



*"A Christmas Carol," will be presented at Stony Creek's Puppet House Theater on Dec. 27, Dec. 28 and Dec. 29. Playwright Kathleen Dabill of Old Lyme, seated front row center, is surrounded by the cast. They are, front row: Dylan Fitch of Branford and Becca Aub of Guilford. Middle row, left to right: Barry Fritz of Branford, Al Mahan of Branford, Timothy Gara of Guilford and Miki Krasnow of Branford. Top row, left to right: Susan Pynn of Clinton, Michael Souney of Guilford and Roberta Houle of Guilford. This small ensemble cast assumes several roles, human and otherwise. The play will be presented at 7:30 p.m. all three nights. Matinees at 2:30 p.m. will take place Dec. 28 and 29. Tickets: \$3.50, available at the door or by calling the box office at 481-3309.*

Photo by Bill Dabill

Old Lyme playwright brings Dickens classic to life



*REACTING IN HORROR* is Scrooge, played by Al Mahan of Branford, as he discovers the Ghost of Christmas Future. The ghost, inset, is played by Barry Fritz of Branford.

By **HILL DALEY**  
*Special to the Recorder*

An Old Lyme playwright has teamed up with a group of short line actors to present an adaption of Charles Dicken's popular tale, "A Christmas Carol."

Scrooge, Tiny Tim, the ghosts and other favorite characters will come to life at Stony Creek's Puppet House Theater Dec. 27, 28 and 29.

Dickens' pen immortalized these vivid characters on paper, Kathleen Dahill's new word processor brought them to life. The job was a delight, she says.

"Essentially, I have been a Dickens freak for years," said Dahill from deep within the warm folds of an oversized cardigan. "The book is so good, the characters are so clear, I visualized them having a conversation and I wrote it down. I try to live through the characters. I try to flesh them out and put them on paper."

Dahill began work on the script in July, inspired by a performance of Dicken's "Nicholas Nickleby" in New York. "I loved seeing a small cast work as an ensemble to do a major work. Everyone was playing more than one character."

"There have been a number of plays made of "A Christmas Carol," but there are very few that are on a small scale and designed for an ensemble," said Dahill. "On a small scale the emphasis is placed

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Photo by Bill Daley

**KATHLEEN DAHILL** of Old Lyme, author of "A Christmas Carol" at the Puppet House Theater, dons an 1895 top hat to get into a Victorian mood.



Photo by Bill Daley

**THE SEEDY SIDE OF VICTORIAN LONDON** is displayed by members of the "A Christmas Carol" cast. Michael Souney of Guilford picks the pocket of Timothy Gara of Guilford as a horrified Roberta Houle of Guilford reacts.

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on the characters and the text, not special effects. My concept was to keep it simple but suggest the era through top hats, shawls, and hairstyles."

Keeping the emphasis on character and the ensemble method of staging is popular with the actors, Dahill said. They are all on stage, she noted, and, except for Al Mahan as Scrooge, they get to exercise all their talents by donning and discarding several different roles.

Director Pat Souney of Madison agreed: "the play is very exciting to work with. It is a challenge for the actors, they all get an equal amount of stage time. And, everything from costume changes to scene changes take place on the stage."

Souney has been in contact with Dahill nearly every day about the production and she enjoys the chance to get input from the playwright on the production. Copyrighted works by major playwrights

makes Souney "paranoid" about making changes in the script, because she respects playwrights very much. Being able to work with Dahill on a new work has made her more comfortable about making changes.

"Kathleen's strength is her use of language," said Souney as she analyzed the production. "She has captured the richness of Dicken's language without becoming unbearable."

Souney can't think of a weakness in Dahill's work. "It's an adaption. The characters are there and we all know them. You don't have to do as much development. You can do this piece in an abbreviated way without a lot of expository material because people know the story very well."

As for Dahill, she's decided to stay in the background to give the director and cast some breathing room with the work. "It has been really exciting to hand a piece over and let people go to work on it," she

said. And, she enjoys seeing the work staged at the Puppet House, saying it is a nice, intimate theater.

Her production of "A Christmas Carol" has been dedicated to the Connecticut Hospice, the Branford facility for the terminally ill, because she admires their work. A percentage of the house proceeds and Dahill's authorship fees will go to Hospice as a donation.

"A Christmas Carol" is a one act play and runs about one hour and 15 minutes. The stage is bare except for black cubes which are arranged in different ways to suggest a fireplace hearth, or a bed. Characters not only don a variety of human roles, but perform as clocks, window shutters and bed posts.

"The audiences will see everything, so the actors will be viewed as the characters and as a troupe of actors putting on a show. A 'bare bones' staging is more interesting to me because that is what the

theater is," said Dahill.

Performing in the production are Becca Aub of Guilford, Dylan Finch of Branford, Barry Fritz of Branford, Timothy Gara of Guilford, Roberta Houle of Guilford, Miki Krasnow of Branford, Al Mahan of Branford, Susan Pynn of Clinton and Michael Souney of Guilford.

Audiences will be invited to linger after the performance to take refreshments with the cast. Souney enjoys the socializing, especially so little children will realize the work was a fantasy not real life.

**Dahill: playwright and composer**

The author of this adaption of "A Christmas Carol" is no stranger to theater or play writing.

A theater arts major at Emerson College in Boston, Mass., Dahill was writing plays as an undergraduate and has written children's plays and radio dramas which have been performed at some of Boston's

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small theaters. She has written psychodramas for emotionally impaired kids to get them in touch with their feelings.

She taught voice and speech in Boston's public schools for eight years and is a musician and composer. She received her masters degree in music composition from the Longy School, Cambridge, Mass.

Born and raised in New Haven, Dahill moved to the Hawks Neck section of Old Lyme from the Boston area two years ago. And, she and her husband will be moving to new quarters in Niantic soon.

Four to five hours are set aside each day for writing or composing, and she often does the latter on trains to either New York or Boston armed with a small electric keyboard.

Once a play is written, Dahill says she becomes detached from it. "The plays are off on their own. The actors contribute so

much, so does the director and the audience adds the missing percentage. Until there's a live house you don't know how the play will go over."

With "A Christmas Carol," Dahill plans to note how audiences react to it, bolster and weak spots and approach a publishing house. And, she is considering having the Puppet House production videotaped and shown over local cable access channels along the shoreline.

Among other projects, Dahill is currently working on a new play called "Siblings" which will focus, of course, on the relationships between siblings. "I have 45 minutes worth of dialogue from my brothers alone," she said with a chuckle.

Clear, natural dialogue is important to Dahill. She listens to others carefully, examining the speech patterns and intonations. If the "pulse" of a written line doesn't sound right, she'll speak it aloud trying to find the right combination of

words.

"Being a musician helps when listening

to dialects and speech patterns. I'm never bored listening to people speak. I'm always trying to imitate what they say."



Photo by Bill Daley

*THE CRATCHIT FAMILY gather for Christmas fellowship in a scene from "A Christmas Carol" at Stony Creek's Puppet House Theater. Family members include, from left: Michael Souney of Guilford, Dylan Fitch of Branford, Becca Aub of Guilford and Susan Pynn of Clinton.*