

“The Man Who Invented Christmas”

By Helen Lutz

Most people relish the holidays filled with friends, family, parties, gifts and decorations. It’s fun to go for a drive through various neighborhoods just to see the beautiful lights and creativity which goes into decorating the houses. Christmas trees adorn most of our homes, my youngest daughter has three in hers while her dad and I stick to one (it’s all the more we can handle). At Christmas I love the music and have been checking every day for a week to see when the radio or Pandora will open up a Christmas music station – I never get tired of it. We also dust off our Christmas movies; some of our favorites being Bing Crosby in “White Christmas,” Nicolas Cage in “The Family Man,” Jimmy Stewart in “It’s a Wonderful Life,” Maureen O’Hara in the original “Miracle on 34th Street,” everyone in “Love Actually” and any one of the varieties of “A Christmas Carol.” While Jesus is the reason for the season, Dickens “A Christmas Carol” resonates the spirit of Christmas (no pun intended).



At least once during the season we watch one or more of the 135 versions of “A Christmas Carol” (135 according to the Google). From Alastair Sim playing Scrooge in 1951 to George C. Scott in 1984 to Jim Carrey’s Disney version in 2009, the Charles Dickens novella has been a source of inspiration to us all with none of them letting little Tiny Tim die. “The Man Who Invented Christmas” brings yet another rendering of the Dickens tale to the big screen. Those who write stories (or movie reviews) constantly look for inspiration and ideas which are not always obvious. “The Man Who Invented Christmas” introduces us to Charles Dickens before he wrote his story.

According to the movie, after achieving huge success and notoriety with his novel “Oliver Twist,” Dickens (Dan Stevens) struggles with less popular works and finds that he is cruising quickly into debt. All the while his lovely wife Kate (Morfydd Clark) extravagantly goes about redecorating their new, bigger house. His friend/manager Chapman (Ian McNeice), always at his side, tries to assist Dickens by encouraging him and putting him in contact with various folks. Chapman sets up a meeting with Dickens’ publishers only for Dickens to find that there is no more money available to him and that he’s actually in arrears due to some of his father’s (Jonathan Price) shenanigans. What’s a writer to do when everyone has their hands in his pocket? Well, he doesn’t know how to be a chimney sweep, so he’ll have to write.

With Christmas quickly approaching, only six weeks away, Dickens and Chapman approach the publishers suggesting an advance on a new Christmas book which is wonderful and exciting without Dickens having a clue as to what it’s about or where it might be going. The meeting didn’t go well. Not quite a title loan, but borrowing some desperate cash, Dickens decides to fund the publication himself. Now he just needs an inspiration – any inspiration – a fleeting thought – some sort of idea as the clock ticks on.

Based on a book by Les Stanisford, Director Bharat Nalluri in “The Man Who Invented Christmas” takes us through the creative process of writing one of the best loved Christmas stories ever written. As we watch Dickens’ characters come to life, Christopher Plummer portrays the ever important Ebenezer Scrooge convincing Dickens that his character is just a stingy, vile, old man. It’s interesting to see the origins of the inspirations like “Christmas is a poor excuse every 25th of December to pick a man’s pocket” or, in reference to the poor, “Have they no refuge or resource? ... Are there no prisons, are there no workhouses?”... and “Bah ... Humbug!” We learn that little Charles was no stranger to the workhouses and his father no stranger to debtor’s prison.

While the background story of Charles Dickens and his inspiration for “A Christmas Carol” is glamorized and fictitious, it is creative and a fresh approach to one of the beloved Christmas tales. On a scale of one to four Hart Beats ... I give “The Man Who Invented Christmas” THREE HARTS. It’s a delightful retelling of the original story ... I think I’ll go dust off my copy of Bill Murray’s “Scrooged”!