

British Theatre Guide

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Great Expectations

Charles Dickens, adapted for the stage by Hugh Leonard
The Brockley Jack Theatre
(2007)

The team behind the Brockley Jack Theatre have been living in interesting times. As preparations for the opening of their Christmas show were reaching a climax, the future of the theatre was put in jeopardy by the brewery in whose premises the theatre is based.

As a consequence of Greene King's ill-thought out refurbishment plans the theatre would be relocated at its own cost - the foreseeable expenses were prohibitive and the theatre would have no alternative but to close.

It seems that at the eleventh hour the brewery reconsidered their plan and the theatre is enjoying a stay of execution. For the meantime, the show will go on

The Brockley Jack Christmas production is *Great Expectations*. Having been 'forced' to read the novel as a recalcitrant teenager doing 'O' level English Lit, I predictably disliked it so it is an understated compliment to say I am tempted to revisit this book having seen the production.

Although Hugh Leonard has taken a few liberties with the adaptation he has, to my mind, made it a good deal more exciting than I remember it! The lengthy list of characters in the original has been cut down little ill-effect and, apart from a rather contrived ending, what is provided is a good yarn.

It seems to me that Leonard has brought out the 'who dunnit' element of the story whilst also playing up the themes of class and expectations and playing at the expense of others. The conclusions, of course, are timeless: Pip comes of age learning that money does not buy happiness.

Initially *Great Expectations* was presented by way of a weekly serialisation but the style of this adaptation is less episodic and director Kate Bannister keeps up the pace to get through over fifty chapters' worth of material.

The role of Pip is initiated engagingly by Bridget Collins as the young boy and taken forward by Steven Alexander from the start of his transition to gentlemen. In splitting the role, there are essentially two narrators and Bridget Collins plays the boy sensitively with echoes of a conscience for the adult Pip.

Davin Eadie is all agreeable modesty as Joe Gargery, and Daniel Brennan manages to make us laugh at Pumblechook without dismissing the significance of his contribution.

Hannah Mercer plays two opposites very well - the trenchant Mrs Joe and the caring and intelligent Biddy in the later story, whilst James Sutherland is marvellously threatening as Magwitch the escaped convict and as the gentlemen he becomes.

James Hutchinson's Wemmick and Max Lindsay's Herbert Pocket both fun and lovely -are the perfect foil for the rather sinister and slimy Jaggers of convincing William Ludwig.

Rebecca Vokins and Pearl Marsland have the impossible job of meeting everyone's own idea of the beautiful Estella and the vengeful, iconic Miss Havisham.

Finally a mention must go to the creative team, especially the costume design of Martin Robinson, for their contribution to this atmospheric piece.

Advanced sales are exceeding expectations (sorry!) and some performances are already sold out, so let us hope the brewery holding the sword of Damocles over the theatre will realise the value of what it is putting at risk.

"Great Expectations" runs to Saturday 5 January 2008, Tuesdays to Saturdays at 8pm (no performances on Mondays, Sundays, 23-27 December 2007 and 1 January 2008, except for an additional performance Sunday 30 December). Tickets: £11, £8 conc. Tuesday all tickets £8.

Reviewer: [Sandra Giorgetti](#)