

ENTERTAINMENT

Flaws, but good effort, mark Oliver's opening night

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Staff Writer

Smokey old London came alive on the stage of John Elliott Theatre Thursday night as Georgetown Globe Musical Productions opened their current offering *Oliver!*

Based on the Charles Dickens book *Oliver Twist*, written in the late 19th century, Globe's production featured a huge cast, many of them children, as they recreated the workhouse atmosphere so well known in the novel.

In the production schedule, Bryan Bartle and Kyle Sokolowski share duties for the part of Oliver, while Meghan de Chastelain and Chelsea Beatty share the part of Artful Dodger. Opening night featured Bartel and de Chastelain.

Taking on the part of Oliver is a daunting task, and occasionally Bartle suffered from a lack of voice projection and stage presence—possibly an opening night adjustment. His choreography and acting was quite effective, and he will no doubt fine-tune the minor problems with subsequent performances. Bartle's accent was

great, giving a taste of cockney London to his character.

Meghan de Chastelain gave a strong performance as the Artful Dodger, never leaving the audience any doubt when she was on stage. Her animated performance gave the character lots of life.

Roscoe Petrovic and Beatrice Sharkey handled the parts of Mr. Bumble and Widow Corney. Again, both suffered from a lack of projecting their voices to the audience, (instead of each other.) At times, they simply could not be heard or understood, especially when Sharkey's part required she 'whisper.'

Kelly Baker handled the part of Oliver's mother effectively.

Mr. And Mrs. Sowerberry, the funeral directors, were played by Paul d'Entremont and Julie Solomon. Their acting and singing was great, but for a moment, I thought I'd dropped by the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, as d'Entremont's outfit resembled Count Dracula more than that of a Victorian undertaker's garb.

Martha Zavitz was effective as their daughter Charlotte Sowerberry, and Travis Paul was a good match to play opposite her as funeral assistant Noah Claypole.

There is no doubt Mark Llewellyn dominated the show as Fagin. From his stage presence, his body language and his facial expressions, he simply spelled F-A-G-I-N. Topping off Llewellyn's character was his costume, a tattered overcoat and broad brimmed hat that had seen better days, making Fagin look like he'd just wandered in from old London.

Mandy Meisner also captured the hearts of the audience as the golden-hearted Nancy. With her mane of red hair, she certainly commanded the stage when she stepped onto it.

Effectively backing her up in many scenes was Carolyn Sevigny, who plays Bet.

Lucas LaRoche handled the part of Charley Bates and Chris Burk stepped in to play Oliver's grandfather Mr. Brownlow, while Sara Martel played Mrs. Bedwin.

Although Dale Kustra was a sinister enough Bill Sikes, he didn't appear that threatening. His outfit needed to be darker and more 'evil' to portray that dark side to its full potential.

The show features dozens of young children, and the choreographers receive top marks for keeping the kids in step. With a few exceptions noted above, costumes were effective and had a strong period look. Stage lighting was quiet smooth and flawless.

In *Oliver!*, Globe tried a departure from the norm, incorporating an audio-visual element into the production, running opening credits on a suspended screen, and at times, flowing graphics down the walls on either side of the theatre.

The credits were excusable, but the graphics running on either side of the theatre tended to do nothing more than distract from the action on stage, rather than compliment it. Anything drawing visual attention away from the performers onstage is not a good thing in any production.

All in all, *Oliver!* is a good production, but opening night revealed a few wrinkles that hopefully can be ironed out. The show has obvious potential, and Globe has the track record to support it. Hopefully the producers and directors can put the polish back on subsequent shows.

Oliver! continues its run this week.

(Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@independentfreepress.com)

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