

Please sir, I want some more

ONHamptonRoads

Written by Robert Hodge

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PCT's production, under the leadership of director PETER NATALE and choreographer DANA MARGULIES, has moments of brilliance, creativity, and true heart. The night that I attended was one of those legendary nights in the musical theatre where the female lead was unexpectedly taken ill, and there were several changes in the casting.

The role of Nancy was played by ALEXANDRIA HAMELIN, and despite having only a few hours of rehearsal, Ms. Hamelin turned in an admirable performance, appearing to be very comfortable with the role and at home with the staging. Kudos.

The musical Oliver! has had a long and storied theatrical life. Lionel Bart, the show's composer, lyricist and writer, took Charles Dickens' masterpiece about a young orphan who asked for "some more" and created one of the most popular musicals of the 20th century.

The performances in this production are generally average community theatre fare. However, this production was highlighted by CHRIS HULL's portrayal of Fagin. His charismatic stage presence and cultivated voice are a perfect fit for the role. Rarely does one find a performer of this caliber in a local community production. Hull stops the show in act two with his energetic rendition of "Reviewing the Situation," and though every adult actor has been cautioned about sharing the stage with children and animals, he holds his own in the group numbers, emerging as an over the top ring leader in a circus of delinquents in the very enjoyable "You've Got to Pick a Pocket or Two."

Fagin's group is made up of some very talented young boys, who deliver great performances. Most notably, JOEL WHITE as Artful Dodger captures the essence of Dickensian England with a marvelous flair. His mastery of the choreography and the consistency of his accent and the strength of the character development make him a joy to watch. He possesses a gift for pacing that eludes many actors with far more experience and training. White is the natural leader of the boys in the gang which included GAVIN WALLACE, JOE AMBROSE, NATHANIEL BARKER, ROBERT CANTRELL, KATIE DEPP, BROOKE HENDRICKS, KAYLA JAEGER, BYRON WIGFALL and MARK WILSON.

There are twenty-three local children who appear in this musical. They are divided into a group of orphans and those who are in Fagin's gang of thieves. HELEN D'ALFONSO has done a marvelous job as the Children's Vocal Coach. The kids really sang out and were remarkably on the money with the demanding song and dance numbers. Their choreography was beautifully executed and quite a few of the orphans are easily and instantly adoptable! From that chorus line of pitiful waifs, Oliver, played by DENVER CRAWFORD, emerges as the main character in an adventure that sees him indentured to a couple of local morticians, portrayed by JERRY SOWERS and LINDA MARLEY SMITH. These two have a perfect mastery of the macabre as they perform the very clever song, "That's Your Funeral." Ultimately, Oliver is delivered into the hands of Fagin, and then following his arrest as a pickpocket, lands in the custody of his grandfather. Young Crawford is charming as Oliver, and has no trouble making the audience root for him.

The most impressive musical moment in the show is heard in the second act. During the number "Who Will Buy," a vocal quartet made up of EMILY SMITH as the milkmaid, WENDY NELSON as the Rose Seller, KAYLA JAEGER who is selling strawberries, and BOB SPRINGSTEAD as the Grinder, deliver a very strong blend and stops the show with their portrayals of characters which exemplify the underlying sadness of the working class of the period.

With the exception of this remarkable quartet moment, this show would have benefited from a more experienced chorus. While the ensemble's sound was impressive, their blocking was unimaginative and the acting was non-existent. The number "Consider Yourself" was cheerily sung by a mass of stoney, blank faces. In the final scene - a tense, dramatic moment - we were distracted by poorly executed improvisations. The awkwardness was exacerbated by poorly-timed staging for the leads and a general feeling that the cast wasn't quite comfortable with this section of the script. This was without a doubt the weakest section of the show.

This production of Oliver!, while not as dark or brooding as previous incarnations, is still a delightful production, which is well worth seeing. It runs through August 26th.