ACT 1

Scene 1

SONG: - JACOB MARLEY IS DEAD

(The curtain opens on a small dingy office. On one side, Scrooge sits at a desk piled high with papers. On the other side of the room sits his clerk at his desk. Scrooge's nephew is standing next to his desk talking to him. He is warmly dressed. The back wall of the office has windows opening on to the street and through them we see the carol singers when they appear later in the scene. Against this wall is a fireplace with a very small fire in it. The rest of the office is sparsely furnished.)

Fred: A Merry Christmas to you, Uncle Ebenezer. God Bless you!

Scrooge: **(mocking)** *A Merry Christmas!* Indeed! What a load of nonsense!

Fred: Come, Uncle, you surely don't mean that?

Scrooge: But I do, my dear nephew. What right have you to be merry? What reason have you got to be merry? You're poor enough!

Fred: Well, what right have you got to be miserable? What reason have you to be in a bad mood? You're rich enough!!

Scrooge: Bah! Humbug!

Fred: Don't be cross, Uncle!

Scrooge: What else can I be when I live in such a world of fools as this? *Merry Christmas!* Out with Merry Christmas! What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older but not an hour richer! If I had my way, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas" on his lips would be boiled with his own Christmas pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!

Fred: Uncle!

Scrooge: Nephew! Keep Christmas in your own way and let me keep it in mine!

Fred: Keep it? You don't keep it!

Scrooge: Then let me leave it alone! Much good it may do you! Much good it has ever done you!

Fred: There are many things that have done me good, but from which I haven't profited – Christmas amongst them. But I've always thought of Christmas time – apart from the sacred meaning of Christmas – as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable time. It's the only time I know of in the whole year when men and women seem to decide as one to open up their hearts, and to think of people less fortunate than themselves as fellow human beings. And so Uncle, though it has never put a cent in my pocket, I believe it has done me good and *will* do me good. And I say, God bless it!

(The clerk, who has been listening, applauds. He then realises with sudden embarrassment that Scrooge would not approve of this, and busies himself with his work again)

Scrooge: **(to the clerk)** Let me hear another peep from you, and you'll keep Christmas by losing your job**! (to his nephew)** You're a powerful speaker, sir. You should be in politics.

Fred: Don't be so angry, Uncle, come and have Christmas lunch with us tomorrow.

Scrooge: Bah! I'll see you in Hell first!

Fred: But why?

Scrooge: Why did you get married?

Fred: Because I fell in love.

Scrooge: **(mocking)** *Because you fell in love!* **(opens the door)** Good afternoon to you.

Fred: I'm sorry with all my heart to find you like this. We've never had an argument that I know of. But it's Christmas, so I'll keep my sense of humour to the last! So Merry Christmas, Uncle!

Scrooge: Good afternoon!

Fred: And a happy new year!

Scrooge: Good BYE!

Fred: **(calls back to clerk as he exits)** Merry Christmas to you. Mr Cratchit!

Bob C: And to you, sir!

Scrooge: **(to himself)** There's another one (jerks his head towards his clerk) my assistant. With what I pay him, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas? I'm surrounded by lunatics!

(Two gentlemen enter)

Gent 1: Scrooge and Marley Incorporated I believe? Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr Scrooge or Mr Marley?

Scrooge: Mr Marley has been dead for seven years. He died seven years ago this very night.

Gent 2: We have no doubt that his generosity is well represented by his surviving partner.

Scrooge: Huh?

(They hand him a sheet of paper which he scans, frowns, shakes his head and grunts)

Gent 1: During this festive season, Mr Scrooge, it is more than ever important to make provision for those who are poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at this time. Many thousands are in need of basic essentials, hundreds of thousands do not have any common comforts.

Scrooge: Are there no prisons?

Gent 1: **(looking at Gent 2, confused)** Plenty of prisons, sir.

Scrooge: Drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres?

Gent 2: There are, sir. I wish I could say they weren't necessary

Scrooge: Still as many orphanages?

Gent 1: Oh yes, sir, too many!

Scrooge: Oh! I was afraid from what you said at first that they had all closed down. I'm very glad to hear it.

Gent 2: Well, Sir, they are hopelessly under-funded and can't provide any Christian cheer at this time. And we were hoping to raise a fund to buy all poor folk something to eat and drink – maybe some clothes and blankets for warmth? Since it is a time of giving, what shall I put you down for?

Scrooge: Nothing!

Gent 1: You wish to be anonymous?

Scrooge: I wish to be left alone! Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't celebrate at Christmas and I can't afford to help lazy people to celebrate. My taxes support the establishments I have mentioned. They cost enough, and those who are badly off must go there.

Gent 2: But many can't go there! And many would rather die!

Scrooge: Well if they would rather die, they had better do it. The world is overpopulated as it is! Besides, this is none of my business. It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me all the time. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

(They look at each other, then nod their heads to him and retreat. Scrooge continues with his business. A group of carollers gather outside. They look through the windows and gather in front of the stage)