

A COWBOY'S CAROL

Book & Lyrics by Jack Kyrieleison Music by John Aschenbrenner & Christopher Youstra

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It's Christmas Eve on the range, where a group of cowboys share the ballad of a ruthless cattle baron's comeuppance. Spurred by 3 frontier phantoms, Judge Ethan Scrawlett reluctantly reviews his life from the Santa Fe Trail to Boot Hill, along the way meeting a lost Mexican love, a sultry saloon owner, her Apache ward, his despised half-breed nephew and others straight from the Old West. Dickens' beloved *A Christmas Carol* is reinvented as a muscular tale of greed and intolerance, filled with the cross-cultural sounds of singing cowboys, dance halls and mariachi fiestas. 8 original and 5 traditional songs. Onstage band of 4.

If the great filmmaker John Ford had met Charles Dickens, the result might have been *A Cowboy's Carol*. A witty celebration of both *A Christmas Carol* and the Old West, *A Cowboy's Carol* is a new two-act musical whose ageless appeal and timeless message of tolerance and the need for community make it an ideal annual holiday event with appeal to all ages.

The original and uniquely American score includes 8 original songs inspired by the music of the Old West, from the cattle drive, the fiesta and the saloon. As part of *A Cowboy's Carol's* unique cross-cultural appeal, it also features traditional Mexican Christmas carols and a staging of the beautiful candlelit festival celebrated by millions as Las Posadas.

Dickens' familiar story is reborn in the fictional town of Sacksaddle in the New Mexico Territory of the 1890s, where three cultures collide in a world of range wars and land grabs. Dickens' rich metaphors travel easily to the American West with its colorful cowboy lingo, where a man isn't just dead as a doornail, but dead as a peeled egg and colder than a bartender's heart.

Judge Ethan Scrawlett, the ruthless cattle baron who despises the Mexicans and Native Americans with whom he has to share "his" valley, is a vengeance-obsessed loner right out of *The Searchers*—a

man who stalks the streets of Sacksaddle like a wolf tracking its prey. His opposite number is Durango, the dance hall hostess whose shopworn glamor suggests the Marlene Dietrich of *Destry Rides Again*. The big-hearted owner of The Three Kings saloon, her cantina is the gathering place for a makeshift family of dance hall girls and fun-loving cowpokes. It's easy to imagine how the colorful supporting cast might have been filled during the Golden Age of movie horse operas—from Walter Brennan and Gabby Hayes to Thomas Mitchell and Andy Devine.

The moving story parallels the Dickens original, but tosses in plenty of surprises of its own. Set in the magnificent southwestern landscape immortalized in such movies as *Red River* and *Stagecoach*, *A Cowboy's Carol* unfolds in many familiar cowboy settings: saloon, marshal's office, Boot Hill. And while it doesn't take a lifelong devotion to John Wayne, Gene Autry or Hopalong Cassidy to get *A Cowboy's Carol*, there are special dividends for anyone even a little familiar with the greatest Westerns: *The Searchers*, *My Darling Clementine*, *Fort Apache*, *Shane*—even *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. And like Dickens' original, *A Cowboy's Carol* also ends with a child's blessing—but this time from Apache tradition: "May your days be good and long upon the earth!"

**SONG SAMPLES ON-LINE AT
WWW.COWBOYSCAROL.COM**



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CHARACTERS

(Extensive doubling is built into the script)

- Judge Ethan Scrawlett, the cattle baron who runs the town of Sacksaddle;
- Durango, the beautiful, earthy owner and hostess of The Three Kings Saloon;
- Dusty, the weather-beaten saddle tramp who spins the story;
- The Sons of the Sagebrush, the on-stage band, a tight-harmonizing group of singing cowboys.
- The 3 Ghosts:
 - The Old Timer, a cantankerous old chuck wagon cook, Scrawlett's link to his lost past;
 - El Fantasma del Navidad, a magnificent Mexican vaquero, his guide to the riches of life in the present;
 - The Ghost With No Name, a shadowy gunman in black, the grim messenger from beyond the grave;
- Doc, the tipping resident philosopher of the town;
- Little Sparrow, a young Apache orphan girl;
- Caleb Filtch, a scheming attorney, late partner in the firm of Scrawlett & Filtch;
- Toby, Scrawlett's good-hearted but simple dogsbody;
- Deputy Matt Cloud, Scrawlett's good-natured nephew, detested by his uncle as a "half-breed";
- Josefina, his Mexican wife;
- Young Ethan, the cattle baron as a rugged, handsome young cowhand on the Fiddleback Ranch;
- Concepción, a beautiful Mexican aristocrat, the love of young Ethan's life.
- Laura Belle & Solomon Jinglebob, the jolly, Fezziwiggish couple who raised young Scrawlett like a son;
- Durango's Girls, the singer-dancers of The Three Kings.

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MUSICAL NUMBERS

- The Old Cowboy Ways
- The Man Who Rides Alone
- The Night That Christmas Rolls Around
- I'll Take Santa Fe
- Fiddleback Square Dance (traditional)
- The Day I'll Be Sayin' Goodbye
- Little Sparrow
- Las Posadas (traditional)
- Campana Sobre Campana (traditional)
- Shall We Gather At The River? (traditional)
- Hymn To The Dawn (traditional)
- Standing On the Outside Looking In

CREATIVE TEAM

John Aschenbrenner (Original Music) won an Emmy Award as composer for *Search For Tomorrow*. His song cycle of Yeats poetry was recorded by the American Symphony Orchestra conducted by famed Broadway Maestro Paul Gemignani. His musical *Dracula, A Musical Nightmare* has been produced at many regional theatres around the country and won a Drama Critics Circle Award and a *Dramalogue* award. His music has appeared on many TV shows and films, including *The China Syndrome*, *Lifestyles Of The Rich And Famous* and *As The World Turns*.

Jack Kyrieleison (Book & Original Lyrics) conceived and wrote the book for *Reunion: A Musical Epic In Miniature*, which premiered at Goodspeed Opera House, had lengthy runs off-Broadway and at Ford's Theatre, and will be an ongoing production at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum. A long-time actor, he toured the US and Japan with Chita Rivera in *Can-Can* and his regional acting credits include Arena Stage, Goodman Theatre, Paper Mill Playhouse, Kennedy Center, Ford's Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Alabama Shakespeare Festival and Marriott Lincolnshire Theatre.

Christopher Youstra (Original Music) has been a music director and conductor of over 150 productions at theaters including Olney Theatre Center, Round House Theatre, Arena Stage and Signature Theatre. He has worked with the Phoenix and Troika National Touring Cos. and toured both Europe and Korea with *Smokey Joe's Café*. He is an artist mentor with the Washington Opera as a composer and has written and recorded several pieces of liturgical music as well as many children's musicals including *Tales of Three* and *anansi and his Tapestry Of Tales*.