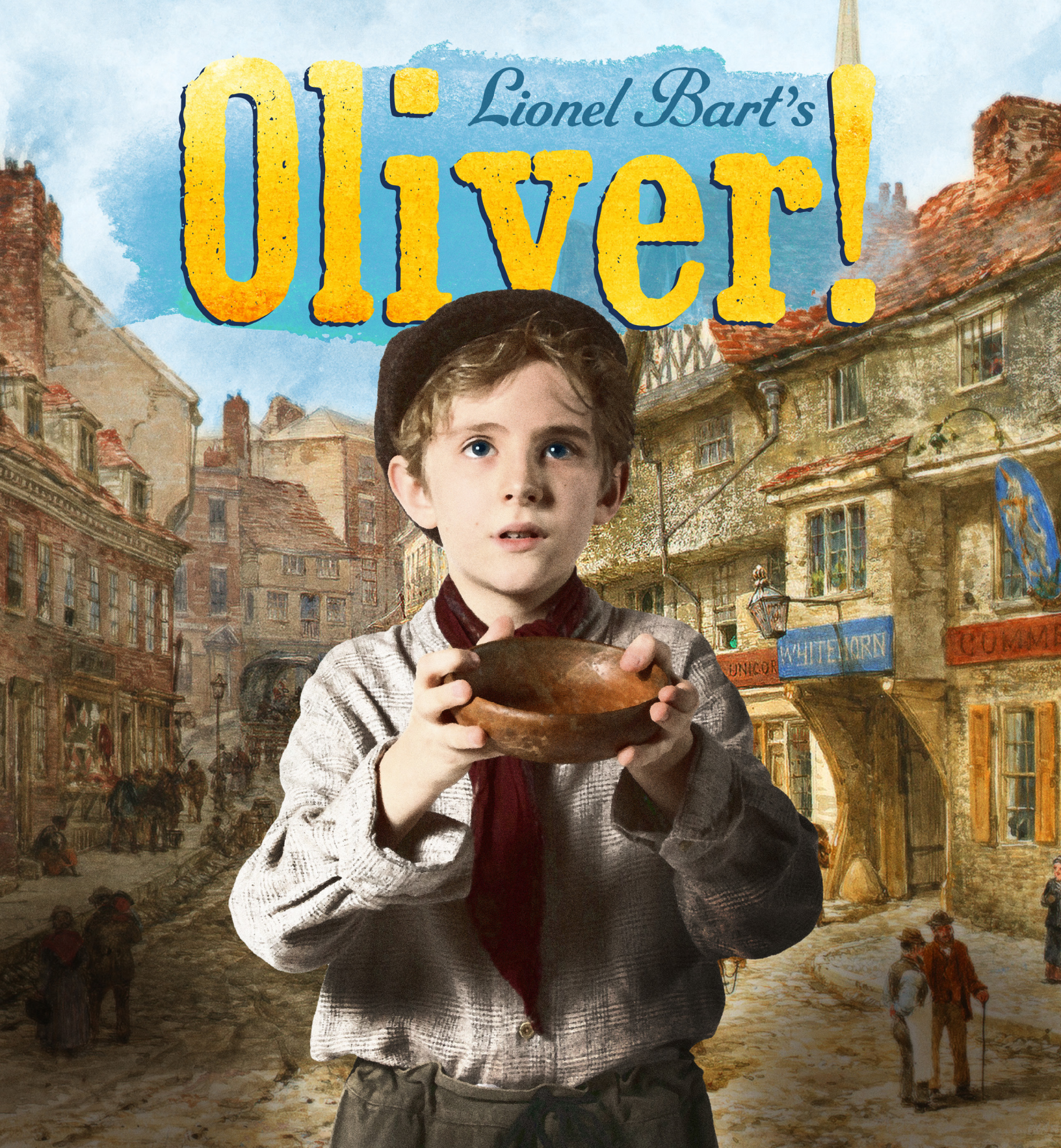


Oliver!

Lionel Bart's



GOODSPEED MUSICALS
AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

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Lionel Bart's **Oliver!**

JUNE 29 - SEPT 8, 2018
THE GOODSPEED

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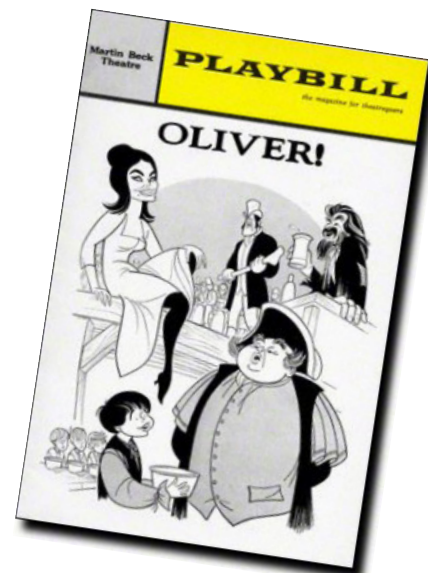
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Production History



Bruce Prochnik (Oliver) and Cliver Revill (Fagin) in the original Broadway cast of *Oliver!*.
©Sony Music Entertainment

Oliver! is an adaptation of the novel *Oliver Twist*, written by Charles Dickens in serial form from 1837-1839. The musical was written in 1960 by Lionel Bart, a pop music writer who also wrote, among other things, the theme to the Bond movie *From Russia With Love*. *Oliver!* was one of the first popular British musicals in a time dominated by American musicals, a fact which caused Andrew Lloyd Webber to refer to Lionel Bart as the “father of the modern British musical.”

The original production, on London’s West End, was a big hit, and an equally successful Broadway run followed. The original Broadway production was nominated for ten Tony Awards. It succeeded in winning Best Conductor and Musical Director, Best Original Score, and Best Scenic Design. After this successful production, there have been multiple revivals. Some notable ones include a Broadway revival in 1984 starring Patti LuPone as Nancy, a 1994 revival on the West End starring Jonathan Pryce as Fagin, a 2009 West End Revival starring Rowan Atkinson as Fagin, and a 2011 European tour starring Samantha Barks as Nancy.

The show has also been performed in The Netherlands, Japan, Australia, Estonia, Israel, and Belgium (and has thusly been translated into multiple languages.) A sequel has also been written called *Dodger!* starring the Artful Dodger seven years after *Oliver!* ends.

In 1968, a film version was made of the musical, which won the Oscar for Best Picture.



The 1984 Broadway cast of *Oliver!* starring Patti LuPone as Nancy.



Synopsis

SHORT TAKE: Read this for a spoiler-free synopsis

In 1850 in a shabby workhouse in England, the orphan Oliver asks for more gruel. For this audacious act he is sold to an undertaker and his wife, but runs away after a fight with the coffin-maker's apprentice. He makes his way to London, and on the street he meets the Artful Dodger, who takes Oliver to the lair of Mr. Fagin, an old thief who runs a band of young pickpockets. Fagin takes Oliver in and begins training him, and Oliver meets Nancy, an older member of Fagin's gang. While out working, Oliver is caught by the police after the Artful Dodger picks the pocket of Mr. Brownlow, an elderly gentleman.

When Fagin finds out that Oliver was caught and has been taken in by Mr. Brownlow, he is worried about what Oliver

SPOILER ALERT! Read the short take for no spoilers.

In a shabby workhouse in England in 1850, the children sing a celebration of delicious food. Instead, they're given gruel by Mr. Bumble, who runs the workhouse with the cruel Widow Corney. One orphan boy, Oliver, does the unthinkable: he asks for more food. Mr. Bumble and the Widow Corney, after a little flirtation in song, decide to sell the troublesome boy to Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry, an undertaker and his wife who want Oliver to act as a mourner at funerals. Left alone, Oliver wonders whether he will ever be loved, something he has never experienced.

The next morning, the coffin-maker's apprentice arrives and insults Oliver's mother, who died at the workhouse shortly after Oliver was born. Oliver fights him, and in the ensuing chaos he runs away. After walking for seven days towards London, he is spotted by the Artful Dodger, a dirty but spirited teenager who tells Oliver he knows of a man who will take him in and provide him with food. In a jaunty number, the Artful Dodger tells Oliver to consider himself at home amongst his new friends.

They arrive at the lair of Mr. Fagin, a charismatic old thief, and his band of young pickpockets. Fagin sings his philosophy to Oliver—there's money for the taking, but you have to steal it. The next morning, Oliver sees Fagin take a box of valuables out from under a floorboard—Fagin's secret stash. Fagin tells Oliver to forget what he saw.

Nancy, an older member of Fagin's gang and the girlfriend of the terrifying criminal Bill Sikes, arrives with her friend Bet. They are introduced to Oliver, and they celebrate their "fine life" of freedom and petty crime. When Oliver bows politely to them, they are charmed, and they all together sing about how genteel people act. Fagin sends the boys off to pick pockets with a tune wishing them luck. On the street, the Artful Dodger and another boy pick the pocket of Mr. Brownlow, a kind elderly gentleman. When the police catch on, the two boys run off, leaving Oliver to be caught.

Act 2 begins at a pub, where Nancy is entertaining everyone with a jaunty drinking song. The mood abruptly chills when

might reveal to the police. The fearsome criminal Bill Sikes, Nancy's lover, promises to kidnap Oliver. Nancy refuses to participate, and Bill hits her. The two take Oliver back.

Meanwhile, the two heads of the workhouse come into possession of a locket owned by Oliver's dead mother, proof that Oliver comes from a rich family. They take the locket to Mr. Brownlow, who realizes that Oliver is the child of his daughter, Agnes.

Nancy comes to Mr. Brownlow and promises to bring Oliver to him at London Bridge that night. But before she can reunite them, Bill Sikes appears, and in the ensuing struggle kills Nancy. Sikes snatches Oliver away, putting his safety and hope of a true home with Mr. Brownlow in jeopardy.

Bill Sikes enters the pub. He sings a song about his reputation, which is so bad that even the strongest men fear him. The Artful Dodger tells Fagin that Oliver was captured and that Mr. Brownlow has taken him in. Fearing that Oliver might reveal too much about the criminal underworld (and his secret stash), Fagin tells Bill to go capture Oliver back. Nancy refuses to accompany him, and Bill hits her. Left alone, Nancy sings that although she knows Bill is a bad man, she loves him and will stay with him.

Meanwhile in Mr. Brownlow's home, Oliver is getting his first taste of being loved and cared for. It transforms the ordinary day around him into something beautiful, and his joy spreads to all the street vendors, who join in his song. But when Mr. Brownlow gives Oliver an errand, he walks straight into a trap—Nancy and Bill Sikes are waiting to snatch him back.

Back in Fagin's lair, Bill threatens Oliver to find out what he's told the police. Nancy stands up against Bill to defend Oliver, vowing that Oliver won't be condemned to the same criminal life she's had. Left alone, Fagin ponders whether it's possible—or cost-effective—to stop being a villain.

Meanwhile back at the workhouse, Mr. Bumble and the Widow Corney are now married and miserable. A very old woman on her deathbed confesses that she stole a locket from a young woman who had died after giving birth to a boy. Mr. Bumble and the Widow Corney realize the boy is Oliver, and that his family must be rich. They go to Mr. Brownlow, who has been looking for Oliver, and give him the locket. Mr. Brownlow realizes that Oliver is the child of his daughter, Agnes.

Nancy comes to Mr. Brownlow's house and asks him to meet her on London Bridge that night to take Oliver back. Nancy brings Oliver to the bridge, but Bill Sikes is there and kills Nancy in his rage. He grabs Oliver and takes him to Fagin's, but when an angry crowd surrounds the building, he appears on the roof and threatens Oliver. Sikes is shot by the police, and Mr. Brownlow and Oliver are reunited. As Oliver heads to his first true home, Fagin appears. Having lost everything, he heads off into the night pondering his future.

Characters



OLIVER TWIST: A young orphan boy born into an English workhouse. Bright and innocent, he longs for a family.

FAGIN: A calculating old thief who trains and runs a pack of young pickpockets.

THE ARTFUL DODGER: A charismatic teenager and the star pickpocket among Fagin's gang, who scouts Oliver to join the group.

BILL SIKES: A dangerous criminal, violent and feared.

NANCY: A tough, good-hearted woman who grew up in Fagin's gang. She's now a barmaid and the mistress of Bill Sikes.

BET: Nancy's younger friend, who looks up to her for everything.

MR. BROWNLOW: A wealthy and kindly old gentleman who takes a shine to Oliver.

MRS. BEDWIN: Mr. Brownlow's warm-hearted housekeeper.

DR. GRIMWIG: A skeptical doctor, and a friend of Mr. Brownlow's.

MR. BUMBLE: A pompous Beadle in charge of the workhouse.

WIDOW CORNEY: The sharp-tongued mistress of the workhouse.

MR. SOWERBERRY: The local undertaker, who buys Oliver from Mr. Bumble to appear as a mourner at funerals.

MRS. SOWERBERRY: The undertaker's wife, and the real boss in their house.

CHARLOTTE: The Sowerberrys' spoiled daughter.

NOAH CLAYPOLE: Mr. Sowerberry's arrogant apprentice.

OLD SALLY: A dying pauper with a secret about a woman she stole from long ago.



Photos: Elijah Rayman (Oliver) and Donald Corren (Fagin); Elijah Rayman (Oliver) with Owen Tabaka (Charlie Bates), Gavin Swartz (Dodger), Meghan Pratt, and Colin Soto. ©Diane Sobolewski.

Meet the Writer

Lionel Bart with the original Broadway cast of *Oliver!*



LIONEL BART, born Lionel Begleiter, is best known today for having written the book, music, and lyrics for the seminal *Oliver!*, but this songwriter born from humble beginnings had a full career in pop music before turning to the musical theatre. He was born on August 1, 1930 in the Stepney district of London, the seventh of nine children born to Eastern European immigrants who had fled anti-Semitic pogroms in their home region of Galicia, part of present-day Poland near Ukraine. As a child he had a variety of interests ranging from opera to fine art, all of which influenced his work, and though he had the opportunity to study music formally, he did not complete a musical education.

Bart's career began during London's coffee house fad in the fifties. In the creative atmosphere the coffee houses fostered, Bart met other young artists and began to write and perform original songs. His first collaborator was Tommy Steele, with whom Bart formed the band The Cavemen in 1956. Their hit song "Rock with The Cavemen" sold a billion records, hit number one on the charts, and was the first British pop song to break into the American Top 40. Bart wrote over 30 hit songs for Steele throughout their collaboration, and his song "Living Doll" recorded by Cliff Richard hit number one three separate times.

Bart had his first foray into musical theatre writing in 1959 when he provided the lyrics for *Lock Up Your Daughters*, which had a 328-performance run in London. In 1960, Lionel Bart was engaged to add music and lyrics to a straight play written by Frank Norman about Cockney characters written in Cockney dialect—*Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be*—which played for two years in London. This surely laid the groundwork for *Oliver!*—for which Bart wrote the book, music, and lyrics—much of which is written in dialect.

Oliver! was Bart's only major success in both London and New York, and many of the score's hits found their way onto pop music records that year, as well. It premiered in London in 1960 and ran for 2,618 performances. When it

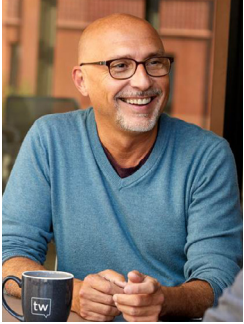
opened on Broadway in 1963, it ran for 770 performances. Then, in 1968 *Oliver!* was adapted for the big screen by Vernon Harris and directed by Carol Reed. The film won Academy Awards for best picture, director, art direction, and musical scoring.

Following the success of *Oliver!*, Bart continued to work on distinctly British musicals. In 1962, he again wrote the book (with contributions

by Joan Maitland), music, and lyrics for a show called *Blitz!* based on his own experiences as a child living in London's East End during the aerial bombings of World War II (i.e. *The Blitz*) that had occurred only 18 years prior. The show was more of an attraction than any previous West End production, with tourists flocking to see it as they would the Tower of London or Madame Tussaud's, and at the time it was the most expensive show ever to be produced on the West End. Two years later in 1964, Bart wrote the music and lyrics for another British piece, *Maggie May*, based on a character from a traditional Liverpool folk song. Unfortunately, the strength of Bart's musical writing from his previous works—tunes with hummable refrains that culminate in community singing, such as "Who Will Buy?" from *Oliver!*—faltering with *Maggie May*. The production ran for 501 performances, but, like *Blitz!*, it never appeared on Broadway. His last work, a show called *Twang!!* that consumed much of Bart's time, energy, and money, was a flop, and Bart ended his career as a writer and composer.

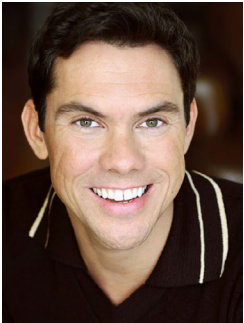
Despite his career as a songwriter and musical theatre composer, Bart never learned to read or write music. Instead, he would compose melodies and tunes in his head and hum them for a copyist to notate on his behalf. Many attribute his pop cross-over successes to his hummable tunes that encapsulate the emotion and energy of a moment rather than intricate successions of perfectly placed notes. Following the close of *Twang!!* and a period of substance abuse and subsequent recovery, Bart worked with Cameron Mackintosh to produce the 1994 revival of *Oliver!* at the London Palladium on the West End. He passed away on April 3, 1999 at the age of 68 of cancer.

Meet the Creative Team



ROB RUGGIERO (*Director*) is thrilled to be returning to Goodspeed for his eleventh season, after directing past productions of *Rags*, *La Cage aux Folles*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The Most Happy Fella*, *Carousel*, *Show Boat*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Camelot*, *Big River*, and *1776*. Rob has won multiple Connecticut Critics Circle Awards for Best Direction, including last season's highly-celebrated production of *Next to Normal* at TheaterWorks, where he is the Producing Artistic Director. His Broadway credits include *High* (starring Kathleen Turner) and *Looped* (starring Valerie Harper in a Tony-nominated performance). Off-Broadway, he conceived and directed the original musical revue entitled *Make Me a Song: The Music of William Finn*. The production received nominations for both the Drama Desk Award and the Outer Critics Circle Award. Rob has earned national recognition for his work on both plays and musicals. Regionally, he has directed a number of critically-acclaimed musical productions including *Follies*; *Oklahoma!*; *Hello, Dolly!*; *South Pacific*; *The King & I*; and *Sunday*

in the Park with George, among others. In addition, he conceived and directed the highly successful *Ella* (Kevin Kline and Joseph Jefferson Awards) at TheaterWorks. His work has been seen at many other major regional theaters around the country, including Actor's Theater of Louisville, Arizona Theatre Company, Barrington Stage Company, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Cleveland Playhouse, Guthrie Theater, Hartford Stage, Northlight Theater, Pittsburgh Public Theater, and The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, among others. Future projects include a production of *Gypsy* with Tony-winner Beth Leavel for The Muny's 100th season, followed by a revival of *Evita* at the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis.



JAMES GRAY (*Choreographer*) recently choreographed the movie *Humor Me*, staged the Emmy Award-winning special *AFI Life Achievement Award: A Tribute to Mel Brooks*, and directed and choreographed *Peg O' My Heart, the Musical* for MITF. James has worked closely with Susan Stroman as her associate choreographer/director on many projects, including *The Producers*, *Young Frankenstein*, *Bullets Over Broadway*, *The Last Two People on Earth: An Apocalyptic Vaudeville* at ART, and HBO's *Curb Your Enthusiasm's Fatwa the Musical* starring Lin-Manuel Miranda. For the past two years, he has worked with Hal Prince and Susan Stroman on *Prince of Broadway* (Tokyo and Broadway). www.jamesgray.org. This production is dedicated to Margery Beddow and Tod Jackson.



MICHAEL O'FLAHERTY (*Music Director*) is in his 27th season as Goodspeed's Resident Music Director. Broadway: *By Jeeves*, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Also: Paper Mill Playhouse, North Shore Music Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, Ford's Theatre, The Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Kennedy Center, Pittsburgh Public Theatre, and the Smithsonian Institution. Musical Supervisor and Cabaret Director of the Williamstown Theatre Festival for 11 years. His original musical *A Connecticut Christmas Carol*, for which he wrote music and lyrics, will be presented at Goodspeed's Terris Theatre in Chester again this fall.

Director's Vision

BY ROB RUGGIERO

"Please, sir. I want some more."

More food, more love, more family, more time... simply, more. "I want some more." Those iconic words decidedly reflect the central theme in Charles Dickens' famous story of a young boy's difficult journey home. Although we all know *Oliver!* to be a musical interpretation of the great novel *Oliver Twist*, upon close examination it is clear that a key source of inspiration for the play is the 1948 David Lean film. Even before I learned of the connection, this version unwittingly inspired me with its clarity, complex characters, and intrigue. The raw truth expressed so vividly in the film made its way into the famed musical and is also at the core of our Goodspeed production.

The raw truth of Dickens' colorful and extreme characters can pose a challenge when directing a production of *Oliver!*—a challenge that both excites and inspires me. In order to experience the joy and love of the story, we need to pass through darkness. We can't ignore the dismal nature of Oliver's pre-London escapades, but we can celebrate his journey. Oliver's odyssey through life's perils and joy is what we find so appealing. That's a tricky balance in any musical. Balancing these potent characters for a contemporary audience can be a daunting task. Folks come to a musical for escape, and I believe this Lionel Bart classic is an exceptional feast that offers complex and entertaining material that beautifully balances the best and worst of life's offerings.

Of course, it all starts with "What is *Oliver!* about?" It's about many things: a desire for family, community, class, oppression, facing adversity, change—but at the center of all these things is one little boy, whose innocence and pure soul alters the lives of the many people he encounters. In most cases, the change Oliver provokes comes from him simply being—that his special connection to the people he meets stimulates change and action. What a transformative idea. That by simply being, his grueling and sometimes terrifying journey leads him to the love and family he is seeking.



Director Rob Ruggiero at the first rehearsal for *Oliver!*. Photo by Diane Sobolewski.

"Consider yourself at home. Consider yourself one of the family."

Fundamentally, *Oliver!* is about finding community and home. Oliver, on his quest for belonging, discovers a community in Fagin's gang as well as his fateful connections to Fagin and Nancy. Misguided as it might appear, it was certainly far better than his oppressive life in the workhouse. It is the Artful Dodger who initially offers Oliver a gateway to community, and ultimately a sense of family and acceptance. I love the essential conflict between the criminal actions of this odd band of "characters" with the acceptance and sense of family they offer.

Oliver's connection with Nancy has a powerful effect on her complicated relationship with Bill. The bond between Nancy and Bill is dangerous and difficult to understand—especially through the eyes of today's audience. But it is also fascinating and inspiring to see Nancy feel empowered by her love and affection for Oliver. Sadly, she is unable to free herself from an abusive relationship soon enough.

Oliver meeting Fagin is key to the central action, and Fagin's "intimate acquaintance" with Oliver exposes an emotional core in the story. Fagin in particular is a fascinating character to explore. The psychology of the character is complicated and complex. It seems clear that Fagin understands immediately that there is something special about Oliver, though he has no idea how much one little boy will change his world. There is a benevolence that is unexpectedly exposed. In fact, research shows that the earliest draft of *Oliver!* actually had the character of Oliver returning to the workhouse where Fagin, "fed up with the dangers of being criminal, happily takes Mr. Bumble's place as the parish beadle and proves a benevolent caretaker to the orphans." This early exploration of Fagin speaks to an interesting part of his psyche and heart. His encounter with Oliver transforms him, or at least challenges his journey forward. Maybe underneath the crafty thief is a decent man waiting to be revealed whose situation and status just don't allow it – or maybe it's merely not in his nature.

Director's Vision

BY ROB RUGGIERO

"With this show, the audience whistles the tunes as they COME IN to the theatre." - early review

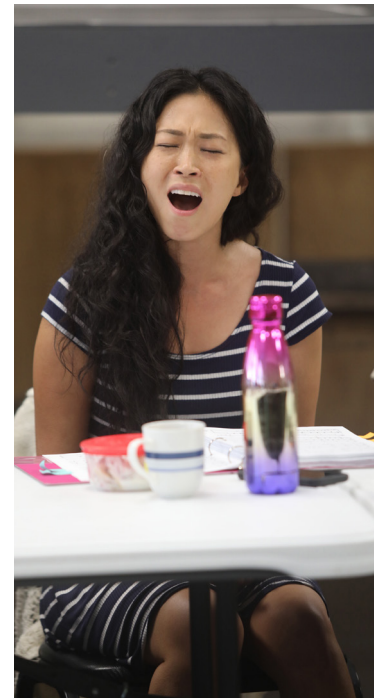
And let's not forget the entertainment values *Oliver!* offers. Not surprisingly, when we think of this musical we typically gloss over the darker elements and think only of this incredible score peppered with hit after hit: "Food, Glorious Food," "Where is Love?," "Consider Yourself," "Oom-Pah-Pah," and "As Long As He Needs Me"—songs that bring a smile to our face or touch our hearts and have endured for decades.

I love the music-hall dimensions in *Oliver!* we experience in "Oom-Pah-Pah"—Nancy's opening number of the second act. It's "celebratory Englishness" helps define a particular musical style associated with the score. That liberating nature of "music-hall morality" is conveyed by Nancy throughout. This specific musical style is deeply connected to why this show had great critic and audience appeal when it premiered in the West End in 1960.

Perhaps because of its unique challenges (including a large number of children to be cast!), *Oliver!* is not often

produced and hasn't seen a Broadway revival in over 30 years. Experiencing this complex and marvelous musical through the intimate lens of Goodspeed Musicals is an extraordinary opportunity to encounter the show close up and personal. As a director, the opportunity to share this story in this very special space is a responsibility I don't take lightly. We have compiled an exceptional cast of wonderful character actors and children from New York, along with some talented local children, to collaborate on this unique production. This will also be my first partnership with the wonderfully talented James Gray, our NYC based British choreographer. James' passion for the material and his authentic connection to that world elevates our production and inspires me to think outside the box. James joins my amazingly talented team of long-time creative partners (our music director and the set, costume, lighting and sound designers) who have worked hard to create the world in which we can share this inspiring story of perseverance.

Welcome to the world of *Oliver!*



Donald Corren (Fagin), Karen Murphy (Mrs. Sowerberry), Jamie LaVerdiere (Mr. Sowerberry), and EJ Zimmerman (Nancy) at the first read-through rehearsal of Goodspeed's *Oliver!*. ©Diane Sobolewski.

The Kids Company of Oliver!

An interview with members of the Kids Company of Oliver!

With this production of *Oliver!*, Goodspeed launches its inaugural Kids Company, a one-of-a-kind summer musical theatre experience that gives local young performers the chance to join the ensemble for one of our main stage productions. Throughout the summer, Kids Company members receive top-notch musical theatre training, participate in exciting and educational activities in our local community, and have unparalleled performance opportunities alongside professional actors on The Goodspeed stage!

We sat down with members of the Kids Company to discuss their experiences at The Goodspeed, their characters in the show, and how they relate to the world of *Oliver!*

What does it mean to be a kid?

Instead of working all day like adults, we do our work in school and have more free time to play. Kids have the right to play and use our imaginations every day. Being a kid means you're at the beginning of your life and learning about possibilities for your future and meeting people that will help you along. While we're kids we're going after different possibilities and trying new things to learn what we like and what we don't like.

What's your favorite part about being a kid?

Usually you have people taking care of you and the things you want or need (and if you're under 12 you can sometimes get stuff for free!). Another great thing about being a kid is that we're still learning, and even if we're surrounded by adults they give you a chance to learn first. It's okay if you don't know the answer, mess up, or make mistakes when you're a kid, but when you're older people expect you to know what to do or to have an answer for everything. I like learning from my mistakes so I don't make them again.

What do you look forward to about growing up?

- I look forward to having more freedoms like traveling and owning a car!
- I'm excited for the possibilities and doors that could be opened in my life!
- I'm excited to do things my mom won't let me do, like go exploring outside far from my house.
- I am excited for college and for being able to choose my own courses based on my interests.
- I'm excited to work as an actress and know it's my job because lots of adults tell me it's just a hobby that I do after school, but I know I want to be an actress when I grow up.



How is your character's life different from yours?

Our characters have to work all day and eat gruel. We don't go hungry because we have meals every day, but our characters don't. People don't care about our characters the way our families care about us. They don't have their own space or people to talk to the way we do. We have teachers and adults who want us to do well, go above and beyond expectations, but these kids are just expected to do the same boring work every day.

Are you similar to your character?

Some of us have made connections with our characters and what they like or dislike. We have a similar thought process as our characters because we're all kids, but we're treated differently. We all have things that we secretly want, but our characters are less privileged than we are so they don't always get the things they're dreaming of.

What's your favorite part about the Kids Company so far?

We all enjoy meeting new people and have become friends really quickly. Everyone in the Kids Company is really nice, and so are our directors. The directors are really helpful when you have problems. We love learning new songs and getting to do what we love to do—act, dance, and sing—with other people who share our passion. We learn things really quickly in the Kids Company. It's a challenge and sometimes overwhelming, but it's fun.

Dickens and the Poor



Although Charles Dickens would become one of the most famous and successful writers of his (or any) time, he never forgot about an issue that was close to his heart: the plight of the poor.

DICKENS' CHILDHOOD

The issue was a personal one for him. Born in 1812 in Portsmouth, England, he was the second of eight children born to John Dickens, a naval clerk, and Catherine, a school teacher. Dickens' family was never wealthy, but for some years they were able to live happily in the country. However, John Dickens' habit of living beyond his means sent him to the infamous Marshalsea debtors' prison when Charles was only 12 years old. Although only John Dickens had to remain in the prison, the entire family lived there (a phenomenon captured in several of Dickens' works, including Little Dorrit and The Pickwick Papers).

Young Charles was forced to leave school and work in a boot-blackening factory, an experience he forever considered the end of his childhood. Dickens' father eventually received an inheritance that allowed him to move out of the prison (a rare occurrence—with no ability to make

income within prison walls, for many debtors it was a life sentence), and Charles returned to school. But he never forgot the dirty, awful factory, or the sad reality of the debtors' prison. Both would feature in his work for years to come, along with themes like crushing poverty, criminality, social injustice, and the hypocrisy of authority figures.

WORKHOUSES

His second novel, Oliver Twist (1839), featured another reality for the poor of the time: the workhouse. These were buildings maintained by the government where the very poor were housed and put to work under terrible conditions. The workhouses were partly the result of the New Poor Act of 1834, which was passed to deter the poor from seeking government relief. Critics, including Charles Dickens, felt that the act criminalized poverty, in essence punishing those who were already destitute.

DICKENS THE ACTIVIST

Dickens didn't only write about the poor in his fiction. He was also a journalist, and many of his articles were investigations into the squalid conditions in workhouses. When he grew more successful as a writer, he remembered his own education, cut short by poverty, and actively supported charities that provided destitute children with education. He also founded a safe house where women and girls could go to escape a life of prostitution and crime and be trained for other employment. Nor was his focus on the conditions of the oppressed limited to England: on his first speaking tour of America in 1842, Dickens was vocal about his opposition to slavery.

Charles Dickens became so known for his portraits of the bleak life of the poor that even today when we refer to terrible living or working conditions, there's a word for it: Dickensian.



© The Geffryre, Museum of the Home; photograph by Jayne Lloyd

A Victorian workhouse.



Victorian London

London in the 1850s was the world's largest and most powerful city. But this did not make it an easy place to live. The population had doubled since the beginning of the century, putting a tremendous strain on the city's public services, including its fresh water supply and sewage systems. Waste disposal was also a problem, especially of the horse dung that filled the streets from the many horse-drawn carriages—it was often impossible to cross a road without the aid of a "crossing sweeper" to clear your path.

THE GREAT STINK

But it wasn't only the streets that were filled with filth. The drive towards industrialization and the increased number of factories meant the air was heavily polluted—so much so that it was said that you could tell how many days a sheep had been in a London park by how black its coat was. The water wasn't much better. In the summer of 1858 London experienced what was called 'The Great Stink,' in which the river Thames became swollen with human feces, rotting food and animal corpses, and toxic waste from the many factories along its banks. The smell was so bad that people were forced to stay in their homes, and parliament was forced to act to remedy the situation.

LONDON'S SLUMS

The population boom had also caused a housing crisis. While the wealthy could avoid many of the bad conditions in the city in their homes, the poor were forced to live close together in slums. With one third of the population living in poverty, this was a huge percentage of people. These slums made the poor even more vulnerable to infectious diseases, and the threat of cholera, typhoid, smallpox, and tuberculosis was always looming. In the mid-19th century the high death rate among young children brought the average London lifespan down to only 37 years.

CLEANING UP

There was hope in sight, though. With the help of writers such as Charles Dickens, who brought attention to the conditions of life for the poor, improvements were gradually put in place. One was an 1875 Public Health Act that required local authorities to implement building regulations, including one that demanded each house be self-contained and have its own sanitation and water supply. 'The Great Stink' prompted the building of an improved sewage infrastructure throughout the city. And in 1870 laws were passed that provided compulsory education for children between the ages of 5 and 12, ensuring that all children, including those born into poverty and hopelessness like *Oliver Twist*, would be given a chance.



FATHER THAMES INTRODUCING HIS OFFSPRING TO THE FAIR CITY OF LONDON.
(A Design for a Fresco in the New Houses of Parliament.)

A cartoon by John Leech addressing the Great Stink in the July 3, 1858 issue of the London satire magazine *Punch*. The three figures emerging from the river represent diphtheria, scrofula and cholera.

The Cockney Dialect

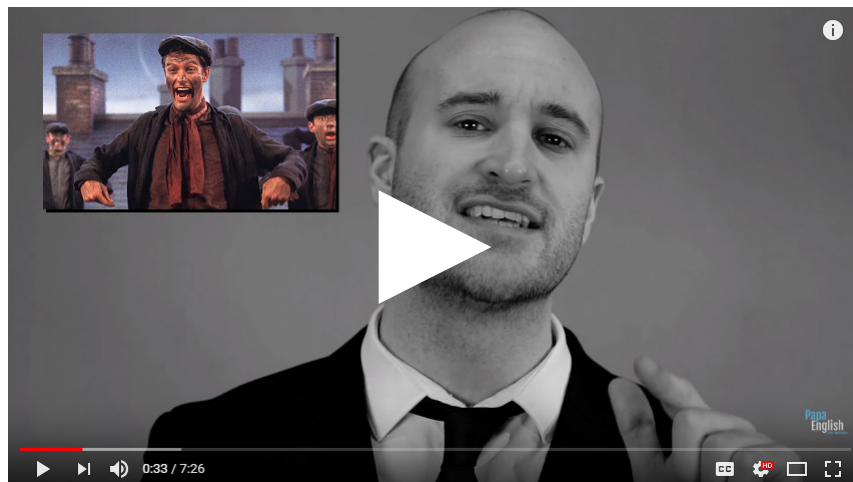
Oliver! is full of British characters from different regions, professions, and socioeconomic classes, and all of these factors influence how a particular character speaks. One of the primary **dialects** in the show is “Cockney,” a dialect of London that has survived since the sixteenth century with little variation along the way. Its roots are in the British class system; with the development and prominence of formal education, schoolmasters and professors endeavored to standardize and refine English and to rid the language of so-called “vulgarisms,” many of which were commonly used by lower class Cockney speakers. Throughout its history, however, the Cockney dialect has actually *contributed* more vocabulary to the English language than any other non-standard English dialect. Some primary Cockney variations from the standard that you might hear in *Oliver!* are: the omission of the internal *l* in words such as “walk” or “walnut,” the sunken *r* in words like “card” or “regard,” the translation of *th* to *f* in words like “thing” or “think” or to *v* in words like “with,” the metathesis (or switching) of “ask” to “aks,” the drawling *a* in words like “lady” or “crazy” that becomes “lie-dy” or “cry-zy,” and—perhaps most prominently—the slippery *h* that is eliminated in common words like “hairy” or “hat” but added to formal words like “Albert” or “Oxford” (also called an aspirant). See the glossary below for Cockney words to listen for in *Oliver!*.

What’s the difference between an accent and a dialect?

This is a common question, and there is a distinction! An accent is a difference in pronunciation only that deviates from the language standard, which we would hear if a British person and an American person read the same words aloud. A dialect is a deviation in both pronunciation and vocabulary by a group of people in a specific class or region, like Cockney.

Use this fun translator website to convert standard English phrases into Cockney. <http://funtranslations.com/cockney>

- Cadge:** to ask for or obtain something which is not necessarily owed
- Whop:** to hit hard
- Scallywag:** a rascal; a person who behaves mischievously
- Beak:** a judge or magistrate
- Bloke:** a man
- Toff:** a rich, upper class person
- Mate:** a friend
- Grouse:** to complain or grumble
- Whip:** to steal
- Cheerio:** a friendly “goodbye”
- Jimmy:** a short crowbar
- Plummy and slam:** a phrase meaning “all right” that was used as a password by underground organizations
- Toddy:** a drink made from spirits
- Furbiowes:** ruffles or decoration on a piece of clothing, like a skirt



Watch this video to learn how to speak with a Cockney accent:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WvIwkL8oLc>

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