

Charles Dickens is ‘The Man Who Invented Christmas’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 22, 2017 - 11:48am

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The story of Ebenezer Scrooge, as told in Charles Dicken’s classic “A Christmas Carol,” seems to be the one constant that survives the commercialization of the holiday season. The story of Scrooge’s creation is told with expressive sentimentality in “The Man Who Invented Christmas.”

Dan Stevens portrays the title character, that of Charles Dickens himself, and the film – directed by Bharat Nalluri (“Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day”), and adapted from a book by Les Standiford – is a scattered narrative between Dicken’s chaotic life in mid-19th Century Britain and his creative spirit in producing “A Christmas Carol.” Literature buffs will get a thrill as the characters spring to life as Dickens invents them, and they follow him around for the rest of the process, almost begging to be freed. Less interesting are the particulars of Dicken’s life, with domestic and familial duties that don’t mesh with the rest of the tale. Yes, Charles Dickens deserves credit for the invention of the Christmas holiday as we know it, but like the season we have to take the good with the not-as-fun elements of it all.

Charles Dickens (Stevens) is at a crossroads. His early success, with books like “Oliver Twist,” has given him a lifestyle that is envious in a London town filled with Victorian dread. But his last three books have fallen flat, and his spending is outpacing his production. His dutiful wife Kate (Morfydd Clark) is expecting again, and his father John (Jonathan Pryce) has an ill-timed visit.



Charles Dickens (Dan Stevens) and Scrooge (Christopher Plummer) in 'The Man Who Invented Christmas'

Photo credit: Bleecker Street Media

His agent and friend, John Forster (Justin Edwards), is encouraging Dicken's publishers to wait, because the author always seems to come through. When they refuse, the two scheme to release a book on their own, an idea that Dickens is trying to bring to fruition, that of an miserly old man who seeks redemption at Christmastime. Ebenezer Scrooge (Christopher Plummer) is about to be born.

As Dickens come up with the various characters, they come to life, and follow him/torture him as he goes through the writing phase. This is delightful at times, especially when Plummer as Scrooge mocks the author trying to bring him into the world. The situations do parallel Dicken's life a bit, as his father never saw money he didn't spend, and a time in a debtor's prison still weighs heavily upon the author's consciousness. But those comparisons also weigh the movie down, since they are less interesting and hit-over-the-head symbolic.

Dan Stevens (The Beast in the recent "Beauty and the Beast") is a great bringer-to-life of character, and his Dickens is a conflicted mess of a man. He even has a rival of sorts, a funny Miles Jupp as writer William Makepeace Thackeray. The author as literary star was in its infant stages, and the film's atmosphere provides a realization that it isn't exactly a stable occupation. The London of Dickens/Scrooge was a harsh place, and that becomes part of the light that realizes the miser's reckoning.



Charles Dickens in the News in ‘The Man Who Invented Christmas’
Photo credit: Bleecker Street Media

The story of Dickens also stays on a track that apes “A Christmas Carol,” as we see his ghosts of past, present and the worries of the future. The genius of the book, and why it endures, is in the title of the film. What would Christmas be like without Ebenezer Scrooge and his journey? It is a reminder of how each year our hearts grow colder with age, while in reality the world offers us a refuge of joy if we can find it. That invention is what makes Christmas the emotional season that it can be, when we wake up on the day. It’s fun in the movie to experience that feeling, and the conclusion is as satisfying as an embracing glass of eggnog.

As Tiny Tim says, “God Bless...,” wait a minute, I cannot end this with that tired line. If there is a description of the season from “A Christmas Carol,” it’s probably came through Old Fezziwig, the provider of celebrations. “There was nothing they wouldn’t have cleared away, or couldn’t have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute... and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter’s night.” Happy Holidays.

“The Man Who Invented Christmas” opens everywhere on November 22nd. Featuring Dan Stevens, Jonathan Pryce, Christopher Plummer, Morfydd Clark and Justin Edwards. Screenplay adapted by Susan Coyne, from a book by Les Standiford. Directed by Bharat Nalluri. Rated “PG”



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