



Show Report

Acton AOS

Oliver!

22 October 2025

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

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| PRODUCTION | Oliver! |
| SOCIETY | Acton AOS |
| VENUE | Lyceum Theatre Crewe |
| GENRE | Musical |
| CAST SIZE | 63 |
| DIRECTOR | Debbie Cornock |
| MUSICAL DIRECTORS | Adam Whitehead, Emily Wycherley, Gemma O'Donnell |
| CHOREOGRAPHER | Faye Thompson-Butt |
| STAGE MANAGER | Rob Munro and Team |
| SET DESIGN | Proscenium |
| LIGHTING DESIGN / OPERATOR | Sarah Knapper |
| SOUND DESIGN / OPERATOR | Adam Thompson |
| WARDROBE | Jo Stubbs, Rene Hancock, Barbara Bispham |
| PROPERTIES | Bev Morris, Rene Gater, Richard Wiffin, Alex Fairclough |
| PROGRAMME | Kevin Whitfield |
| SAFEGUARDING/CHAPERPONE | Rachel Willis |

CAST LIST

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Oliver 1 & Fagin's Gang | Freddie Barlow |
| Oliver 2 & Fagin's Gang | Arthur Colerik |
| Fagin | Adam Goode |
| Artful Dodger 1 & Fagin's Gang | Alec Sweeting |
| Artful Dodger 2 & Fagin's Gang | George Robinson |
| Bill Sykes | Levi Rhodes-McKenzie |
| Nancy | Emily McAvoy |
| Bet | Anabelle Nolan |
| Mr Bumble | Lewis Thompson |
| Widow Corney | Claire Thompson |
| Mr Brownlow | Kevin Whitfield |
| Mr Sowerberry | Simon Dean |
| Mrs Sowerberry | Mary Bolide |
| Charlotte & Milkmaid | Ellen Smith |
| Noah Claypole | Richard Senior |
| Dr Grimwig | Joe Moore |
| Mrs Bedwin | Rachel Willis |

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|---|-------------------|
| Old Sally | Heidi Bradney |
| Bullseye | Patch (Dog) |
| Charley Bates & Fagin's Gang | Connor Mason |
| Rose Seller & Ensemble | Eva Estevanon |
| Milkmaid & Ensemble | Rachel Hadzik |
| Strawberry Seller & Ensemble | Scarlett Robinson |
| Strawberry Seller & Fagin's Gang | Elsa Slater |
| Knife-Grinder, Bow Street Runner & Ensemble | Dean Cornock |
| Knife-Grinder & Ensemble | James Bebbington |
| Bow Street Runner & Ensemble | Peter Carragher |
| Bow Street Runners, Swing & Ensemble | Rob Earl |

ENSEMBLE

Stephen Barber
Angela Barlow
Marco Crisuolo
Maria Earl
Karen Flannery
Kathryn Harding
Vanessa Harratt
Lillian Henry
Julie Mann
Christine Parker
Rachel Rogers
Lisa Smith
Sally Slater
Justine Twiss
Shannon Vernon
Ruth Vidler

FAGIN'S GANG

Poppy Dight
Melody Freeman
Eva Guthrie
Lola Hurley
Summer Jardine
Aubrey Jenkins
Lucia Kemp
Poppy Kemp
Poppy Mell

Hannah Pascall
Joe Potts
Myla Rhodes
Abigail Riley
Dougjie Shaw
Annie Slater
Ellie Tierney
Winnie Twiss
Isabella Willis
Freddie Wilson

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|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| DATE OF PERFORMANCE | Wednesday 22nd October 2025 |
| DATE REPORT PUBLISHED | Thursday 23rd October 2025 |
| ADJUDICATOR ID | NSA0001 |
| NSA LOGO ON POSTER | No |
| NSA IN PROGRAMME | Front Cover, No Banner |
| PROGRAMME CLASS | Best Original Design |

THE REVIEW

REVIEW WORD COUNT

2129

STRONGEST ELEMENTS

Powerful Performances

- **The entire cast** delivered an infectious energy throughout that lit up the stage and gave a passionate and enthusiastic performance.

Bold, Intelligent Direction and Structure

- Every lighting cue, every scene change, every detail of this production was thoroughly planned and executed well.

Striking and Cohesive Design Choices

- The costumes were fitted brilliantly, suiting every character, every moment and imagined, designed and sourced splendidly.

As you can expect, I go to many productions and when you go to opening night - it's likely you will spot a few mishaps that will be sorted out over the course of the run - But that was not the case of Acton AOS' production of Oliver which shone through, setting the tone and the bar for the rest of the production run this week.

The production started with an open stage to reveal the workhouse, with bricked flats and a wooden bridge featuring a distressed wood effect that would feature in every scene - cleverly used to give the performance depth and height throughout and giving the opportunity for the cast members to peregrinate across the stage. There was one cloth used upstage throughout that set the scene well - although some damage or a niggle in the cloth and really stood out against the lighting directly above it, creating an undesirable shadow throughout.

Playing the titular character was ten year old **Freddie Barlow** - a cheeky, happy actor who undertook the role as his first Principal Character position. He was innocent, gentle and portrayed the character very well - he was focused, performed unphased to hundreds of people, had great tones and pitch in his vocals and the audience were blown away and mesmerized with his rendition of 'Where is Love?' Freddie, with a bit more experience, will be an actor to truly look out for in the next few years on the amateur stage. Oliver's attack on Noah felt authentic and natural and Freddie did this well.

Fagin was portrayed by **Adam Goode** who possesses great characterisation skills. His comedic movement, energy, expressions and intriguing nature ensured he encapsulated the audience's attention when he was performing. Adam pitched the correct tone into his voice and character, spoke with a great accent throughout, ensuring he paid attention to his posture and character at all times and was very much 'in the zone.' There were a couple of tiny hiccups with timing during his vocals which I am sure Adam will sort for future performances, you have to remember I saw this on opening night and he gave a robust, solid, entertaining performance.

Alec Sweeting undertook the role we all know and love – The Artful Dodger. Alec is 13 years old which shocked me because he had great confidence, posture, characterisation and maintained a great accent throughout – skills that you normally find at an older age with tonnes of experience. He had great diction, threw in the odd heel flick during scenes to match his characters movement, he delivered his lines with a great pace and energy, performing directly to the audience and the scene. He is certainly on the road to a great career in acting if this is how he can portray a character at such a young age.

Bill Sikes was played by **Levi Rhodes-McKenzie** – He was terrifying, you could hear a pin drop in the audience – his eyes were popping out, he was dominant, confident and over powering. He used his prop well, bashing it to assert authority and slapped Nancy well with good use of trickery. He had great reactive acting skills and performed well against **Emily McAvoy**, who played Nancy. Emily had a great, maintained accent throughout, very solid vocals (which actually made my assistant cry during her rendition of ‘As long as he needs me’), strong breath control, characterisation, movement, energy and she had obviously worked on this character a lot in rehearsals resulting in a powerful, emotional performance.

Bet was played by **Anabelle Nolan** who’s infectious energy and smile lit up her scenes, she bounced well off Emily and displayed both emotion and fear in her scenes, particularly when around Bill.

Lewis Thompson and **Claire Thompson** played Mr Bumble and Widow Corney who both had vigorous vocals and were a very entertaining pair. They were believable and relatable. They both had good projection and I particularly enjoyed ‘I shall scream’ which was acted well and created lots of laughs.

Mr Brownlow was portrayed by **Kevin Whitfield** who brought a caring and loving nature to his character. With years of experience in theatre, he acted methodically and moved with intention, delivering his script with good pace, diction and expression. Playing alongside Kevin was **Rachel Willis** as Mrs Bedwin who was authentic and had good reactive acting skills, good projection and was in the moment of the scene throughout.

Simon Dean and **Mary Bolide** portrayed Mr and Mrs Sowerberry. Simon had eccentric mannerisms and good characterisation. He reacted well to scripted dialogue from other cast members. Mary was burly with her characterisation. She was focused with her eyes popping out, she had worked on her gestures and mannerisms, even her shuffle across the stage, she had worked on her voice control and injected great tones in her voice to give it depth, meaning and intention.

Ellen Smith portrayed Charlotte with good diction and projection. She sang beautifully as a milkmaid alongside **Rachel Hadzik** where they were hitting the highest harmonies. **Richard Senior** played the role of Noah with a good accent, posture and facial expressions although I would have liked to have seen more vindictiveness aimed towards Oliver instead of shouting but Richard knew what his job was and moved round the stage well.

Joe Moore played Dr Grimwig and although it is only a tiny part, he performed directly out to the audience, giving his character flamboyance and flair – he had secure characterisation skills and expressions and made efforts to elevate his character, emphasising the dialog well.

Heidi Bradney undertook the role of Old Sally. Such a tiny part in the musical – but I have seen this character performed exceptionally well in the past and again where I felt underwhelmed and it is all about the balance of the character. Although it is my personal preference, I would have liked to have seen this character in a wheelchair to show how ill and sick Sally is. Heidi played this character wonderfully. She had a soft voice, delivered her dialogue with purpose and acted her death wonderfully, creating both shocking and comical moments when she took her final gasp and executed the purpose of her character well.

Connor Mason played the cheeky Charley Bates with so much energy and confidence. He lit up the stage, knew his purpose and executed it well. His enthusiasm, projection and reactive acting skills were on fire during the performance and Connor will go far if he continues to act.

I appreciated the rendition of 'Who will buy' with the beautiful harmonies and simple direction in them. The characters all sang well, focused and delivered a splendid number.

Bullseye was played by **Patch** who was not phased by the noise, the lights and the hundreds of people staring at him. It was a shame that Patch wasn't included in more of the storyline but he had a good temperament throughout and was led by his handler in the right moments.

The energy and commitment shown by Fagin's Gang was infectious. The rhythmic choreography shown by both this group and the ensemble elevated the energy for the Principal characters and it was obvious all the cast were having fun, enjoying their passion for theatre. When looking at the bigger ensemble groups as a whole during a number – I look out for timing, feet, symmetry and synchronisation and this group of performers were very, very powerful – it was obvious they had worked so hard rehearsing and practicing the choreography by **Faye Thompson-Butt** and I am sure the entire group did her proud. I always like to seek out the performers in the ensemble who really shine as standout performers and this job was particularly tricky as they were all so confident – however, **Freddie Wilson** and **Hannah Pascall**

stood out for their beaming smiles, confidence and stage presence and I hope to see them try out a Principal role in the future and further elevate their experience and skills.

The direction put in place by Director **Debbie Cornock** was very strong and influential. The entire musical kept its pace, the stage was always busy and there was always a focal point to watch. Debbie had a very clear passion and vision for this production and not once was there a moment where the audience could have had an opportunity to switch off. Every scene change happened in the shadows with a focus point, whether it be a spotlight or piece of miming happening in the opposite corner of the stage. She had directed well, ensuring the stage was both symmetrical and full. The only suggestion I could have made was because the set was static and used for every scene, with careful lighting transformations to resemble Fagin's den and the other scenes, was that during Nancy's death at London Bridge - I would have liked to have seen the inclusion of a street lamp, mist, low fog or more haze to set the eerie ambiance that was about to unfold.

I would have liked to have seen real liquids in the tankards and in Mr Sowerberry's hip flask as the cast often pretended to take tiny sips and then speak instantly. Having water in these would have created a natural swallow and generated more authenticity into the performance and would elevate the scenes well.

The musical direction by **Adam Whitehead, Emily Wycherley, Gemma O'Donnell** elevated the production. Harmonies were balanced, energy, emotion and commitment put into every number and I was very impressed. Overall, the timing was very good, although a couple of cast members had to look at the conductor for pace and beat, but nevertheless, it was very enjoyable.

Sarah Knapper did a great job with the lighting design. Every scene was precisely planned. There was a good blend and use of LED's and Farnells with a good balance of warm and cool whites - many scenes designed with intentional shadows to set the scene. Sarah had great control of the hazer and used it to her advantage. There were a couple of late cues from the followspots and the lighting cue at the start of Where is Love could have had a gobo beamshape fade or a preset included to ensure the gobo wasn't changed in the first verse so abruptly but overall, the lighting was impressive and dominant.

The sound was designed and operated by **Adam Thompson**. Firstly, this is no easy task at all with such a big cast to balance. Overall, the sound was good, a couple of missed cues and some slight imbalances - but Tom used reverb well on some of the numbers to add depth to

the darker numbers. Although the sound overall was a little too loud for me, the cast clearly bounced off the volume and sang stronger and more powerful. There were a couple of mic packs on show on the cast that the stage crew and chaperones could have a check for before they walk on stage at future performances as it would be really appreciated.

I would like to state that the wardrobe team, **Jo Stubbs, Rene Hancock, Barbara Bispham**, did a splendid job with the costumes for this production. I could not find a fault in a single one - they were fitted perfectly and were appropriate for the character. A lot of time and effort must have gone into them for such a big cast, but it seems a lot of time and effort had gone into each and every single costume with such precision and detail such as Nancy's dirt stain on her dress, the rips in Fagin's Gang, the design on Dodger's costume - all were planned so well, in the correct, authentic period and executed beautifully on stage and the entire team should take a bow!

To summarise, Acton AOS' production of Oliver was inspiring - their marketing stood out from amateur theatre groups but it was a shame the programme cover was slightly pixelated. It was performed as a professional production, it had so many strong elements, it had clear vision and leadership, energy and passion. It is not often you see a group charge so much for an amateur show but anyone watching the show will see they have so many costs to cover to deliver such a caliber of performance. This is amateur theatre finely tuned, planned and executed and I would encourage everyone nearby to go and watch this talented group of people, who have had so much fun along the way and performed their hearts out. Thank you so much Acton AOS for a splendid evening, thank you to Debbie and Ian for hosting and I cannot wait to return to see you next year!

PHOTOGRAPHS





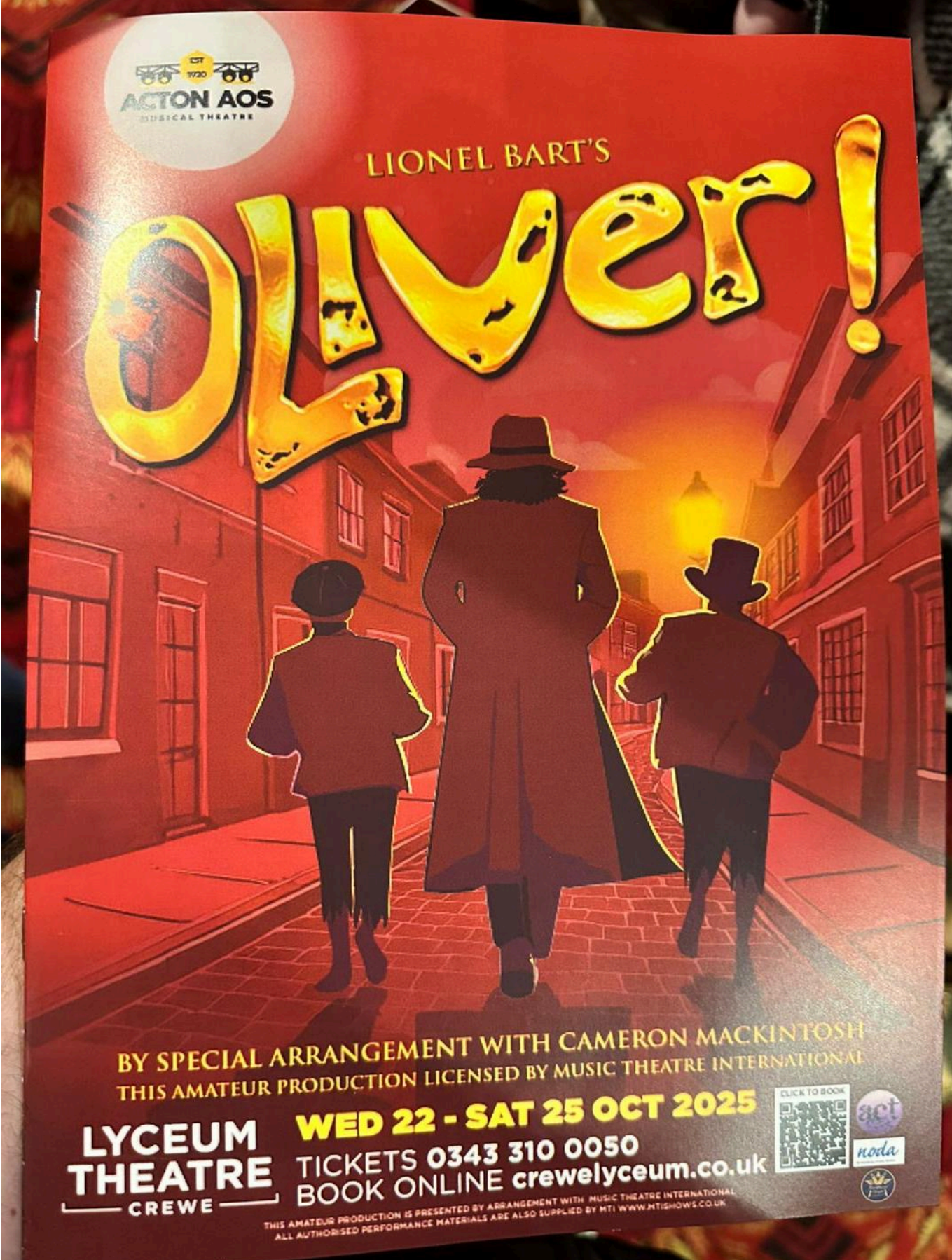








PROGRAMME



ACTON AOS
MUSICAL THEATRE

LIONEL BART'S
Oliver!

BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH CAMERON MACKINTOSH
THIS AMATEUR PRODUCTION LICENSED BY MUSIC THEATRE INTERNATIONAL

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CREWE

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