

Consider yourself true stars

'OLIVER!', performed by the Newbury Nomads, at The Corn Exchange, from Thursday, October 3 to Saturday, October 5

Five years ago this week, my first review for this newspaper was of Nomads' excellent production of 'Return to the Forbidden Planet'. Coincidentally, in the Queen's golden jubilee year, my 50th critique is of their latest offering, 'Oliver!'. What a strange 'twist' of fate.

The cast list displayed many familiar faces, not least Stuart Honey, who had played the Artful Dodger the last time the company staged the show in 1983, now in the starring role as the arch-villain Fagin. Scheming and manipulative, with plenty of tongue-in-cheek humour, his was a performance to savour.

Max Beare's rumbustious Mr Bumble proved a perfect foil for the acid-tongued Widow Corney, played by Jeanette Maskell, who was also responsible for the lively choreography. Tony Randall seemed to relish his role as that nasty piece of work Bill Sykes, coercing Melody Arnold's tuneful Nancy into carrying out his evil plans, to the detriment of them both. Dennis Heath, reprising the part of the undertaker Mr Sowerberry (spelt 'Sowerbury' in his shop window - a Freudian slip?), cut a gaunt figure and Mike Cound made a welcome return as the beneficent Mr Brownlow. The ubiquitous Daniel Maskell shone in a multiplicity of roles.

Mandy Maskell, making her directorial debut, marshalled her large forces with flair and Nic Cope presided over a youthful orchestra who provided sympathetic accompaniment throughout. Effective lighting and perfect sound enhanced the overall effect.

An impressive chorus of children was led by Christopher Scott as a sweet-voiced Oliver. His rendition of 'Where is Love?' was far superior to that in the recent professional production at the London Palladium although I had to smile as he 'switched on' his candle at the start of the song! The charismatic Jack Juniper (is that his stage-name?) contrasted well as the resourceful Artful Dodger. Together they can consider themselves the real stars of the show. Who could ask for anything more?

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