Welcome to these pre-show notes for visually impaired patrons attending the audio described performance of *A Christmas Carol*, adapted from the novel by Charles Dickens by Ciaran McConville. The audio described performance will take place at 5 o’clock on Saturday December 19th, here at the Rose Theatre. The show lasts for about an hour and three quarters, including one 15-minute interval.

On the day of the show, there will be a Touch Tour at 3.30, to give us a chance to get on stage and examine the set, props and costumes as well as meet some of the actors. Please let the Box Office know if you would like to attend the touch tour, so that we have an idea of numbers. Then at 4.45, 15 minutes before the show begins, these notes will be delivered live through the headsets with any changes, to allow you to refresh your memory and also to check that you have a good signal.

From the moment we enter the auditorium, the festive sound of traditional Christmas Carols promises a traditional Christmas entertainment. The wide stage of the Rose is in shadow, but it is possible to glimpse the row of tall terrace houses that curve round the back of the stage, rising a good four storeys high. Dim light glows through some of the leaded casement windows in the upper storeys, and the steep pitch of the roofs is silhouetted against a cloudy sky. A taller building stands slightly in front of the rest in the back centre. The scene is in black and white, and the buildings have the look of the Victorian era, when this play is set.

These buildings remain throughout the play, but sometimes huge swagged curtains drop down in front of them. Sometimes these are grey, sometimes lit a rich gold. At other times long white curtains are drawn across, creating an enormous curved projection screen, where we are shown the deserted roads and low thatched cottages of a snow-covered village, a deserted heath, and the narrow streets of a poor part of London. All these images are in black and white, but we are also shown the roof beams of a great house in full colour, decorated for Christmas and loaded with greenery and rich red velvet ribbon. As the story develops ghostly images flick across the screen and orange flames roar briefly up it.
The stage itself is largely kept clear, and locations created with the minimum furniture, all of it plain unpolished wood. The actors accomplish the scene changes to the accompaniment of music. Also, the specially-composed music we hear in the show is provided by the actors.

There are more than 30 named parts in this production, and many are played by members of the Rose Youth Theatre, who also appear as citizens, partygoers and dancers, filling the stage with life and movement and acting as a kind of chorus to the main events. Four of them also guide us through the story as narrators – two girls in thin black knee length dresses, and two boys in black trousers, with dark shirts and black waistcoats and top hats.

The action takes place in the nineteenth century, at the height of the Victorian era, a time of stark contrast between rich and poor. The gentlemen wear fitted tailcoats with waistcoats, narrow trousers or knee length breeches, dark stockings and flat black shoes; their starched shirts have stiff upstanding collars and neckties. Outside, they might wear a caped greatcoat and top hat. The workmen are practically dressed in loose shirts and trousers with braces; some have waistcoats, or knee-length coats, while the boys wear short jackets and peaked butcher-boy caps.

The ladies appear in Empire line floor length dresses, usually white or ivory, gathered under the bust and falling to ankle length, often with ruffles near the hem, worn with a lacy shawl. Outside they might wear a cape, and a poke bonnet, its deep brim framing the face. The working women are swathed in many-layered long dresses, some with petticoats peeping out beneath the hem; some have large white aprons tied round their waists. Outside, they wear a short jacket and scarf, or a thin shawl, which is sometimes threadbare, and they wear white mob caps or soft bonnets. The younger girls have short knee length petticoats and dresses, dark stockings and flat black shoes.

A Christmas Carol tells the story of the stingy miser Ebenezer Scrooge. He is a skinny middle-aged man with a sour lined face, clad entirely in black except for his white shirt. We first discover him bent over his desk in his bleak office, a bare room containing just two desks. Scrooge’s heavy stool stands on a low wooden platform in the centre of the space, together with a sloping schooldesk, where he sits, bent over, looking down on the tall sloping desk of his clerk, Bob Cratchit. Bob is a tall
balding man in his thirties with a friendly face, poorly clad in threadbare brown trousers and jacket – the trousers are slightly too short -and a cheerful knitted blue and pink scarf round his neck. His desk is high, so that he has to stand to use it. Each desk is illuminated with a single candle. A cluster of furniture on the left indicates the edge of the room - there’s a small sideboard, a mantelpiece and an unlit brazier, a barrel and a crate, all of them used in later scenes. On the right, two actors support a tall doorframe with a working door in it.

Scrooge has some visitors in his office, none of them welcome. A cheerful couple of **charity collectors** appear, warmly clad against the cold, he in a brown greatcoat, she in a rust-coloured dress with a jacket – they are soon sent packing by Scrooge’s gimlet stare. Later, his nephew **Fred** walks in, his slight frame swathed in a big blue greatcoat, a scarf round his neck, a top hat on his head, Fred has sandy hair and a narrow face with a wide smile.

When we move to Scrooge’s **house**, the desks are removed, the mantelpiece is set on the right, and a ladder-backed rocking chair is on the left, with the small sideboard near it. The door is moved to the centre back. Scrooge dresses for bed in a long white nightshirt over long johns, with a nightcap on his head. The nightcap has a long tail weighted with a bobble on the end, rather like a Father Christmas hat but a great deal less festive. Here he pads about barefoot and meets a variety of ghosts. **Jacob Marley** stumbles in dragging a heavy ball and chain. The chain is slung over his shoulder, the huge ball follows behind. He is wearing a jacket, breeches, stockings and shoes, but all are lit silver, and so is his heavy face and his hair, which is tied back at the nape of his neck. A scarf is tied round his jaw – when he loosens it, the jaw hangs slack like a dead man. until he speaks.

As the story develops we meet the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Yet to Come.

**The Ghost of Christmas Past** is white from head to foot. On her head is a skull, which she can illuminate so that white light glares from the eye sockets and mouth hole. Her sleeveless brocade dress hugs her slim figure, its hem ragged like cobwebs. She wears pale stockings and walks in stocking feet.
The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, by contrast, is dressed entirely in black, her long dress festooned with glittery strands, her face framed by a huge pleated collar. We never get a good view of her face, which is blackened like her costume, as she is constantly bending low and swaying, facing Scrooge as eerie hissing noises fill the space.

In stark contrast to these two ethereal ghosts, the Ghost of Christmas Present is colourful, stout and jolly. He is tall, with a big beard and twinkling eyes. He wears a long green robe, and is garlanded with greenery. In one hand he carries a long curved horn like a horn of plenty.

Leaving ghosts aside, in the course of the story we meet a host of human characters, including three of families. Fezziwig is tall and broad and radiates good humour. He has a wide face and a bushy beard and is prosperously dressed in a honey-coloured fitted knee length tailcoat over a cream coloured double breasted waistcoat. He has a broad blue necktie, brown breeches and polished black shoes. His wife, Mrs Fezziwig, is blonde and beaming in a cream-coloured gown with a lacy blue overdress, and their daughter Belle is a sweet-faced girl with long blonde hair: we first meet her wearing a pale dress with a rich green short cape, and a dark poke bonnet with green trim.

Fred’s family are quieter. We meet them dressed up for Christmas day. His wife Kate and his daughter Georgiana wear peach coloured long frilly dresses and dainty lacy shawls. Kate’s dark hair frames her face in ringlets, her daughter’s is worn loose, and Fred’s son Topper lounges about in a smart scarlet waistcoat over dark trousers.

These two families are prosperous, but the Cratchit family has to struggle by on the poverty line. Bob’s wife Emily wears a practical-looking powder blue dress with a belt round her slender waist. Her blonde hair is pinned up out of the way as she goes about her tasks, but her expression is calm and pleasant as she manages her large family of six children. The smallest of these is Tiny Tim, a young boy of about eight with a shock of brown hair, a big smile, short trousers, and a caliper on his left leg. He walks with a crutch.
Other characters get by on even less. Miss Dilber, poor but respectable in dark dress, cape and bonnet, is Scrooge’s drudge about the house. Joe runs a pawnshop in the slums, and Mrs Filch is a regular there. Joe sits, legs wide, very much in charge, in a drab coat and trousers, fingerless mittens on his grasping hands, an oversized top hat on his head. Mrs Filch lurks at the side, swathed in layers of grubby fabric, her head peering out of a shawl. Both have sharp eyes and a nose for a bargain.

Finally, we delve into the past to meet young Scrooge, first as a round-faced boy of about eight, bent over a desk, smart in waistcoat and short trousers, and then as a lean young teenager in tailcoat and breeches. His little sister Fan is much younger, seven or eight to his 18 years or so, and she gambols in to greet him in a pale frilly knee-length dress with a little red hat.

That ends the set and character notes. Now to conclude, here is a list of the seven adult cast and the creative team involved in this production of A Christmas Carol. As in the programme, only the adult actors are credited.

Scrooge is played by Martin Ball,
Bob Cratchit Tomm Coles
And Scrooge’s nephew Fred Jon Trenchard
Elisa Boyd plays Belle, Kate, charity lady
Paul Hawkyard Fezziwig, Ghost of Christmas Present, Charity gent
Anthony Hunt Joe, Jacob Marley
Anne-Marie Piazza Mrs Fezziwig, Emily Cratchit, Mrs Filch

The sound is designed by Leigh Davies

And the lighting by Malcolm Rippeth

The costume designer is Peter Todd.

The composer and musical director is Eamonn O’Dwyer
The set and projection is designed by Timothy Bird

And the director is Ciaran McConville