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*Dramatic Publishing*

# OLIVER TWIST

An adaptation of the Charles Dickens novel

by

ROBERT THOMAS NOLL



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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## ABOUT THE STAGING ...

This adaptation can be produced with a large cast or a small one. It can be produced using sets or no sets. It has successfully been produced both ways.

If you decide to produce it with a small cast and no sets, then here are some staging suggestions:

As audience enters they view a bare stage except for two large coat racks center stage. On these racks are all the costumes and hats that the dozen or so actors will need to perform all the parts in the play.

The following is an imaginative treatment of the Dickens classic. Some tables, a few simple chairs, maybe a bench and a few hand props are brought in by the actors just before the play is to begin. That's all that is needed.

Actors play many characters as well as doorways, gates, bedposts, even London Bridge. They move in and out of their various characters via a quick change in costume piece or voice or movement. Whenever possible, actors should provide sound effects and musical backgrounds themselves. Part of the fun of watching this play is seeing actors do this. All that is asked of the audience is to supply their imagination.

*The Adventures of Oliver Twist* had its world premiere at Cuyahoga Community College on February 7, 1985 under the direction of Frank J. Lucas with lighting by Scott Plumer. The ensemble cast was as follows:

POLLY BURNS, BRADLEY GLENN, RACHEL GREEN,  
LINDA MASON, FRANK MULARO, CARL PAOLETTA,  
DIANA PAOLETTA, TONI PAOLETTA, KRISTEN RUDD,  
ERIN SCHEIDEGGER AND JIM THEODORE.

*The Adventures of Oliver Twist* was produced by Dallas Children's Theater, Inc. at the El Centro College Theatre, Dallas, Texas, under the direction of Robyn Flatt, on July 17, 1992 with the following cast:

Mrs. Mann . . . . . BARBARA ALKOFER  
Bill Sikes . . . . . SCOTT AMES  
Oliver Twist . . . . . TYLER BROCKINGTON  
Mr. Bumble . . . . . DOUGLASS BURKS  
Monks/Ensemble . . . . . MICHAEL SKOTNIK  
Rose . . . . . AUDRA HATCHETT  
Ensemble . . . . . REBECCA LEAL  
Noah/Ensemble . . . . . MATTHEW DAVID KING  
Chairman/Giles/Magistrate/Ensemble . . . . . DAVID LUGO  
Sowerberry/Brownlow . . . . . J.E. MASTERS  
Fagin . . . . . ARTIE OLAISEN  
Nancy . . . . . NATALIE ROSS  
Ensemble . . . . . MELISSA FLORES  
Constable/Jailer/Ensemble . . . . . BILL CARMICHAEL  
Old Sal/Bookseller/Ensemble . . . . . ISOBEL TUTOR  
The Artful Dodger . . . . . ASHLEY WOOD  
Charlie . . . . . MARC WALLENSTEIN, RICK MERRICK

Fagin's Gang . . . . . BRITT BROWN, CLAIR JORDAN,  
ADAM LOCKHART, JILL MATELAR, RICK MERRICK,  
AILEA SNELLER  
Parish Orphans . . . KATHERINE ADAMS, HEATHER ATKINS,  
DANNY GREER, GILLETTE HUGHES,  
ISLEY MORKMAN, PHILLIP SCHUEPBACH,  
MATTHEW WALLENSTEIN, CHERLY WILSON

# OLIVER TWIST

A Play in Two Acts

## CHARACTERS

MR. BROWNLOW  
OLIVER TWIST  
MR. BUMBLE  
MRS. MANN  
BOARD CHAIRMAN  
WORKHOUSE BOYS  
MR. SOWERBERRY  
MRS. SOWERBERRY  
NOAH CLAYPOLE  
ARTFUL DODGER  
FAGIN  
CHARLIE BATES  
FAGIN'S BOYS  
MR. MONKS  
LONDONERS  
OLD WOMAN  
CONSTABLE  
NANCY  
BILL SIKES  
GILES  
ROSE  
GUARDS  
MAGISTRATE  
JAILER



For the small cast playing many parts, below is a suggestion if you are working with twelve actors playing all the parts:

ACTOR #1 plays OLIVER TWIST

ACTOR #2 plays FAGIN / CHAIRMAN OF ORPHANAGE

ACTOR #3 plays MONKS / ENSEMBLE

ACTOR #4 plays MRS. MANN / NANCY

ACTOR #5 plays BILL SIKES / MR. BUMBLE

ACTOR #6 plays ROSE / OLD LADY /

MRS. SOWERBERRY / ENSEMBLE

ACTOR #7 plays DODGER / ENSEMBLE

ACTOR #8 plays CHARLIE / ENSEMBLE

ACTOR #9 plays BROWNLOW / SOWERBERRY

ACTOR #10 plays NOAH / GILES/ ENSEMBLE

ACTOR #11 plays CONSTABLE / JAILER / ENSEMBLE

ACTOR #12 plays MAGISTRATE / ENSEMBLE

Members of the ENSEMBLE play LONDONERS, BOYS AT WORKHOUSE, FAGIN'S BOYS.

# ACT ONE

## SCENE 1

AT RISE: *Stage is very dark and dreary. Sinister music. From the shadows enters the company of actors. Each member of the company takes at least one line of the opening narration.*

NARRATION (*to audience*).

We are in rural Northern England. It is 1837.

A pregnant young woman was lying in the street—she had walked some distance, for her shoes were worn to pieces;

But where she came from, or where she was going to, nobody knew ...

She was brought to the parish workhouse where she gave birth and then soon died.

Her child was named Oliver Twist. He was a pale, thin child somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference.

But nature or inheritance had implanted young Oliver with a sturdy spirit to be able to survive a spare diet and absolutely no attention and no love as he was growing up.

Be this as it may, however, it was his ninth birthday; and he was keeping it in the coal-cellar, after having been beaten.

What was young Oliver's crime for such a severe punishment?

*(From the shadows appears OLIVER TWIST, a small boy. Right behind him is MRS. MANN, a middle-aged, overweight woman. She is beating the boy. He's thrown into a corner.)*

For atrociously presuming to be hungry.

*(Company moves into darkness and exits. Lights come up on MRS. MANN. She is standing behind a gate [an actor represents this]. MR. BUMBLE, middle-aged and plump, enters quickly and quietly behind the gate.)*

BUMBLE. Mrs. Mann! Mrs. Mann!

MRS. MANN *(startled)*. Goodness gracious! Is that you, Mr. Bumble, sir?

BUMBLE. Of course, Mrs. Mann, of course, woman. Open up!

MRS. MANN. My heart alive! It is you, sir. How glad I am to see you, surely.

BUMBLE. Open your gate immediately! It is locked.

MRS. MANN. Oh, sorry, sir. So very sorry. So, so sorry.

BUMBLE. Open the gate!

*(MRS. MANN unlocks gate. BUMBLE pushes it open with his walking stick. He's a pompous ass.)*

MRS. MANN. Lo' only think that I should have forgotten that the gate was bolted in the inside, on account of the dear children.

BUMBLE. The dear children! Do you think this respectful or proper conduct, Mrs. Mann? Do you? Do you?

MRS. MANN. No, sir. No, sir. Which, sir?

BUMBLE *(grasping his cane)*. To keep the parish officer a-waiting at your garden gate when he comes here upon parochial business connected with the parochial orphans? Are you aware, Mrs. Mann, that you are, as I may say, a parochial delegate and a stipendiary?

MRS. MANN. I'm sure, Mr. Bumble, sir, that I was only a-telling one or two of the dear little children as is fond of you, sir, that it was you a-coming.

BUMBLE *(tapping his cane)*. Well, well, Mrs. Mann. It may be as you say, it may be.

MRS. MANN. Of course it is.

BUMBLE. Lead the way, Mrs. Mann, for I come on business.

MRS. MANN *(touching his hand)*. Business, Mr. Bumble.

BUMBLE *(removing her hand from his)*. Just business today, and I have something to say.

MRS. MANN. And I'm dying to hear it, but first will you take a little drop of something? *(Takes whiskey bottle from her pocket and moves to touch his stomach.)* Will warm up your little tummy, sir.

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BUMBLE. Not a drop. Not a drop.

MRS. MANN. Not a drop?

BUMBLE. Not a drop. (*Takes bottle from MRS. MANN and quickly takes a drink.*)

MRS. MANN (*slight smile*). Not a drop, Mr. Bumble, sir.

BUMBLE. I've come for the boy—a boy with the very unusual name. Oliver Twist.

MRS. MANN. I named him myself, sir.

BUMBLE (*takes another swig of whiskey*). How did you come up with a name like that, good woman?

MRS. MANN. I was there at his birth—when his mother—poor child—came to the orphanage. I named him after she died. I named my foundlings in alphabetical order. The last was a Swable. I named him. This was a Twist. I named him. The next one that comes along will be Unwin, the next Vilkins.

(*Beat. BUMBLE takes another swig of whiskey.*)

BUMBLE. You're quite a literary character, Mrs. Mann.

MRS. MANN. Quite. Quite. (*Takes a swig for herself*)

BUMBLE. A literary character; do you not comprehend the brilliance of my wit—a literary character.

MRS. MANN. Yes, ha, ha, you have quite a wit. (*Under her breath.*) You husky hog.

BUMBLE. What did you say, my sweet?

MRS. MANN. A frog. I had one in my throat. (*Hands bottle to BUMBLE who drinks.*)

BUMBLE. Oliver is too old to remain here. The board chairman wishes to see him immediately, to determine which workhouse he'll be sent to. So let me see the little bastard at once.

MRS. MANN. At once! (*Takes another swig.*) At once!

BUMBLE. Mrs. Mann.

MRS. MANN. Yes, Mr. Bumble, dear.

*(BUMBLE puts out his hand to her. MRS. MANN touches it gently. He shakes his head and takes the bottle from her other hand. She moves upstage to OLIVER, disappointed. BUMBLE takes another swig.)*

MRS. MANN (*to OLIVER*). Now, come now, my dear child.

OLIVER. Are you speaking to me, Mrs. Mann?

MRS. MANN (*back to her old self*). Get up! You ungrateful bugger. Before I... (*Sweetly.*) Now, Oliver, Mr. Bumble has come to see you. He wants to help you. So be on your best. (*Grabs his arm tightly.*) Understand?

OLIVER. Yes, Mrs. Mann.

MRS. MANN (*moves OLIVER to BUMBLE*). Mr. Bumble, here is our little angel. Oliver, dear, this is Mr. Bumble. Make a bow to the nice gentleman. (*OLIVER bows to BUMBLE.*) Mr. Bumble is the parish beadle. He has come to take you to meet the board chairman.

OLIVER. Who is that, Mrs. Mann?

BUMBLE. You'll soon find out. (*Pompous, majestic, slightly drunk.*) Now come along, boy.

OLIVER (*to MRS. MANN*). Must I?

MRS. MANN. You are a parish orphan. Mr. Bumble is in charge of the care of parish orphans. You do as he says.

BUMBLE. Oliver, for nine years you have lived off the generosity of the parish and the kindness of dear Mrs. Mann. It is time to repay the great burden we have all had of keeping you alive.

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OLIVER. A burden, sir?

MRS. MANN. A burden. Now, hush, Oliver.

BUMBLE (*tapping his cane firmly on OLIVER's head*).

Let's go, boy. Off to the board chairman.

(*BUMBLE and OLIVER start to leave.*)

MRS. MANN. Good day, Mr. Bumble. Come back soon.

BUMBLE. Good day, Mrs. Mann. I will. (*Whiskey is now really affecting him.*) Thank you for the refreshments.

MRS. MANN. You're most welcome, sir. (*As OLIVER and BUMBLE walk.*) Watch out for Oliver. He has a mind of his own. An occasional whipping with a thick belt or heavy stick does the trick.

BUMBLE. Don't worry your pretty blue eyes.

MRS. MANN. They're green.

BUMBLE. Don't worry, I will take care of the wretch. A boy of his age only needs the firm hand of a man. (*To OLIVER.*) This way, young man.

(*BUMBLE pokes OLIVER with his cane. Music. They walk to other side of stage. MRS. MANN takes another swig and exits.*)

NARRATION (*various company members take turns doing narration*).

With a slice of stale bread in his hand, and the little brown-cloth parish cap on his head, Oliver was then led away by Mr. Bumble from the wretched home where one kind word or look had never lightened the gloom of Oliver's infant years.

And yet Oliver burst into an agony of childish grief as the orphanage gate closed after him.

Wretched as were the little companions in misery he was leaving behind, they were the only friends he had known, and a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world sank into the child's heart for the first time.

Oliver had not been within the walls of the workhouse a quarter of an hour, when Mr. Bumble informed him he was ordered to meet the chairman of the board.

*(BUMBLE brings OLIVER in front of stern-looking BOARD CHAIRMAN. He is wearing a white waistcoat.)*

BUMBLE. Bow to the chairman.

*(OLIVER brushes away his tears and does.)*

CHAIRMAN. So boy, you know you have no mother or father. That you were brought up at the kindness and prayers of the parish. You know that, don't you?

OLIVER. Yes.

BUMBLE. "Sir."

OLIVER. Yes, "sir." I know all that. But, it was not my fault.

CHAIRMAN. It was.

BUMBLE *(swaying a bit—the effects of the whiskey)*. Yes, it was.

CHAIRMAN. You are a sinner. You wouldn't be growing up in an orphanage if you weren't. Do you understand that, boy?

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OLIVER. No, sir.

BUMBLE. Oliver!

CHAIRMAN. Bumble!

BUMBLE. Yes, sir. Oh. (*Pokes OLIVER with his cane.*)

CHAIRMAN. Sinner, you're a sinner. Do you understand, boy?

*(BUMBLE pokes OLIVER again.)*

OLIVER. Yes, sir, I understand ... sir.

CHAIRMAN. Good, and since you are no longer a child ...

OLIVER. I am nine years old, sir. My birthday is today, sir.

*(BUMBLE gives him a rap to be quiet.)*

CHAIRMAN. You will start to repay your debt by working at the workhouse with the older boys. And if you work hard and do as you're told, Mr. Bumble here will find you someone you can apprentice with, who will teach you a craft, a trade. So you won't have to live off our generosity any longer. Understand, boy?

OLIVER. Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN. Mr. Bumble.

BUMBLE (*swaying and falling asleep standing up*). As ...

CHAIRMAN. Bumble, you ass!

BUMBLE (*startled*). Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN. Take Oliver over to the house. The older boys will take care of this wretch's obstinate behavior immediately. Make sure he is well fed—he's much too thin and pale to carry his workload.

BUMBLE. Yes, sir. Come on, wretch. (*Pokes OLIVER as they start to leave.*)

CHAIRMAN. Oliver.

OLIVER. Yes, sir?

CHAIRMAN. I will pray for you... for your sins.

*(OLIVER is again poked by BUMBLE.)*

OLIVER. Thank you, sir.

*(OLIVER and BUMBLE move to other side of stage. BUMBLE is grabbing him around the collar. CHAIRMAN reverently exits.)*

NARRATION.

The room in which the boys were fed was a large, damp stone hall. There each workhouse boy was given one bowl of gruel a day.

The bowls never needed washing. The boys, so hungry, would polish them with their spoons till they shone again.

*(Music. WORKHOUSE BOYS [only a few are needed] enter carrying bowls and spoons. A BOY hands OLIVER a bowl and spoon.)*

OLIVER. Thank you.

*(Another BOY enters with kettle and ladle. He hands it to BUMBLE, who pours BOYS' gruel. OLIVER is anx-*

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iously waiting his turn. *OLIVER* gets his "food." He gets ready to start eating when *BUMBLE* slaps his hand.)

**BUMBLE.** Wait, impatient boy! We must first give thanks. *(To other BOYS.)* Let us pray. *(Sudden silence, BOYS including OLIVER have their hands folded.)* O Lord, Giver of life. We thank Thee for Thy kindness. For Thy generosity, to all these miserable creatures. Forgive them of their sins. May they find happiness in Thy mercy. We thank Thee O Lord for the food you have blessed us with today. Amen.

**BOYS.** Amen.

**OLIVER.** Amen.

*(BOYS quickly down their food. OLIVER does the same.)*

**OLIVER.** Mr. Bumble, sir.

**BUMBLE.** What is it?

**OLIVER.** Please, sir. I want some more.

**BUMBLE.** What! *(To BOYS, BOYS snickering.)* Silence! *(BOYS eye OLIVER.)* What did you say, Oliver?

**OLIVER.** Please, sir, I want some more.

**BUMBLE** *(incredulous).* You want some more? My Lord, Oliver! Is that all you do—take, take, take? Don't you know the Poor Laws?

**OLIVER.** No, sir.

**BUMBLE.** The Poor Laws state that you get one bowl for supper. No more, no less.

**OLIVER.** I didn't know, sir. I am sorry.

**BUMBLE.** Sorry? Sorry? It's too late to be sorry. *(BUMBLE strikes OLIVER with his hand on the forehead.)*

*OLIVER falls to floor. His forehead is bleeding. BUMBLE drags OLIVER to other side of stage.)* To the dark rat-filled cellar you go. Where you'll stay all alone—with only the vermin to keep you company. And without food—oh, greedy one, or water, until... Until God gives me the strength to forgive you. You ungrateful child. You miserable good-for-nothing.

*(BUMBLE throws OLIVER in dark corner. OLIVER starts to cry. Lights come up downstage on SOWERBERRY. He is a tall, thin sinister-looking man dressed in black. BUMBLE moves to him. BUMBLE is now completely sober. Dimout on the crying OLIVER.)*

BUMBLE *(putting out his hand)*. So, Mister, you are interested in the boy?

SOWERBERRY *(doesn't shake BUMBLE's hand)*. For the right price I am.

BUMBLE. The parish is willing to give you four pounds. Only four pounds for such a hard-working, intelligent lad as Oliver.

SOWERBERRY. Six pounds. That's what your notice said.

BUMBLE. Five pounds for him. Not a shilling more.

SOWERBERRY. Six pounds. Not a shilling less.

BUMBLE *(beat)*. I will bring you the boy.

SOWERBERRY. Six pounds, Mr. Bumble.

BUMBLE *(mimicking SOWERBERRY as he moves to where OLIVER is lying)*. "Six pounds, Mr. Bumble. Six pounds." *(Takes from his coat pocket a cap.)* Oliver, come here, child.

OLIVER. Please, sir. Don't beat me again!

BUMBLE. Oliver, get up!