

Oliver!

Music, Lyrics and Book by Lionel Bart

TAOS Musical Theatre

Thursday 24 May 2018

Reviewed by Delia Lee, District 10 Representative, South West Region

Thank you for your kind invitation to review your production of *Oliver!*

There were some nice touches in this production, directed by **Matt Heaton**. I loved Mr Bumble standing on the cat, who let out a well-timed strangled meow! I also loved the silhouette at the very end created by Fagin against the back wall; a really inspired way to finish the show.

The set was very simple, with raised areas on each side of the stage used for The Workhouse parlour and Oliver's bedroom at the Brownlow's' respectively, amongst other locations. This allowed maximum space for the big numbers. Although scene changes were generally handled efficiently by the stage crew, there were times when they removed a set one side whilst action was taking place on the other. This was occasionally distracting and could perhaps have been better timed or been less conspicuous. As with previous productions by this group, the use of projected images helped greatly to place the action.

The children as the Workhouse boys and Fagin's gang did a great job. Their entrance down the steps through the audience worked well and they were well rehearsed. The show had a strong start with '*Food Glorious Food*' and the choreography by **Anna Mazan** was interesting and well executed by the youngsters. Later on Anna created some enjoyable numbers with the full company, making the most of the cast and the space available.

Zachary Green, who played Oliver on the night I went, has got to be the youngest Oliver I have seen performing this iconic role. He may have been small in size but this was a confident performance, with a lovely clear speaking voice and excellent, note perfect singing. Well done.

Jamie Davies as Artful Dodger had bags of character, was a good dancer and had a wonderful, expressive singing voice. He gave a really outstanding performance and got the character of this cheeky chappy perfectly. Certainly one to watch in future productions.

Lou Knight was a very believable Nancy and had a strong singing voice that suited the part well. Her rendition of '*As long as he needs me*' was one of the standout moments of the show; full of emotion. She was ably supported by **Connie Harris** as Bet, who also performed well and was a strong dancer.

Andrew Curtis as Fagin held his character well and his Jewish accent was perfect. This was a very considered portrayal; quite understated but nonetheless effective. His songs were both well sung and acted, so that every word was heard and understood. A really excellent performance.

Bill Sykes, played by **Paul West**, was a strong presence on the stage and was accompanied by an adorable Bullseye, played by a completely unfazed **Pepper**. Sykes's death is always a tricky moment but this was brilliantly done in this production. Paul West threw himself off a very high level with confidence



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and disappeared behind the set in an instance, to gasps from the audience. It was a very dramatic moment that was realised well by the director.

There were some good singing voices and character acting evident in the supporting cast. Mr Bumble and Widow Corney, played by **Ian Jones** and **Tina Duffin**, worked well together and gave an enjoyable rendition of '*I shall scream*'. Likewise **Tim Hobbs** and **Sarah Davies** as Mr and Mrs Sowerberry made the most of their number and scene. **Alan Rutland** was a very kindly gentleman as Mr Brownlow and suited the part well and **Bernice Hudson** as Mrs Bedwin had a believable connection with Oliver.

The stand out moment of this show for me was the beautiful chorus singing in '*Who will Buy?*' This is a very tricky ensemble to get right and, not only was the timing spot on, but the soloists were strong with accurate intonation and the chorus blended well with lovely dynamics. They had obviously worked hard on this number and it paid off. The Musical Director, **Chris Anderson**, did an excellent job and should feel very proud of his achievements in this production. The location of the band did initially have the effect of not quite being in sync with the principals on occasions, but this settled down through the show and was not an issue in later songs. When working on the flat it is always difficult to place the band and being up higher did mean they were well balanced with the cast.

Costumes and makeup were very good, as was the lighting and sound.

It was lovely to see a full house and the audience clearly loved every minute of this great production; joining in with the finale songs and clapping along.

Many congratulations to everyone involved.

Delia Lee

NB The comments above solely form the view of the representative attending and only reflect the performance seen.

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