

Fagin's Last Hour - The Civic, Barnsley

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Writer: James Hyland

Director: Phil Lowe

Reviewer: Ray Taylor

This is a one-man show based on Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and adapted, produced and performed by James Hyland. Hyland has acted in a variety of one-man shows and has a particular fondness for Dickens, having also very successfully adapted *A Christmas Carol*.

Anyone who only knows the story of *Oliver Twist* from popular culture such as the musical version might be forgiven for not realising Fagin's fate at the end of the novel. Far from disappearing over London Bridge, skipping and dancing with the Artful Dodger, Fagin actually suffers the just punishment meted out to him according to the laws at the time and is hanged by the neck until dead in Newgate Prison. This show, as the title suggests is based on the penultimate chapter of the book (*Fagin's Last Night Alive*) and presents Fagin looking back on the series of events that have led him to be in this condemned cell and awaiting his execution.

Hyland has a very commanding stage presence and convincingly plays a number of the main characters from the action: Bill Sikes, Nancy, Artful Dodger and Magistrate. At one point, he even adopts the persona of Sikes's dog, Bullseye. All this is achieved through voice, mannerism, stance and movement and expertly conveys the relationship between them all. Just one small example of this is when he goes from the upright magistrate looking Fagin straight in the eye and boldly asking him if he has anything to plead and then, ever so slightly and deftly, gradually transforming himself into the bent, frightened, pathetic old Jew upon whose face his inevitable fate is beginning to dawn.

The performance lasts just an hour and in that time Hyland treats us to a tour-de-force in which he manages to convey the essence of the novel in a skilful and entertaining way. Lighting and music are sparingly but effectively used. His characterisations are always consistent with each other and it is a testimony to his expertise that by the end you feel there have been five actors on the stage. This show should satisfy fans of Dickens and general theatre-goers alike. Recommended.

Reviewed on 4 December 2015