHONE] EACH TIME CLIFTON SAYS "TING"*)*

BOY. Ting?

CLIFTON. Ting.*

(At first, **CLIFTON** *is pretty proud of the musical punctuations, smiles as he anticipates them, but soon he starts waving* **CHOLLY/TOOTS** *off to stop them, but they ignore him. The* **CAST** *gives* **CHOLLY/TOOTS** *the thumbs up to indicate that it's going very well.)*

The faster way to clear up pimples.

BOY. Ting?

CLIFTON. Ting.*

BOY. How does it work?

CLIFTON. Boys and girls have overactive oil glands. Excess oil clogs pores, and causes pimples.

BOY. Boy, I'll say!

CLIFTON. Ting* blots up oil faster, more completely than any other product of its kind. That's right, in laboratory tests, Ting* completely absorbed oil in 15 minutes!

BOY. Wow.

CLIFTON. Yes, Ting* dries up pimples more effectively than *any* other product tested.

BOY. How?

CLIFTON. Applied at bedtime, Ting*

(waves off **TOOTS/CHOLLY**, *who is now getting into the joke, egged on by the* **CAST**)

dries to an oil-absorbing, non-staining yellow powder that clings all night. Ting* helps *heal* all varieties of pimples on your face, chest and back. So don't let pock marks and scarring of pimples and blemishes spoil your fun. Get Ting.*

BOY. *(***CAST** *is now laughing silently.* **JACKIE** *plays along.)* What's it called again?

CLIFTON. Ting.*

BOY. Ting?

CLIFTON. T-I-N-G. Ting.*

BOY. Ting.

CLIFTON. *(reverently)* This announcement from the Acno Corporation is brought to you as a public service.

*(***TOOTS/CHOLLY** *does one last "ting," the highest "c" on the keyboard/xylophone.)*

(MUSIC: CHEERY CHRISTMAS TRANSITION)

Return with us now to the Nash Kelvinator Mystery Theatre production of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." Chapter 4, the Ghost of Christmas Future.

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