

Playstage
Junior

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OLIVER TWIST



Adapted from the original story by Charles Dickens

Written by
Stewart Auty

(A large cast, which can be reduced by doubling parts – The Workhouse Boys could be Fagin's Gang of Street Urchins; Crowd 1 - 5 in Scene 9 could be doubled with earlier cast members/Narrators. Some street scenes require crowds in the background etc.)

CAST

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Poor Family - (*Mum, Dad +3 children – non-speaking but required to mime. Needed in crowd scenes later*)

Mr Bumble, the Beadle

Mrs Corney, later Mrs Bumble

Mr Sowerberry

Mrs Sowerberry

Mr Leeford

Agnes Fleming

Workhouse Inspector

Workhouse Boy 1

Workhouse Boy 2

Workhouse Boy 3

Workhouse Boy 4

Workhouse Boy 5

Workhouse Boy 6

Claypole

Jack Dawkins aka Artful Dodger

Street Urchins Gang in Fagin's den:

Gang 1

Gang 2

Gang 3

Gang 4

Fagin

Bill Sikes

Mr Brownlow

Constable

Nancy

Mrs Bedwin

Monk

Mrs Maylie, aunt to Rose

Rose Maylie

Crowd 1

Crowd 2

Crowd 3

Crowd 4

Crowd 5

35 parts. Could be less with doubling or more if crowd scenes were larger

Running time approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes.

OLIVER TWIST

SCENE 1.

(Closed curtains if possible. Narrators dressed as elegant ladies - they can appear in crowd scenes later)

NARRATOR 1

Today/tonight we're going to tell you the story of Oliver Twist, possibly the most well known of Charles Dickens' stories.

NARRATOR 2

Charles Dickens started writing his book round about the time that Queen Victoria came to the throne.

NARRATOR 1

Life in Victorian times was either pretty good – if you were rich, and not so good if you were poor.

NARRATOR 2

Poor people who had nowhere else to live were often directed to the local workhouse.

(Miming sequence during commentary by Narrators: In silence, enter poor family, mother, father and three children. They shuffle along, very unsure of themselves. They stand, huddled together until MR BUMBLE enters and forcibly directs father one way, mother another. Children cling and have to be roughly separated from their parents who are demonstrably upset.)

NARRATOR 1

In the workhouse, families were quickly and often roughly separated, men in one wing of the building...

NARRATOR 2

Women in another...

NARRATOR 1

And children were kept apart and if they were lucky might see their mum or dad on a Sunday.

NARRATOR 2

And that was only if everyone had been good for the whole week, which was almost impossible.

NARRATOR 1

Workhouses were for the lowest levels of society, and they were mean, often uncaring establishments.

NARRATOR 2

Their whole purpose was to provide temporary accommodation, which was presented in the most unattractive way possible.

NARRATOR 1

The idea was that everyone hated being there, so they tried hard to move out when their circumstances improved.

NARRATOR 2

If it was too comfortable, why would anyone want to leave? So they made it horrible!

NARRATOR 1

It was into the workhouse that our hero, Oliver Twist, was born. A very upsetting situation all round.

NARRATOR 2

In the workhouse, Mr Bumble was the Beadle, a sort of manager or superintendent. He was only a minor church official, but my, was he a very self important man!

NARRATOR 1

Mrs Corney was the matron of the workhouse, a most unpleasant woman by all accounts.

NARRATOR 2

You saw Mr Bumble, the Beadle briefly, and now you will meet him properly and Mrs Corney too.

NARRATOR 2

So here we are in the workhouse. It is late into the evening, and all is quiet. The poor people are asleep in their respective dormitories.

NARRATOR 1

Mr Bumble and Mrs Corney have been entertaining guests.

NARRATOR 2

Mr Sowerberry, the local undertaker, and his charming wife.

(The NARRATORS exit. Lights up and curtains open to reveal four people seated around a dining table - MR BUMBLE, MRS CORNEY, MR and MRS SOWERBERRY)

MR BUMBLE (*Stands*)

This has been such a delightful evening! So nice of you to call round Mr Sowerberry, and to bring your charming and delightful wife.

(MRS SOWERBERRY smiles in an embarrassed way)

MR SOWERBERRY (*Stands and shakes MR BUMBLE'S hand*)

We've had a lovely time, and thank you Mrs Corney for the meal.

MRS CORNEY

An absolute pleasure!

MRS SOWERBERRY (*Stands*)

...And the wine too! Not only have we eaten well, but we have drunk, now what's the word.... sumptuously, that's it.... sumptuously.

MR BUMBLE

Very kind of you to say. This might be the Workhouse, and we may not have much, but we know how to entertain our friends.

MRS CORNEY

And in our business, though it is sad to say, but having the local undertaker as a friend is sometimes both useful and necessary.

MR SOWERBERRY

We understand perfectly. When our paths cross, as they occasionally must, it's not always the best of times, but tonight has been different.

MRS SOWERBERRY

You have been excellent in your roles as host and hostess. But now Mr Sowerberry and I must take our leave.

(Enter MR LEEFORD half carrying, half dragging AGNES FLEMING)

MR LEEFORD

Help me, please! I need some assistance here! My lady friend is hurt! She's in pain!

(AGNES FLEMING groans)

MR BUMBLE (*Officiously*)

Now look here, young man, whoever you are, this is a workhouse, not a hospital. If your lady friend is ill, or injured, here is not the place.

MRS CORNEY (*Scornful laugh*)

What's the matter with her? Is she drunk? Has she had one or two too many?

MR LEEFORD

No, she is not drunk madam, and I take offence at that remark!

MRS CORNEY

She looks drunk to me, that's all I was saying. Poor thing, she can hardly walk!

MR SOWERBERRY

Perhaps it would be a kindness Mrs Corney for us to help her. I can see she is in great distress.

MR BUMBLE

Young man, what sort of help do you need? Is this your wife?

MR LEEFORD

She's not my wife, well, not exactly, not really.

MRS SOWERBERRY

Well either she is, or she isn't. Make your mind up.

MR LEEFORD

It's complicated, but she needs help – please? She's in a bad way!

MR BUMBLE

Very well, we will see what we can do. Mrs Corney – will you take the young woman through into the kitchen? There's a big table in there where she might be placed until we think what we are going to do.

MRS SOWERBERRY (*Goes to assist AGNES FLEMING*)

Here let me help you. My goodness, if I'm not very much mistaken, I think this young lady is heavy with child!

MR LEEFORD

That's what I was trying to say. I think she might be about to give birth any minute.

MR BUMBLE

Stand back, Mr Sowerberry. You too, young man. This is not your place. Ladies, if you would be so kind?

(MRS CORNEY and MRS SOWERBERRY help AGNES FLEMING offstage)

MR SOWERBERRY

Yes, you're right, Mr Bumble. These things are best left to those who know about such things. Despatches not hatches, that's my game.

(MR LEEFORD exits discreetly, whilst everyone is distracted)

MR BUMBLE

Now young man *(Turns, looks around)*... where's he gone? He's vanished! Into thin air!

MR SOWERBERRY

He was here a minute ago. How impertinent to ask for help, and then to leave without so much as a thank you.

MR BUMBLE

Most ungrateful of him. Did you know him by any chance?

MR SOWERBERRY

Never set eyes on him before. A complete stranger to me.

MR BUMBLE

And to me. Our mystery man has completely disappeared. We don't know who he is, or for that matter, who the young lady is.

MR SOWERBERRY

Very frustrating. Perhaps our good ladies will find out who she is when they speak with her.

MR BUMBLE

She looked beyond conversation if you ask me.

(Enter MRS CORNEY, carrying a baby wrapped in a shawl. MRS SOWERBERRY follows her.)

MRS CORNEY

Well, gentlemen, there's good news and there's bad news, so which would you like first?

MR SOWERBERRY

Good first, I think, all things considered. If you hear good news you're better prepared for the bad that inevitably follows.

MRS CORNEY

Well, the good news is that our young lady has just given birth to a baby boy.

MR BUMBLE

I suppose all things considered, that's good news, but there is something else?

MRS CORNEY

Now the bad news - the young lady has passed on, has gone to meet her maker.

(MR BUMBLE and MR SOWERBERRY exchange frowns. Enter MRS SOWERBERRY)

MRS SOWERBERRY

Terribly sad, terribly sad. Just faded away she did, right there on the table in front of us.

MRS CORNEY

So it's fortunate you're still here Mr Sowerberry, you being an undertaker and all that.

MR BUMBLE

Your professional skills seem to be required Mr Sowerberry, I'm afraid.

MRS CORNEY

If you would be so good as to go into the kitchen and, er, tidy up, so to speak, we'd be very grateful. I've some gruel to mix for the morning on that table.

MR SOWERBERRY

My wife will help me. Come along dear, and we will, er, tidy up as you request.

(Exit MR SOWERBERRY and MRS SOWERBERRY)

MR BUMBLE

Mrs Corney, did you by any chance find out who the young lady was? It would help if we could notify the family. We need someone to could pay for the funeral.

MRS CORNEY

Mr Bumble, you're all heart! But I've no more idea now who she is than when that young man brought her in. You'll have to ask him. He'll be able to tell you.

MR BUMBLE

He can't Mrs Corney.

MRS CORNEY

Can't or won't? Which is it?

MR BUMBLE

He's vanished, Mrs Corney. One minute he was there, and then he wasn't!

MRS CORNEY

And he never said who she was, or where they came from?

MR BUMBLE

Not a word. What an unfortunate end to our evening of socialising with the undertaker and his wife.

MRS CORNEY

Yes, not only is the young lady dead, she is also a liability, and a costly one at that.

MR BUMBLE

Mr Sowerberry knows the Parish will pay for the funeral. It won't be a lavish affair.

MRS CORNEY

There'll be no mourners there for a start, so she will truly go to a pauper's grave.

MR BUMBLE

All in all, a wasted, and now costly evening.

MRS CORNEY

The evening hasn't all been wasted Mr Bumble.

MR BUMBLE

Now what do you mean Mrs Corney? You're being obtuse woman – explain yourself!

MRS CORNEY

Patience! When the lady came in I noticed she was wearing a gold pendant on a chain. Now seeing as she's no further use for it, not where she's going, well, she's not wearing it now! Look!

(MRS CORNEY dangles pendant in front of MR BUMBLE'S eyes.)

MR BUMBLE

Smart thinking! *(Reaches for necklace)* Perhaps I should look after it? We might be able to sell that Mrs Corney. Gold eh? Should make a tidy sum!

MRS CORNEY *(Snatches necklace away)*

There's no 'we' about this! Finder's keepers Mr Bumble, and it's not for selling. I'm keeping this for myself! And...if you know what's good for you, you will pursue this matter no further. Now be off with you! I have to take this child to

the infant's ward and then I've gruel to make - if that kitchen table has been cleared!

(Exit MR BUMBLE and MRS CORNEY)

END OF SCENE 1/

OLIVER TWIST**SCENE 2**

(NARRATORS appear. In front of closed curtains if possible)

NARRATOR 1

The baby born into the workhouse was given a name. Mr Bumble liked to name the boys in alphabetical order, and he was now up to the letter T.

NARRATOR 2

So with a surname of Twist, and a first name of Oliver, the young Oliver Twist grew up in the grim surroundings of the workhouse.

NARRATOR 1

Now that you've met Mr Bumble, and the matron - who was Mrs Corney but is now Mrs Bumble, having prevailed upon Mr Bumble to marry her.

NARRATOR 2

To his endless regret!

NARRATOR 1

You understand what sort of people they are. Remember, conditions in the workhouse were terrible. Many of the boys were orphans, like Oliver, and Mr Bumble couldn't wait for them to grow up.

NARRATOR 2

If they could work, they would earn money and Mr Bumble could charge them rent.

NARRATOR 1

Even better, some boys left the workhouse when they became old enough, and this was Mr Bumble's burning desire for every boy in his care. Moving them on was Mr Bumble's ambition!

NARRATOR 2

Mrs Bumble was given very little money to spend on food, so the boys were often still hungry even after a meal.

NARRATOR 1

We return to the workhouse some ten years later.

NARRATOR 2

The workhouse is being inspected. You will recognise one of the inspectors – it is Mr Sowerberry, the local undertaker and close friend of Mr Bumble.

NARRATOR 1

Here they are now after inspecting the boys' dormitory.

(NARRATORS exit. Curtains open. There are two tables, one overloaded lavishly with food, and the other almost bare. Two chairs at the top table, and benches either side of the other. Enter MR BUMBLE, MR SOWERBERRY and another INSPECTOR)

MR SOWERBERRY

That was an exceptionally clean dormitory, Mr Bumble. Please pass on our thanks to Mrs Corney for providing such home comforts in an institution.

WORKHOUSE INSPECTOR

Rare indeed to see such facilities. This workhouse could set an example to others we have seen.

MR BUMBLE

Mr Sowerberry, if you don't mind me saying, Mrs Corney is now my wife, so she's Mrs Bumble really. If you need to mention her in your report, can you be sure to call her Mrs Bumble? She can be a bit touchy you know?

MR SOWERBERRY

Touchy, eh? That was said with feeling! So how's married life treating you?

MR BUMBLE

It's not quite what I expected if I'm honest. But best not to grumble, eh? Grumbling does little good and often lasting harm.

MR SOWERBERRY

Quite so!

MR BUMBLE

I know from experience, believe me! Every man must know his place. There's right and wrong in every marriage - she's always right, and I'm always wrong!

WORKHOUSE INSPECTOR

Ah, yes, very droll. Now we've seen the facilities, but we would like to see your boys. You've not been hiding them from us have you?

MR BUMBLE

Hiding them? Why ever would I do that? If I may say sir, that's an absurd notion, and not one I would contemplate.

WORKHOUSE INSPECTOR

We do find in some institutions that the inmates are... how shall I put it...elsewhere... yes, that's the word, elsewhere. Out of sight, and quite deliberately too in my opinion.

MR BUMBLE

Well my boys are elsewhere, as you put it, but that does not mean they are unavailable. My boys have been working in the fields, and they're cleaning themselves up under the watchful eye of matron, my dear wife Mrs Bumble. They'll be here shortly for their midday meal.

MR SOWERBERRY

I see you have provided for us too, Mr Bumble.

MR BUMBLE

I like to show hospitality to my guests.

WORKHOUSE INSPECTOR

You're not trying to influence our report Mr Bumble? This has been known you know, this has been known.

(Enter MRS BUMBLE)

MRS BUMBLE

The boys will be along soon, gentlemen. They're in a queue at the pump in the yard making themselves presentable.

MR BUMBLE

Shouldn't you be supervising, dear? We do want them to look their best!

MRS BUMBLE

Have no fear of that. I've had a word with them, if you catch my drift. There'll be no problems there, I can assure you.

WORKHOUSE INSPECTOR

And how's married life suiting you, er... Mrs Bumble?

MRS BUMBLE

It's suiting me just fine, thank you. When Mr Bumble does as he's told, well, we get on really well. Isn't that right, Mr Bumble?

(MR BUMBLE grimaces)

MR SOWERBERRY

I know there's right and wrong in every marriage.

MRS BUMBLE

True. I'm always right, and he's always wrong!

WORKHOUSE INSPECTOR

So Mr Bumble was saying.

MR SOWERBERRY

You will have your little joke, Mrs Bumble.

MRS BUMBLE

Whatever made you think that I was joking Mr Sowerberry? I'm sure you have a similar relationship in your marriage?

MR SOWERBERRY

I know my place, Mrs Bumble. Things were explained to me very early on.

MRS BUMBLE

A very strong willed lady, your wife, Mr Sowerberry. Ah, here are our boys!

(Enter 6 WORKHOUSE BOYS, including OLIVER, in single file marching with their right hands on the boy in front's shoulder. They divide in almost military fashion to stand behind the benches on either side of a long table. They stand in silence, heads bowed, hands clasped in front. The table has 6 bowls, 6 spoons, 6 pieces of dried bread and a jug of water, but no drinking vessels.)

WORKHOUSE INSPECTOR

Only six boys, Mr Bumble? But your records show almost twenty boys on roll. Where are the others?

MR BUMBLE

You are quite correct sir. There are more boys, but they continue to work out in the fields. It is hay making time, and we need to complete the job before the weather turns.

WORKHOUSE INSPECTOR

So these boys are hand-picked, a representative sample, you would say?

MR BUMBLE

A random sample, sir, if you please. I take exception again to any suggestion that we are in some way trying to manipulate your inspection.

MR SOWERBERRY

Yes, well, we do need to reflect on the full workings of the workhouse Mr Bumble.

MR BUMBLE

You are welcome to meet with the other boys if you wish, but they are some distance away in the fields... and it's a bit muddy, overnight rain, you know?