

CONTENTS

The Play
Meet the Creator
Charles Dickens: Author of
Oliver Twist
From Victorian England to
Modern-Day London
From the Director's Notebook
Arena Backstage: Meet Oliver
What's with the Singing
and Dancing?
Three Big Questions
Resources

THE PLAY

"Why should we be fated to do nothing but brood on food?"-

Workhouse Boys, Oliver!

In a workhouse, in present-day London, **Oliver** and his fellow orphans hungrily dream of a filling dinner. They work in terrible conditions in exchange for food and a place to live. Oliver's world is turned upside down when he makes a simple request to the villainous **Mr. Bumble**: "Please, sir, I want some more." Bumble kicks Oliver out on the streets to fend for himself.

There, he meets the **Artful Dodger** and joins a gang of thieves – other children trying to stay alive on the streets. **Fagin** is the adult who masterminds their criminal activities and cares only for himself.

Oliver meets undertakers, thieves, misers and murderers. In a dangerous world of homelessness and hunger, where is love and generosity?

The DC Ticket Partnership is generously sponsored by the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation. Additional support is provided by Rockwell Collins.

OLIVER!

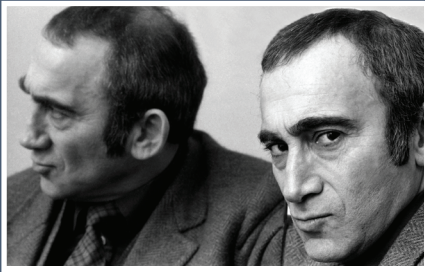


WRITTEN BY **LIONEL BART**
DIRECTED BY **MOLLY SMITH**
CHOREOGRAPHY BY **PARKER ESSE**
MUSICAL DIRECTION BY **PAUL SPORTELLI**

NOW PLAYING ON THE FICHANDLER STAGE
OCTOBER 30, 2015 – JANUARY 3, 2016

Oliver! is generously sponsored by AT&T and GEICO. Additional support is provided by Karen and Edward Burka and the Harry and Fay Burka Foundation, Sylvia Kay Greenberg and Charlotte and Hubert (Hank) Schlosberg.
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MEET THE CREATOR



LIONEL BART

“Songs should be like sneezes - spontaneous.”

Lionel Begleiter (1930-1999), better known as Lionel Bart, wrote the book (script), music and lyrics for the musical *Oliver!* He started working in the theater painting sets. One day, he saw an ad asking for songwriters. He applied, and the rest is history.

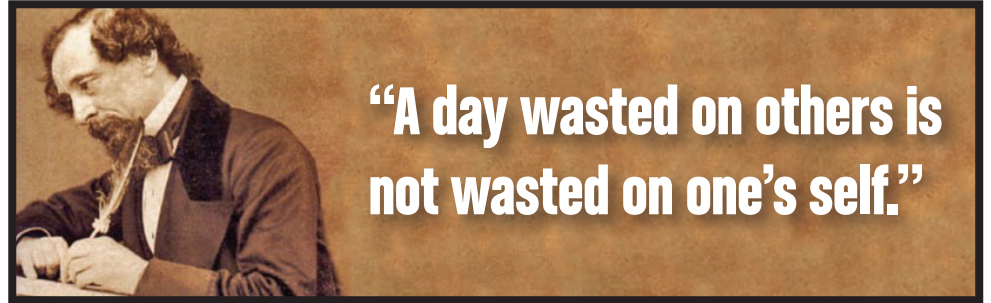
During his career, he wrote musicals as well as pop songs. When he was trying to produce *Oliver!* he was well-established on the **West End**. Despite his success, no one wanted to produce (pay for) the show. He ended up funding the musical himself. It opened in 1960 and was a huge success. *Oliver!* went on to win two **Tony Awards**.

To get the money to produce his next musical, *Twang*, Bart sold the rights to *Oliver!* This meant that he no longer earned money for having created *Oliver!* The new show did so poorly that Bart had to file for bankruptcy in 1972. By the late 1970s he had developed diabetes and destroyed a third of his liver with heavy drinking. He died in 1999 from liver cancer.

West End – the premiere, professional theater district of London, like Broadway in New York.

Tony Award – prestigious award for Broadway shows.

CHARLES DICKENS: AUTHOR OF *OLIVER TWIST*



The musical *Oliver!* is based on the novel *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens.

Charles Dickens was born in England in 1812. When he was 12, his father went to prison and Dickens had to quit school to support his family. He worked in a warehouse where the hours were long and the labor was exhausting. Experiencing these harsh conditions as a child shaped the rest of his life. As an adult, he became a voice for the impoverished and the working class. He believed even the smallest people in society deserved respect and fair treatment.

Dickens began his writing career as a newspaper reporter. His work in journalism allowed him to publish fictional work in magazines and newspapers. In Dickens' time, authors didn't immediately publish a complete story in a book, like the novels we read today. Instead one chapter was released per magazine or newspaper issue. This is called "serialization." Many of Dickens' most famous works began this way.

Some other works by Dickens include *A Christmas Carol*, *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Charles Dickens loved theater. He was also a playwright and actor. He even performed for Queen Victoria in 1851.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S NOTEBOOK



“Why *Oliver!* now? What does a story written in the last century tell us about our world today? One in 25 children

are living on the streets of London. The disparity between the rich and the poor [in London] is at its highest level since Dickens' time. Dickens would be shocked by how far we haven't come.

We tell our story from the point of view of Oliver, a delicate orphan swallowed up by a dangerous, overwhelming world. First in

a workhouse, then in chaotic London. For our production, we take the spirit of Dickens and transplant it to today — taking the audience under the bridge.”

– Molly Smith

The Human Rights Watch estimates that over 100 million children worldwide work currently in hazardous conditions.

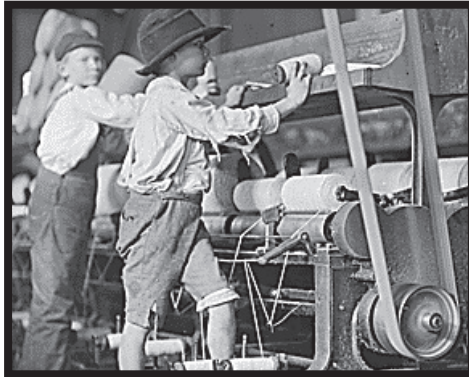
FROM VICTORIAN ENGLAND TO MODERN-DAY LONDON

“Victorian” is a term used to describe England during the reign of Queen Victoria, which lasted from 1837–1901. *Oliver!* was originally set in 1830s London.

During this time, many people moved from the English countryside to London to work in factories. Soon London became overcrowded and dirty. Sickness was common, especially among the working class. Many children lost their parents to disease and roamed the streets alone. Some Victorian families were so poor that their children were forced to work instead of going to school. Children worked in factories, mills and mines, and there were few laws to keep them safe.

Although this is the traditional world of *Oliver!*, the director, Molly Smith, has set this production in contemporary London. This concept highlights the fact that wealth inequality is just as much of an issue in modern society as it was in Victorian London.

In theater, a “concept” is a theme, interpretation or a setting that



makes a play unique. This concept often makes the play different from when it was first imagined, but it doesn’t change the story or the lines the actors say. A concept can help an old story have new meaning.

Activity – Wealth inequality exists when a nation’s money isn’t spread out fairly between all of its citizens. Scan to learn more about wealth inequality today.



A concept inevitably influences the design of a show. While Arena’s production of *Oliver!* takes place in the 21st century, there are nods to Victorian England in the costume and set designs. Which ones can you spot?

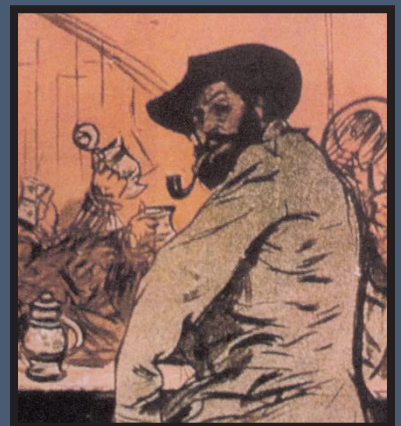
Selling children was a common practice in Victorian England. Parents would sell their children to wealthy families in exchange for money. The children might work as a servant for the family or assist with the family’s business.



Think of your favorite story and transplant it to a different time period. How does this change the message of the piece? What themes are made more or less apparent by this new setting?



Costume designer Wade Laboissonniere drew inspiration from historical images and the modern runway to create sketches for each character, which will be used to make the costumes.



ARENA BACKSTAGE: MEET OLIVER

The role of Oliver will be played by fourth-grader Jake Miller. According to an interview with *Fauquier.com*, Jake started taking voice lessons last year because his parents thought it would be a good way to channel his creative energy. After receiving encouraging feedback from his voice teacher, Jake started auditioning and performing. He says he “feels happy” when he performs and doesn’t get very nervous.

Jake’s parents are willing to support Jake and his career. His teachers are also understanding of his demanding schedule. While performing is a big part of his life, Jake’s classmates don’t know about it because he’s “not big on bragging.”

When Jake isn’t singing he enjoys reading, playing with his friends and spending time with his dog, Lollie.



WHAT’S WITH THE SINGING AND DANCING?

The singing and dancing in musicals are meant to do more than entertain. Singing and dancing are tools to convey heightened situations. A playwright will add a song when an idea, event or emotion is too big for words alone. Similarly, when a situation is too much for song, we see dance.

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

Who are the “Olivers” of our world today?

2

What is our responsibility to the poor and those that live on the margins of society?

3

Who is responsible for a crime?

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the exact seat on your ticket. Ask the usher for help finding it.
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum, unless invited by the performers to do so.
- Keep your feet on the floor and off the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show — you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don’t repeat lines out loud or talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end!

RESOURCES

BBC News: “Charles Dickens”

<http://tinyurl.com/dickensbckgrnd>

Economic History Association: “Child Labor during the British Industrial Revolution”

<http://tinyurl.com/m2teknu>

Fauquier.com: “Warrenton boy lands lead in Arena Stage’s *Oliver!*”

Human Rights Watch: “Child Labor”

<http://tinyurl.com/hrwchildlabor>

IMDb: “Lionel Bart”

<http://tinyurl.com/lionelbart>

Museum of London: “What was life like for children in Victorian London?”

<http://tinyurl.com/MoLchildlabor>



the mead center
for american theater

1101 Sixth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Phone: 202-554-9066

Fax: 202-488-4056

Written by Jenna Murphy
Edited by Rebecca Campana

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