

Review: Fagin's Last Hour

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FAGIN'S Last Hour tells the story of one of the most well-known characters from Charles Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist*; the story is set immediately before Fagin's execution. The play is a one-man show, starring James Hyland, from the Brother Wolf Theatre Company. JAMES Hyland's characterisation is absolutely flawless; while the majority of the play focuses on the title character, Hyland also assumes other personas - Bill Sikes, the Artful Dodger, Nancy, the judge, and even Bullseye, Sikes' dog - throughout the play, as a storytelling technique.

It is immediately obvious which persona Hyland has adopted at any given time in the play; he is able to change his stance, voice, actions and mannerisms. It did not take me long to suspend my disbelief, I almost forgot that it was one actor on stage as the transition between Hyland's personas was so immaculate.

Something which most impressed

me was Hyland's ability to bring in more dimensions for already well-established characters. Hyland even managed to make the story's villain, Bill Sikes, more human, and even pitiable.

Fagin's Last Hour captures the message of Charles Dickens' novel - that the poorest in society are victims of circumstance - far better than an all singing, all dancing production ever could. The characters, Nancy, the Dodger, Sikes and Fagin all meet their demise, and sympathy is evoked for each of them. In Victorian London, those who were living in poverty had a number of options; go into the workhouse, where food was scarce, hard labour was required, and conditions were awful, or they could resort to a life of crime.

The ending, while deeply unsettling and unpleasant to witness, was immensely effective. The final action, while it happens offstage, is unambiguous. The audience sat stunned into silence for several moments, before Hyland re-emerged on stage, to a standing ovation.