

# British Theatre Guide

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## It's a Fine Life!

Music and lyrics by Lionel Bart, book by Chris Bond

Cut to the Chase Theatre Company

Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch

(2006)

For any *Oliver* fan, *It's a Fine Life!* is a great chance to go and listen and discover the hits of Lionel Bart. The show is currently being played by Cut to the Chase - the multi talented Rep Company based at the Queens Theatre, Hornchurch.

*It's a Fine Life!* is based on Bart's life story and musicals including his work with Joan Littlewood at Theatre Royal, Stratford East. The show does depict an extremely colourful 'up and down' life and highlights just how prolific Bart's writing was - from writing 'Living Doll' to 'From Russia With Love.' However, I'm not sure that the piece works as a whole - it feels like a biographical piece with great songs dropped in rather than the two following on from each other. The 'now-we're-going-to-sing' feeling actually ruined some of the better acting scenes - including Littlewood and Bart having an intimate heart to heart and a very touching Alcoholics Anonymous meeting.

The risk with these 'Greatest Hits' musicals is that the writer has to find a way of fitting the songs in with the story without detriment to either - *It's a Fine Life!* never seems to achieve this. Certainly the show is packed with songs, which makes for an evening which seems to drag a little - this isn't helped by the conventional 'building up' in act one and 'knocking down' in act two.

There are some plus points - a fantastically powerful Joan Littlewood is brought to life by Diana Croft, and Matt Devitt convinces us in his portrayal of Bart himself, especially in his spectacular demise from 'riches to rags.' There are some great comic moments too - the affirmation that Cliff Richard 'will never last' and Bart's last minute performance in *Fings Ain't Wot They Used t'Be* come to mind.

However, there are problems - the technical difficulties on this evening will be ironed out, but the fact that the piece seems to shy away from Bart's homosexuality is an example of an all-too-obvious dent in the show's armour. There is no doubt that if you are an *Oliver* or *Blitz* fan you will enjoy hearing reprisals of the catchy songs. However, I wonder whether *It's a Fine Life!* offers you much more than reading a biography and listening to a back catalogue of Lionel Bart musicals.

*"It's a Fine Life" runs until 16th September*

Reviewer: [John Johnson](#)