

Powered by 

## Twist

December 26, 2007

By Neal Weaver

The young heroes and heroines of Charles Dickens' novels are invariably subjected to terrible trials and tribulations, but until now nobody ever suggested that the characters enjoyed it. This raffish and cheerfully trashy musical, based on *Oliver Twist* -- with book and lyrics by Gila Sand and music by Paul Leschen, Garrit Guadan, and Sand -- turns teenage Oliver (Brandon Ruckdashel) into a sweetly virginal, wickedly innocent devotee of bondage and discipline. At the very mention of a whipping or a punishment, his eyes light up with eager delight. When he asks, "May I have some more?" he's not talking about porridge. In the course of the action he is stripped to his skivvies, is chained and beaten by workhouse proprietor Mr. Bumble (Matt Stevens), is confined to a straitjacket, becomes a male ballerina in a pseudo-romantic pas de deux with lecherous undertaker Noah Claypool (Brendan Brandt), performs a tango in high heels with shoe fetishist Lady Downlow (Angela Nicholas), is terrorized by predatory multisexual Fagin (Alexandra Billings), and forms a romantic attachment with street hustler The Artful Dodger (Chris Carlisle). Ruckdashel is a versatile trouper with wit as well as skill.

Even more remarkable is Billings, whose Fagin suggests a cross between Katharine Hepburn and Captain Hook, with a little Kaye Ballard thrown in. She can purr and coo like Kate and roar and bellow like John Belushi. She sings with dizzying abandon and possesses a seemingly prehensile tongue. It's the most hilariously outrageous performance in years.

Carlisle's Dodger is a tall, lanky blond who's first seen sucking a presumably metaphorical lollipop. Nicholas' Downlow is deliberately screechy as what Beatrice Lillie might have called a mezzanine soprano. Justin Mortelliti smolders effectively as villainous Bill Sikes, which is fortunate because he's not given much else to do until the end, where he acquits himself well. Darrin Revitz is a surprisingly energetic Nancy, given that the character is supposedly an opium addict. And the entire cast is rousingly enthusiastic.

The songs are not particularly memorable, but director Paul Storable, musical director Russell Kieffer, and choreographer Matt Valle make the most of the material they're given. The costumes and set by A.M. Bartolomeo are a mixture of the opulent and the tatty. Genteel types may not find it to their taste, but at the performance reviewed the audience was having a ball.

*Presented by and at the Avery Schreiber Theatre,*

*11050 Magnolia Blvd., North Hollywood.*

*Fri.-Sat. 8 p.m., Sun. 7 p.m. Dec. 10-30. [www.themusicaltwist.com](http://www.themusicaltwist.com).*

**Links referenced within this article**

**Find this article at:**

[http://www.backstage.com/bsa/news\\_reviews/la/review\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1003688868](http://www.backstage.com/bsa/news_reviews/la/review_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003688868)

Uncheck the box to remove the list of links referenced in the article.

© 2007 VNU eMedia Inc. All rights reserved.