

# A twist on popular view

By Ian Dipple Friday 19 October 2012 Updated: 19/10 11:15

## Fagin's Last Hour

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### Artrix, Bromsgrove

IF YOU thought you knew Oliver Twist then think again as James Hyland's breathtaking adaptation of Charles Dickens' classic novel took the story to new and darker places.

Hyland himself puts in another powerful, thought provoking and faultless performance as he brings every character to life with effortless ease and emotion which drags the audience into events on stage. None more so than the murder scene where despite the fact you are looking at a bearded man telling a story, you genuinely believe that is Nancy on the floor, pleading for her life. Special praise also for the innovative use of lighting - turning the stage blood red as Bill Sikes club's his love to death - adding to the sense of drama.

Using Fagin as the sole storyteller is inspired as it offers a different viewpoint and you actually realise this isn't just a 'wronged boy done good' tale, but runs much deeper than that and ends tragically for most of the main characters.

It also challenges the notion that these criminals deserved their fate, with one particularly powerful speech by Fagin pointing out he's a thief because it's his only means of survival as he's been thrown out of decent society - highlighting one of the themes which run throughout Dickens' work about the condition of the poor.

You also have some sympathy for Fagin. Yes he's a thief, selfish and a bully who exploits children. But Hyland's performance also highlights some redeeming features, such as his father's love for the Artful Dodger, the guilt he feels at not doing more to prevent Nancy's death and ultimately the fact that underneath the bravado, is a vulnerable, frightened, old man - something the audience is left to reflect on as they listen to the haunting sound of a body swinging from the gallows after Hyland exits the stage.

This may be a million miles from the much-loved musical version, but Fagin's Last Hour captures the true spirit and message of Dickens in a way a filmmaker never could.