

1963

OLIVER!

Book Music and Lyrics By Lionel Bart
 Freely adapted from Dickens' "Oliver Twist"

Directed by Peter Coe

Designed by Sean Kenny

Orchestrations by Eric Rogers

Musical Director Donald Pippin

Technical Supervisor Ian Albery

Lighting by John Wyckham

Oliver Twist Bruce Prochnik

Mr. Bumble Willoughby Goddard

Mrs. Corney Hope Jackman

Old Sally Ruth Maynard

Mr. Sowerberry Barry Humphries

Mrs. Sowerberry Helena Carroll

Charlotte Cherry Davis

Noah Claypole Terry Lomax

Fagin Clive Revill

The Artful Dodger Michael Goodman

Nancy Georgia Brown

Bet Alice Playten

Bill Sikes Danny Sewell

Mr. Brownlow Geoffrey Lumb

Dr. Grimwig John Call

Mrs. Bedwin Dortha Duckworth

Workhouse Boys and Fagin's Gang: Johnny Borden, Eugene Endon, Bryant Fraser, Randy Gaynes, Bobby Gold, Sal Lombardo, Christopher Month, Patrick O'Shaughnessy, Alan Paul, Barry Pearl, George Priolo, Robbi Reed, Christopher Votos

Londoners: Jed Allan, Barbara Bossert, Jack Davison, James Glenn, Lesley Hunt, John M. Kimbro, Michael Lamont, Allan Lokos, Dodie Marshall, Richard Miller, Moose Peting, Ruth Ramsey, Nita Reiter, Ray Tudor, Maura K. Wedge



Friday, Jan. 11, 1963

Oliver Twisted

Oliver! Lionel Bart, 31, is not too proud to help Charles Dickens, Immortal. In "freely adapting" Oliver Twist, Britisher Bart, who wrote book, music and lyrics, has blue-penciled out the socially conscious harshness of Dickens, and mauve-penciled in the timeless hokum of Showland.

Dickens takes the count after approximately two minutes and 35 seconds of the first act. As the curtain goes up on Sean Kenny's somber hewn-wood set, a dozen or so boys are released from their kennel-like pen. They slink up to their empty gruel bowls like wan, spiritless animals. For a long instant, a pang of pathos hangs upon the air. Then the game little troupers raise their obviously steak-fed voices and wham a sappy-happy song, Food, Glorious Food, right up into the dingy rafters.

After this, the audience knows that nothing painful, nothing honest, nothing real will be inflicted upon it. In Oliver Twisted, the Thieves' Kitchen becomes an urban Sherwood Forest, with Robin Hood Fagin teaching his pickpocketeers to rob from the rich and give to the deserving poor—themselves. The grim workhouses, stews and drinking dens of London become playgrounds for boys with a taste for adventure. The biggest laugh of the evening comes when Fagin paternally growls at his charges, "Shut up and drink yer gin."

With one eye on The Beggar's Opera, Bart has contrived a sort of lovable rogues' operetta, Oliver! is chockablock with songs that are as straightforward, single-minded and rhythmic as a choo-choo train, and they do keep the show steaming briskly and more or less merrily along.

Five months on the road have given the company the treacherous confidence, on reaching Broadway, to overplay characters that were already over written to the point of caricature. The cast also knows where all the laughs are buried, and it squirrels them out with stagy anticipatory glee. Bruce Prochnik's Oliver is singularly unaffecting, but Clive Revill's Fagin glints with eccentricity. This Fagin is not very Jewish (he has been viewed without alarm by representatives of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith), but he is a strangely epicene miser whose furtive batlike swoopings on his treasure box and triple-tempo fingering of his baubles provide comic delight.

Considering the vulgar travesty it is, *Oliver!* is not as bad a show as it ought to be. The archetypal force of the Dickens story still faintly magnetizes the stage. Fagin is a kind of storybook witch, but the power of witches exists to be broken. Oliver is destined for storybook transformation—the ill-born pauper turned well-born prince, the maltreated underling who bests his oppressors, the orphan boy who finds a father and a home. Every boy who ever had a nightmare or a dream, every adult who ever yearned for renewal or rebirth, feels the pull of Dickens' fable.

Whatever the cause, *Oliver!* promises to be one of those theatrical phenomena that defy good taste and the saws of critics with equal impunity. Apart from being a cross-country box-office sellout, it is already accentuating a curious trend in haircuts. Hip barbers are clipping the tykes of unwary parents in an *Oliver*-styled fashion known as the "British boy cut" (low bangs in front, thick mop in back), and many a little boy will soon look rather like a wistful needle in a haystack.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,873035,00.html>

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