

# British Theatre Guide

News, reviews, features and podcast on theatre across the UK

## Dickens Unplugged

Written & Directed by Adam Long

Mark Goucher, Wimpole Theatre and The Araca Group in association with the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre

Comedy Theatre

(2008)

Co-founder of the Reduced Shakespeare Company, Adam Long is back in the West End with *Dickens Unplugged*.

In the same fashion as *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)*, *Dickens Unplugged* squeezes approximately one hundred hours of literature into an hour and forty-five minutes. Add to that songs, musical instruments and five men playing women, children, ghosts and oh men, and you have yourself a Dickens frenzy.

Although slightly unusual to see a play about one of our home grown authors performed in American accents, it actually worked, adding another comic level to the send-up of these infamous characters from British literature.

The cast have an exuberant amount of energy as they flit about the stage, re-telling stories such as *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*, ranging from under a minute to half an hour in length. Told primarily through song, the American influence is evident through their country and soft rock inspired melodies and although these songs are undeniably witty they are not particularly memorable.

Each tale is scattered with modern day references from the musical *Wicked* to Scooby-Doo to the 2012 Olympics. Whilst the comedic ability of this cast can't be faulted, it lacks the slickness and sophistication of other shows similar in style such as *The 39 Steps*.

The joke of telling a long story in a very short amount of time ran out of steam fairly quickly. The combination of larger than life performances with age-old gags such as performers running across the stage with signs to show the passing of time or a bucket of white powder falling on a performer's head at the mention of snow created pantomime like moments. What in fact is a vast and varied collection of literature all blurred into one as the same performance style was used to tell each tale.

Having said this; the audience (of whom I suspect certainly included some friends and family) were highly appreciative and their enjoyment was audible; so what do I know? This is a show for which I had "Great Expectations" (excuse the pun; I am merely taking a leaf out of their book). If subtle humour is what you are after then you'll be better off catching a full length adaptation of one of these famous novels. However if in your face, thigh slapping comedy is what you enjoy then you'll have a "Dickens" of a time.

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Sheila Connor [reviewed](#) this production at Guildford

**Reviewer:** [Rachel Sheridan](#)