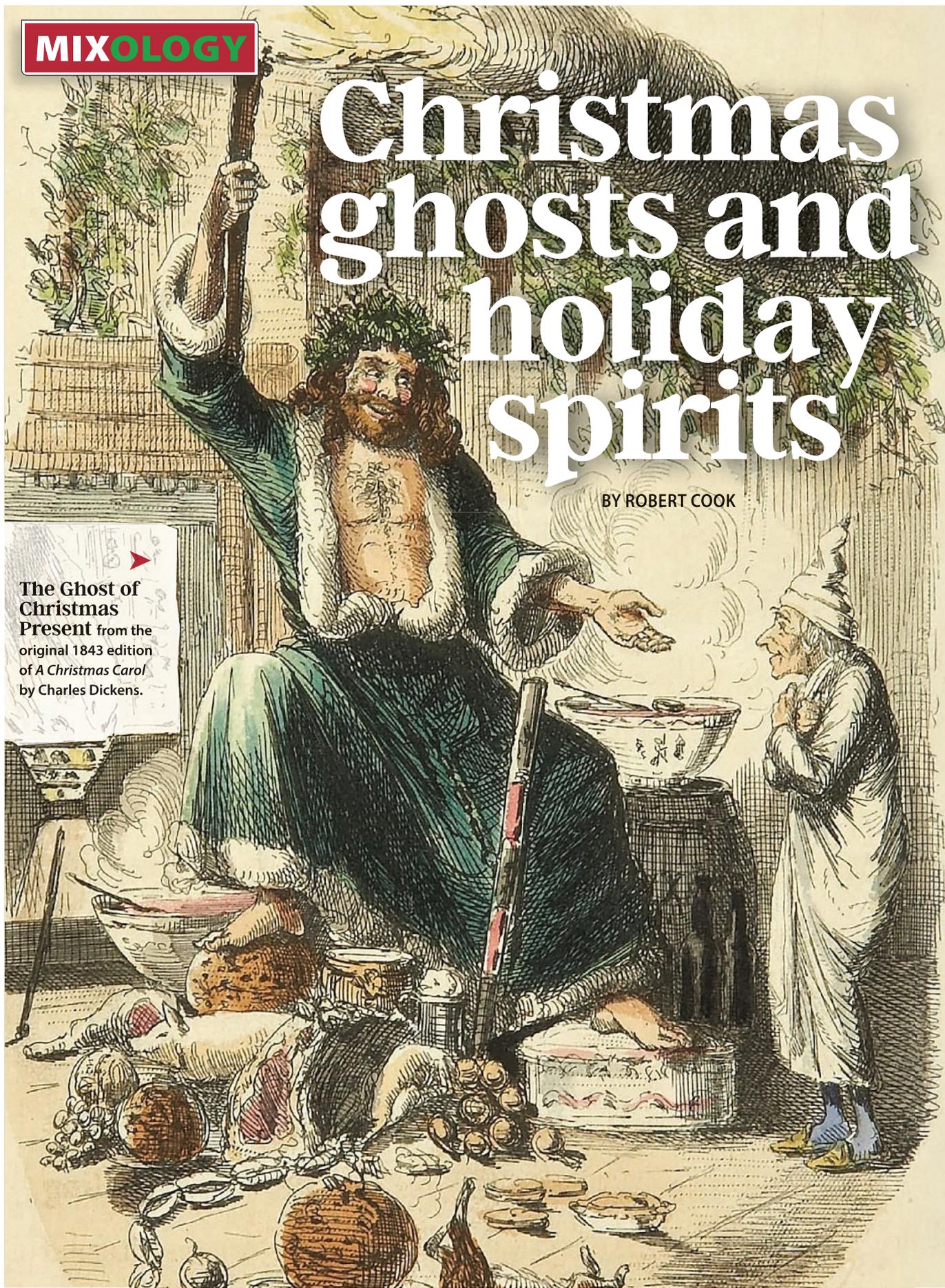


Christmas ghosts and holiday spirits

BY ROBERT COOK

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The Ghost of Christmas Present from the original 1843 edition of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.



For many Vermonters, Christmas is a time for beautifully decorated holiday trees, Christmas cards, coveted wrapped treasures underneath the tree and stockings filled to the brim with tantalizing treats delivered by Santa every Christmas Eve. The local church is bright with the light of the season as choirs sing carols leading up to candlelight vigils.

But there is another Christmas tradition that does not get as much notice in the digital age where Facebook, Instagram and YouTube are the lead cyber dogs. Long before the internet, television and radio, families often gathered around their fireplaces and told ghost stories where phantoms would pay a certain call during Christmas celebrations.

This tradition was very popular in Victorian England and is refer-

enced in the popular Andy Williams Christmas song, "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year:"

*"There'll be parties for hosting
Marshmallows for toasting
And caroling out in the snow
There'll be scary ghost stories
And tales of the glories of
Christmases long, long ago."*

The tradition pre-dates the Victorian era and was very popular as a way to mark the Winter Solstice. Every holiday season, there are scores of movies that feature ghosts and holiday spirits. Instead of watching them, why not create your own retelling of these classic tales of yore? Here are some recommendations to enhance the old fireside ghost stories with plenty of holiday spirits to match.

"A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens

This story needs very little introduction as it continues to be the most popular Christmas story of all time captured in cartoons and on the Silver Screen through the decades. Scrooge, a miser who has no use for Christmas, is visited by the ghost of his deceased partner, Jacob Marley, and three ghosts who show him the error of his ways. A Classic Egg Nog is the perfect holiday treat to go with the granddaddy of Christmas ghost tales.

Classic Egg Nog >

2 cups milk
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
6 large egg yolks

½ cup granulated sugar
1 cup heavy cream
1 cup bourbon or rum (optional)
Whipped cream and additional cinnamon,
for serving



Classic Egg Nog

In a small saucepan over low heat, combine milk, cinnamon, nutmeg and vanilla. Slowly bring mixture to a low boil.

Meanwhile, in a large bowl, whisk egg yolks with sugar until yolks are pale in color. Slowly add hot milk mixture to egg yolks in batches to temper the eggs and whisk until combined.

Return mixture to saucepan and cook over medium heat until slightly thick (mixture should coat the back of a spoon). Do not boil. If using a candy thermometer, mixture should reach 160° F.

Remove from heat and stir in heavy cream and bourbon (optional). Refrigerate until chilled.

When ready to serve, garnish with whipped cream and ground cinnamon and/or stick.

“It’s a Wonderful Life”

This holiday classic directed by Frank Capra and starring Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed actually flopped at the box office in 1946, but went on to be a must-watch every holiday season. George Bailey, a man who has spent his life helping others at the expense of his dreams, decides to end it all one Christmas Eve before Clarence, his guardian angel, comes to his rescue and shows him what life would have been like if he had never been born. With Clarence’s help, George wakes up and smells the coffee, or in this case a Bailey’s Coffee Slushie.

< Bailey’s Coffee Slushie

3 cups cold-brew coffee, divided
 ½ cup milk
 ¼ cup Baileys Irish Cream
 ¼ cup vodka
 Chocolate sauce, caramel and whipped cream, for garnish

Fill an ice cube tray with 2½ cups cold brew. Freeze until solid, roughly 3 hours.
 Combine frozen coffee cubes

with remaining ½ cup cold brew, milk, Baileys and vodka in a blender and blend until smooth. Drizzle chocolate and caramel

Divide slushy evenly between glasses, then top with whipped cream, more caramel and more chocolate.



Photo courtesy www.delish.com



Photo courtesy www.wikimedia.org

“Santa Claus is Coming to Town”

This popular Jules Bass cartoon made its debut in 1970. It stars Mickey Rooney as Kris Kringle, Burgermeister Burger and one cool dude with magic powers, the Winter Warlock, who lives in a palace of ice and makes reindeer fly. Winter, as he likes to be called, becomes an important ally for Kris as he evolves into Santa Claus.

Santa Clausmopolitan >

Lime wedge and white or multicolor sanding sugar, for rim
 1 cup vodka
 1½ cups cranberry juice
 ¼ cup triple sec
 ¼ cup fresh lime juice
 ½ cup fresh cranberries

Run a lime wedge around each glass then dip in sanding sugar.

Fill a cocktail shaker with ice then add vodka, cranberry juice, triple sec and lime juice. Shake until the cocktail shaker is cold.

Divide drinks between rimmed glasses and add cranberries for garnish.



Photo courtesy www.fandom.com

“Frosty the Snowman”

This popular cartoon narrated and sung by Jimmy Durante also suspends disbelief. When the evil magician Professor Hinkle’s hat is placed upon Frosty’s head, he began to dance around. Frosty’s direct opposite in a parallel universe, a Dirty Snowman, will keep you warm after your imagination goes on this snowy ride.

Dirty Snowman

¼ cup melted chocolate, for rim
 ½ cup chocolate shavings
 1 pint vanilla ice cream
 2 cups hot chocolate
 ½ cup Baileys
 Whipped cream, for serving



Photo courtesy www.bellyfull.net

“How the Grinch Stole Christmas”

Dr. Seuss’s classic tale, that has also been made into a popular film starring Jim Carrey as the man in green, is a Christmas ghost story of sorts. First of all, it involves the Who’s down in Whoville who liked Christmas a lot. Unlike the Grinch, who did not. While the Grinch is not a ghost, he certainly acts like one as he tries to derail Christmas by sneaking into every Who’s house and stealing everything, including the last can of Who Hash.

Boozy Grinch Punch

- 1 packet Kool-Aid Lemon Lime mix (0.13 oz.)
- 4 cups water
- 4 cups ice
- 3 cups lemon-lime soda
- 2 cups pineapple juice
- 2 cups vodka
- 1 cups ginger ale
- Lime wedges and red sanding sugar, for rim

In a large pitcher combine Kool-Aid and water. Then, mix ice, Kool-Aid, soda, pineapple juice, vodka and ginger ale in a large punch bowl.

Use a lime wedge to rim glasses and dip in sanding sugar to coat. Pour punch into glasses to serve.



Photo courtesy www.delish.com

Pour melted chocolate and chocolate shavings into separate shallow dishes. Dip rims of two mugs in melted chocolate then immediately dip in chocolate shavings.

Using a medium cookie scoop, add a few scoops of ice cream into each mug. Pour hot chocolate and Baileys on top. Then, top with whipped cream and sprinkle with any extra chocolate shavings.

Always drink in moderation.

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MIXOLOGY: HOLIDAY SPIRIT COCKTAILS

“The Polar Express”

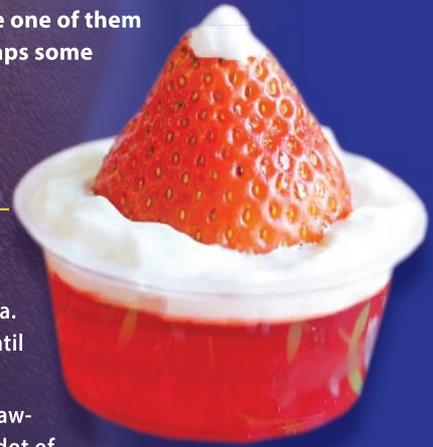
This book, written by New England’s own Chris Allsburg, was also made into a wonderful holiday movie by Robert Zemeckis, starring Tom Hanks as the mysterious train conductor. The ghostly train appears one Christmas Eve and transports children to the North Pole where one of them will receive the first gift of Christmas. Perhaps some Santa Hat Jell-o Shots are in order?

Santa Hat Jell-o Shots

- 1¼ cups water
- ¾ cup vodka
- 1 package strawberry Jell-O (3 oz.)
- 1 container Cool Whip, thawed
- 1 pint strawberries, hulled

Pour water into small saucepan and bring to a boil. Once boiling, remove from heat and add Jell-O packet, stirring until dissolved. Add vodka. Pour into plastic shot glasses and refrigerate until set, about 1 hour.

Top with a dollop of Cool Whip, then place a strawberry on top, pointed-end up. Top with a small dot of whipped cream, to resemble Santa’s hat, and serve.



Photos courtesy www.imdb.com and www.caryonsandcravings.com

“Harry Potter: Christmas at Hogwarts”

Jody Revenson’s book takes its readers and true believers young and old to Hogwarts Castle where they can celebrate a magical Christmas with their favorite wizards. Movie viewers were first introduced to Christmas at Hogwarts in the first feature film: “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone.” This tale recounts the snowy Great Hall festooned with Christmas trees, the elaborate Yule Ball, Mrs. Weasley’s holiday sweaters and Harry’s gift, the invisibility cloak. Some Sugar Cookie Martini’s would go great with this festive story.

Sugar Cookie Martinis

- Martini:** ½ cup whole milk
¼ cup Baileys
2 ounces vanilla vodka
2 ounces amaretto
Ice
- Rim:** ½ cup vanilla frosting
¼ cup sprinkles, plus
1 teaspoon, divided
Pre-made sugar cookie dough

Preheat oven to 350° F and line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Roll sugar cookie dough out to ¼-inch thick. Using a cookie cutter, cut out desired shapes then place cookies on prepared baking sheet. Bake until just set and lightly golden around the edges, 12 minutes. Let cool.

Using an offset spatula, spread a thin layer of frosting onto the rim of two martini glasses. Pour ¼ cup sprinkles onto a small plate then dip rims in sprinkles to coat. Use an offset to frost cookies, then decorate with remaining 2 tablespoons sprinkles.

In a cocktail shaker, combine milk, Baileys, vodka and amaretto. Add ice and shake until cold. Pour into glasses and garnish rim with a cookie.

What can make telling ghost stories this Christmas even more fun is to leave room for improvisation. Let your imagination run wild. It’s Christmas after all.

Happy Holidays!

