

# A COWBOY'S CAROL

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

CONTACT: BRET ADAMS LIMITED, 448 W 44th STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10036 • (212) 765-5630

Charles Dickens' classic tale of redemption is reborn as a musical Western spun by a trail-worn trio of singing cowboys. In the rugged Southwest where three cultures collide, an extraordinary set of phantoms—a cantankerous chuck-wagon cook, a magnificent Mexican *vaquero*, and an Eastwood-like bounty hunter—show a vengeful cattle baron the costs of a lifetime of hatred and intolerance. When the ruthless loner forsakes his bitter past for a new life, he brings hope to an orphaned Apache child and the dance hall hostess protecting her, finding a home at last in the community he scorned.

**Act I:** The cowboys welcome us to their campfire (1. *The Old Cowboy Ways*), and start their ballad one long-ago Christmas Eve in the town of Sacksaddle at the law office of Scrawlett & Filtch (2. *The Man Who Rides Alone*). Banks, mines, cattle—if money can buy it, Judge Ethan Scrawlett owns it. Except for The 3 Kings Saloon, lost years ago to an earthy dance hall singer named Durango, who's named her place in honor of the poker hand that won it. Aggravated by the seasonal glad-handing, Scrawlett provokes his laconic nephew Matt (the deputy marshal) with his coldness and intolerance, fumes at a friendly Quaker collecting donations for the neglected Apaches, and reaches his limit when the sweet-natured but slow-witted stablehand Toby asks for Christmas Day off.

At The 3 Kings, Durango, the tipling philosopher Doc, and the rag-tag patrons get a head start on Christmas (3. *The Night That Christmas Rolls Around*). Durango has taken in a consumptive little girl, an orphaned Apache named Little Sparrow, who is everyone's favorite, particularly Toby's. Desperate to send her East for a cure, Durango swallows her pride and asks Scrawlett for a loan. When he tries to use her plight to take The 3 Kings from her, the outraged woman orders him out of her place.

A wild storm on the trail brings his partner's miserable ghost with a warning that 3 more ghosts hold the key to his only hope of avoiding an equally grim fate. The first ghost, an ornery Old Timer, shows him his past, starting with the aftermath of an Apache raid that left him and his sister orphans. This is followed by a Christmas Eve square dance at the ranch of the goodhearted couple who have raised the children to young adulthood, the young cowboy's introduction to the profiteering Caleb Filtch, and his courtship of the lovely Concepción (4. *The Day I'll Be Saying Goodbye*). Playing on his insecurity about a future built on a lowly cowhand's wages, the oily Filtch ensnares the promising young Ethan in a partnership. When the now-engaged couple disagrees over the army's treatment of the local Apaches, Concepción questions Ethan's hatred for all Indians, whom he blames for his parents' deaths. Their argument painfully reminds Scrawlett of the break with his sister over her marriage to a Navajo ranch hand and her early death, abandoned by her brother. Concepción learns that Ethan has sunk to supporting Filtch in a scheme to cheat the old families out of their original Spanish land grants. Unrepentant, he defends himself angrily, leading Concepción to break the engagement. The act ends as the troubled older man collapses into sleep at his ranch.

**Act II** brings the second ghost—a life-embracing Mexican *vaquero* who calls himself *El Fantasma del Navidad Corriente*. Their first stop is The 3 Kings, where a Christmas celebration is in full swing (5. *I'll Take Santa Fe*). When Doc offers his heartfelt toast to the saloon's little family of cast-offs, Little Sparrow adds an Apache blessing: "May our days be good, and long upon the earth." Durango worries over the sick child's uncertain future (6. *Little Sparrow*).

Matt's modest adobe home is the setting for the candlelit *Las Posadas*, the traditional Mexican song of Christmas Eve in Bethlehem, with the bashful deputy as the Innkeeper and children portraying Mary, Joseph, and the Angel. Afterwards, his Mexican wife sings a lively traditional carol while children whack at a *piñata*, and even Scrawlett is caught up in the fun (7. *Campana Sobre Campana*). Matt toasts his absent uncle, but his wife has to shame her guests into joining him.

*El Fantasma* gives way to the final spirit, The Ghost With No Name. They witness the funeral of Little Sparrow, a victim of her untreated illness, where the shattered Toby makes a cryptic promise by the graveside. At the undertaker's parlor, Doc completes his post-mortem on a shrouded corpse who we learn has been shot. The undertaker picks the corpse clean of valuables—among them is the treasured locket given to Scrawlett by his mother. The unhappy Matt stands guard at the jail against a town angry over a hanging set for the next morning. The prisoner sentenced for murder turns out to be Toby, confused but resigned to his fate. Scrawlett refuses to believe Toby could hurt anyone and demands an explanation from the ghost, who only orders him on to desolate Boot Hill, where a lightning flash reveals the inscription on a sorry headstone: "Ethan Scrawlett. Shot down like the dog he was. This world the better for it."

At dawn a transformed Scrawlett wakes to confront the question of where the rest of his life will lead (8. *Outside Looking In*). Asking Matt and his wife to forgive him, he hopes to redeem the pain he caused his sister with his future devotion to her son's family. His last stop is The Three Kings, where he and Toby burst in loaded down by a lavish Christmas spread for the saddle tramps and dance hall girls. He stuns them with the news that he himself will take Little Sparrow to St. Louis for treatment. In one last surprise he asks the astonished Durango to let him help raise the little girl and build a life together for the three of them. She announces her acceptance—on her terms, naturally—and Little Sparrow adds her blessing. The saddle tramps who began the story end it with the hope we'll remember "The Old Cowboy Ways."