

OLIVER!

Programme £2.50

**Tuesday to
Saturday,
October
21st to 25th,
2014**



RHODA MCGAW THEATRE WOKING

*Book, music and lyrics by Lionel Bart
Based on Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist
by arrangement with Musicscope*





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'OLIVER!' – OCTOBER 2014
WOKING AMATEUR OPERATIC SOCIETY

There is little I can add to background of this wonderful musical as Lee covered every aspect of it thoroughly in the programme, including some very interesting facts that would not be common knowledge to the average audience. The theatre appeared to be full on Friday and if the show sold so well at every performance then I trust you came away with a profit to take into your next production.

The opening was good and sung well by children who could only dream of the delectable foods, (which were most realistic!) carried across the stage by the workhouse staff. 'Food Glorious Food' was simply choreographed and the children mostly coped with it.

It is really difficult to comment on children who are brave enough to go up on the stage and take part, but suffice it to say that some of them were less involved than others.

I haven't seen the children dressed in a 'uniform' before and I didn't think it worked. They were after all in a workhouse, and would have been dressed in any manner of scruffy, ill-fitting clothing that was available, but they appeared spotlessly clean both facially and in dress. There was the occasional splodge of 'dirt' but they looked angelic rather than tough, which is what life in a workhouse would have made them. If they were to be in a uniform, as a break from a traditional approach to this musical, then darker material would have been more suitable.

Evan Huntley Williams was young to play the title role but didn't appear to be unduly out of his depth, and although his voice wasn't the sweet soprano one normally associates with 'Where is Love' he put it across very well.

Sam's Widow Corney was loud, irascible and vulgar and I loved it.

As Mr Bumble Brian Higgs was also very good and they worked well together depicting a marriage that was certainly not made in heaven. 'I Shall Scream' was excellent.

Another loud and irascible woman was Mrs Sowerberry, and in that role Sue Gaastra certainly had Peter Howitt, playing Mr Sowerberry, under her thumb! He appeared quite terrified of her and she utterly disparaging of him. 'That's Your Funeral' was well done and Mr. Sowerberry's make up was notable, as was Mrs Sowerberry's well- practised fall into the coffin. The four above characters are real gems to play and I enjoyed their performances very much.

Peter Robinson who played the Artful Dodger made a likeable young rogue and appeared very comfortable on stage. He moved nicely too.

As his sidekick Charley Bates, Robert Angus also gave a confident performance and appeared at all times to be immersed in the story.

Nancy was the perfect part for Geninne. She played it with guts and style but we saw the underlying softness (? weakness) that she had when dealing with Bill. Her performance was first rate.

Mark was absolutely terrifying as Bill, I've never seen a nastier one, and he had great stage presence. The only pity was that in the role he doesn't have to sing 'properly'- and I know what a good voice he has. That aside he made a fabulous Bill Sykes and the fiery relationship between Bill and Nancy was brilliantly acted.

Fagin is the character I most enjoy in this popular, much staged musical and I have never seen a better characterisation than Michael Locks' one. His make up was good, he was utterly Jewish in his presentation, and had the right build and accent. His singing voice was wonderful and if it's possible to fall in love with a stage character – I did with him!



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Nancy's friend Bet was strongly played by Hannah Edser who has both presence and a good musical theatre voice.

Noah Claypole is not a likeable young man, taunting Oliver and being generally unpleasant, and taking this part James Mc. Donald acquitted himself well.

Chloe Attewell in the small role of Charlotte could have been a bigger character but shows promise with future opportunities.

Brian Beamish and Hannah Kitchener were both convincing as Mr Brownlow and Mrs Bedwin respectively, and the reprise of 'Where is Love' sung by Hannah was an unusual but pleasant addition to the show.

I have always thought that Dr. Grimwig is a weak role to make much of, but Roger Thomas managed to bring out the humour in the part and made it very much more enjoyable.

Gillian Freeman appropriately wheezed and coughed her way through the small part of Old Sally and Amanda Carey-Mc Dermot made a delightful cameo of her tiny part as the Old Lady.

The choreography was especially good in the adult numbers and the freezes most effective in 'Consider Yourself' and 'Who Will Buy?' The latter was beautifully sung by the five sellers, and there were artistic groupings in all of the big numbers.

Lee's direction was very good and the principals were all commendable. It's never easy working with children, and although they may learn more quickly than the adults, unless they are experienced on stage, managing to maintain concentration can be a challenge.

The only big set was the London Bridge one, which was more in keeping for the Rhoda Stage than the smaller ones designed by the company. The 'park' scene didn't look right just finishing in a straight line with the blue backcloth behind it, but the trucks were as always attractively constructed, painted and adaptable for the different scenes.

The furniture for Mr Brownlow's house was elegant, however using the same chaise longue with a throw over it did little for the parlour in the workhouse, and the pine chair in that scene was not of the right period. It was set at a strange angle on the stage too, facing into the left wing. The supports to the door stage left were clearly visible.

Costumes were good, Fagin's was the most traditional one for the role, and properties were suitable too.

The accomplished orchestra under the baton of Lindsay Macauley never overpowered the performers, and in 'Reviewing The Situation' the violinist was superb.

Sound was a little inconsistent but the lighting was good.

Your souvenir programme is particularly well presented and apart from the usual necessary information has a wealth of interesting facts re 'Oliver!' I'm sure you will be entering it into the poster/programme competition.

Thank you for inviting me to see the production and also for your hospitality on the evening. I enjoyed the show and as always it was good to meet the cast on stage afterwards.

E. Gloria Smith

N.O.D.A. South East Regional Representative – District 12