

Bumble, for Quarter.

WITHAM A.O.S. OLIVER 25TH OCTOBER 1995

DRAFT REPORT FOR THE FEBRUARY 1996 AREA BULLETIN

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WITHAM A.O.S.'s production of OLIVER used the largest cast I have yet seen on the modest Public Hall stage, and it says much for Cynthia Stead's direction that these numbers were used to such good effect in most of the ensemble set pieces. There were one or two places, however, where the logistics of moving so many people off and on stage slowed the impetus rather. Certainly Fagin's gang of 20 put up a terrific show, with plenty of verve and energy, and they were all convincing boys, despite 50% of the complement being female. Oh, and they did manage to look suitably scruffy! All of the major principals were well cast and without exception gave good interpretations of characters with whom we have all become familiar. Nick Clough gave us the warm, sympathetic, and wholly likable Fagin of the musical, while Anthony, his son, came over well as a rather defiant Oliver, and John Dalgleish was a cocky Artful Dodger. Nancy, played by Jan Edmunds, developed exactly the right style, and Michael Dunnion's Sykes became really menacing, but through the dialogue, rather than with his entrance number. Stewart Adkins was in fine voice as an imposing Mr. Bumble. The composite set was excellent, and in view changes with costumed crew were exactly right. Costumes were also very good, and lighting was effective. Congratulations to the sound operators, who so successfully got the balance right with the radio mikes used by Oliver and The Artful Dodger. Musical direction, by Jill Parkin, was firm and the orchestra sounded good, but unfortunately, too much volume in too many places obliterated lyric and dialogue. As always, an informative and interesting programme. This was a good show, played to capacity audiences, and will prove to be an excellent launch pad, I'm sure, for the Society's new Youth section.

#### Other Comments - For the Society only.

1. I must be honest with you and tell you that I went away from your second night performance feeling slightly puzzled. Here was a show where all the individual constituents were good; well loved music, good script, well cast, good settings and costumes, good individual performances, good production numbers etc., and yet for some reason it had not gripped as, with that recipe, it should have done. The audience did not seem to me to be as responsive as it might have been either. Certainly there were one or two near to me who did not know how to behave in a theatre, and even talked during a solo, a small point really, but perhaps a manifestation of something more general. Thinking about it since, there are perhaps three points I might make:-

(a) It was second night, and we all know about the tendency to relax slightly in the performance following the stress and relief of a successful first night, and in so doing lose some of the bite!

(b) The point made above about impetus had a very real impact on the overall pace, and I did wonder whether a cast of 60+, including 21 "boys" was a bit of a tall order on the Public Hall stage, not so much relating to on stage events as to getting groups on and off quickly.

(c) The orchestra was tuneful, well balanced and pleasant to listen to, BUT I felt it to be intrusive rather than supportive of the events onstage on rather too many occasions. In fact I found it, at times, to be a real irritant. I really am very sorry to feel the need to make this comment, since I have always held up Witham as an prime example of the sympathy between pit and voice which can be achieved. On this occasion, however, orchestra did outdo voice too often for comfort. Some examples. No concession to unmasked boys solo bits in "Food Glorious Food", to the extent that they simply weren't heard; a well sung "Where is Love" was overshadowed, despite the radio mike used; "Who Will Buy" was lost amongst the instruments, and I couldn't help reflecting how good this quintet can sound unaccompanied. Too much of a well put over "I'm Reviewing the Situation" overwhelmed by the accompaniment. There were other

examples but I won't labour the point, except to say that both Nancy and Sykes would have benefitted from having radio mikes for their entrance numbers, so that the impact of their characters could have been more immediately effective.

2. I thought the composite set was admirable and suggested quite effectively everything it needed to.

3. Probably the best balanced cast I've seen for some time and everyone was right both for themselves and as part of the group of characters portrayed. Apart from things already mentioned one or two moments stand in the memory e.g. the instant establishment of the Mrs. Sowerberry character with that first offstage screech!; the Bumble/Widow Corney interplay throughout; Fagin's first entrance; Nancy's "As Long As He Needs Me"; and some good stage pictures.

4. And so, on to the next, and I really do wish you well in the establishment of your youngsters with W.O.W. If I can be of any assistance please do let me know, and I look forward to seeing their debut in Joseph.... next year. By the way I would appreciate the return of the literature I lent to Nick concerning the legislation covering stage performances by children.

All the best to you everyone.

John Warburton  
1st November 1995