

2REVIEWS

Astonishing performance

**Fagin's Last Hour, Spa Centre,
Leamington, March 23.**

CHARLES Dickens' story of *Oliver Twist* is well known – but here's another twist.

We've seen Lionel Bart's sanitised sing-a-long version and forget that Fagin is a corruptor of children, Bill Sikes a murderer, Nancy a prostitute and Oliver himself only survives his introduction to the poverty of Victorian London's East End by being inculcated into a life of crime as a pickpocket.

James Hyland, an astonishing actor, takes the peripheral character of Fagin and re-imagines his last hour as he awaits the gallows, bringing the other characters to life through his eyes. Fagin

muses that he knew as soon as Oliver arrived at the den that he would be his undoing - that being Jewish was enough to hang you on its own and that survival was only possible through crime.

Hyland's use of voice and stance to indicate which of the many characters he is representing is amazing and the energy and concentration he brings is truly astonishing. For me the use of music, sound effects and stage lighting was an unnecessary aid to the exemplary storytelling and occasionally obscured it.

Apart from that, this was unforgettable theatre at its best.

Jane Howard