

British Theatre Guide

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Oliver Twist

Charles Dickens, adapted by Adam Peck

Tobacco Factory Theatres

Tobacco Factory Theatre, Bristol

1 December 2023–22 January 2024

This year's Christmas production at Tobacco Factory Theatres is *Oliver Twist*. Writer Adam Peck has taken the original from Charles Dickens and transformed it into a neatly modern retelling of this classic to produce a version more Oliver with a Twist.

Oliver starts his life in some kind of Orwellian prison rather than an orphanage. Causing trouble by asking for more, he finds himself turned out to fend for himself. In this very twenty-first-century version, Oliver finds himself in a tough area of Bristol on the wrong side of the river—where could it be? He quickly finds himself taken in by a new 'family' and heading for the leafy comforts of Clifton, where Fagin's gang head for rich pickings.

This reset stays close to the original but, as the Tobacco Factory's family Christmas show, Peck is careful to give it a life of its own, introducing local references and humour along the way. This version played in-the-round has a live musical accompaniment on stage throughout. Cast member and musician Alex Heane brings to life composer Seamas Carey's work with some fun songs for the cast to sing and perform to. Director Heidi Vaughan keeps the evening moving along, allowing for the frequent character and costume changes and the choreographed musical numbers.

The small cast double up roles in many instances, producing some very funny moments in the evening when some characters just can't be found. All should get a mention. Defender Nyanhete is well cast as the guileless Oliver, balancing his naïve and appealing nature. Beverly Rudd has a great evening as Fagin, buzzing with humour and malevolent energy. Tom Fletcher has a very busy evening in a variety of roles and delivers some of the funniest moments with perfect comic timing as either Dodger or Martha.

Bill Sykes is played by Dan Gaisford (also taking other parts and supporting Heane on stage with the music). Gaisford is perfect for Sykes, threatening violence and menace whenever he comes on stage. Shiquerra Robertson Harris takes the part of the sympathetic Nancy (and other characters), showing empathy for the children but also her vulnerability at the hand of Sykes. Alice Barclay, also in more than one role but principally Brownlow, enjoys a comic double-act with her maid (Fletcher again), offering Oliver a way out.

It is an enduring story and in this version brought to life with a Christmas message of family and belonging. Perfect for a seasonal night out. Be warned: Sykes does threaten with a gun. The age recommendation is 7+ so possibly for many children familiar with many popular video games this may not something that shocks, but, without spoiling what was otherwise a tremendous night, was a slightly uncomfortable moment in the evening for this reviewer.

Will one of English writing's biggest crooks get away with it this time? Watch the show to find out.

Reviewer: [Joan Phillips](#)