

**OTTERSASH PLAYERS – ‘OLIVER TWIST’
NOVEMBER 2008**

Having watched and also taken part in a number of productions of the musical version of ‘Oliver Twist’, it was a nice change for me to see the play.

Congratulations to Alan Wakefield who produced yet another super set which provided all the necessary venues for the story’s enactment. Pulling across the ‘walls’ gave an added depth to the set and Fagin’s den plus the other rooms stage right were perfect.

I always enjoy something happening on stage before the actual start of the production, purely a personal preference, as it helps to set the atmosphere for the play.

The first piece of action was a dark reminder of what life was like for the less fortunate in the 1800’s. In that dramatic opening scene Graham Collier was excellent as the indifferent, down to earth doctor, and also as the servant later on. He portrayed two totally different characters very convincingly. His deference as the servant was most amusing, it was difficult to watch anything else whilst he was dithering about with the tea tray!

His wife Fiona has developed her acting skills in the past year and was good in the parts she played, giving a particularly good characterisation as the Old Hag.

In the title role of Oliver, James Cochrane coped well but had a tendency to deliver his lines to the audience rather than his fellow actors. He needed to relate more to them as they had little to work with, especially when they were addressing him but he continued to look straight out. That being said, he is only young and definitely shows promise for the future.

Peter Moore was great as Mr. Bumble, displaying the bombastic character plus good timing to bring out the humour brilliantly. The scene in act two where we see that the marriage has already turned sour was classic. Very well handled by both players and very amusing.

Widow Corney was suitably coy to start with and then once she had her man she displayed the real sourness of her nature. Kay Doyle dealt with the role very well.

As Lady Stock-Jobber, Alison Byers had the right air of a person in her station of life and Bob Day was effective in his various roles, especially as Mr. Grimwig.

Nick Daborn made a strutting confident Noah Claypole and Amanda Keating a pleasant if rather easily led Charlotte.

Spectre like Mr. Sowerbury, played by Tony Richardson, was suitably creepy and Hannah Rose complemented him as his wife.

In the role of Fagin, Mark Holton was a likeable rogue and his relationship with the children was nicely depicted. He was kind to them but in return expected them to fill his pockets by picking those of others, and he made this as much fun as possible. He played the part securely.

Nancy was portrayed strongly by Sophia Hodgson; who gave a very good performance. She showed her toughness and stood up to Bill with spirit, but we also saw a soft underbelly when it came to dealing with Fagin’s gang of children.

I understand it was Phil Pile’s first lead role so congratulations to him on making such a confident debut. Bill Sykes has to be fierce and brutish and he achieved those characteristics most convincingly. His meeting with Nancy under the bridge, (and for the audience the knowledge of what was about to happen) made for a tense scene in the play. The red lighting plus the noise as Nancy was beaten to death was most chilling. I felt the lighting cue could have been delayed until the beating started and we assumed her death, rather than as they walked under the bridge, but perhaps that was how it was plotted.

Bill Jackson acted the part of Monks strongly and conveyed the anger, fear and wickedness he felt as his own position became insecure, and Clare Groome and Lynne Walters were credible as the upper-class Maylies.

All of the other parts were well played and the cast commendably managed to change their persona with each role.

The young people taking part in the production added a great deal to the workhouse scenes although a couple of them were quite clearly looking for friends/ family in the audience. Always a problem with youngsters once they get on stage, but one or two of them stood out as experienced performers.

Devon White-Aldworth was one of them. He gave a confident and relaxed performance as Dodger.

Matthew's direction was excellent and he produced a well-plotted play with plenty of business aside from the main action. His hard work, doubly so working with children, resulted in a polished and enjoyable production. I thought the first scene in the workhouse yard gave a strong image of the life and of the cruelty handed out to orphaned children in that era, and throughout the piece the harshness of those times was apparent.

Not having read Dickens for many years I can't remember how the story finishes but I suspect that Matthew added the little extra bit at the end where Fagin comes back on stage? Whether or not, I liked it and it led the audience to imagine what the future would hold for him, or even if there would be a sequel at some later date.

The costumes were very good except for the odd white shirt with a breast pocket and the makeup was good too.

Lighting and sound were very good indeed with well-chosen music and sound effects.

The programme cover is attractive but the scenes were not listed. It was mostly obvious where they were, but it wasn't clear what the silver drapes hanging from the bridge represented in a later scene.

It was good to see Chris again and to meet Matthew in the interval, and once again I thank you for inviting me to see 'Oliver Twist' and for your hospitality on the evening.

I shall look forward to your play in May and meantime wish everyone at Ottershaw Players a happy Christmas and a healthy 2009.

E. Gloria Smith
NODA Representative – District 12