

A Christmas Carol

(notes for premiere by Festival Chorus, Calgary, December 6, 2008)

“Selected narrative from ‘the Ghostly little book’ by Dickens seemed a natural choice for a seasonal choral setting. To my knowledge, it hadn’t been done before and I wondered why. That is I wondered why until I actually began the work. Shortly into it I felt as if I’d been drawn down by a great ocean current with no hope of escape, with no choice but to abandon myself to it. The panic I felt in the realization that this work would be much more than the twenty minutes asked for was only balanced by the enormous sense of joy in the discovery of a witty and moving music hidden in the language of Charles Dickens. The five “Staves” of the novel translated into seven movements of music for chorus and orchestra. It was painful to have to set aside one marvellous passage in favour of another in order to keep the final musical work from taking three days to perform! My hope is that in addition to providing an adequate thread of narrative for the listener, the musical setting of the texts selected will illumine other aspects of this wonderful novel than are seen in the existing theatre or film adaptations. I am utterly committed to the compassionate and transformative nature of the story and hope its musical telling may brighten a holiday season for you as it lit up my own summer labours.”

David L. McIntyre