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## “Consider Yourself One of Us”: The Dickens Musical on Stage and Screen

# ABSTRACT

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Charles Dickens’s work has been taken and adapted for many different ends. Quite a lot of attention has been given to film and television versions of the novels, many of which are very distinguished. The stage and screen musical based on his work, essentially a product of the last fifty years, has been neither as studied nor as respected. This paper looks at the connection between Dickens’s novels, the celebration of “London-ness” and its articulation in popular forms of working-class music and song. It will argue that potentially unpromising texts were taken and used to articulate pride and a sense of community for groups representing the disadvantaged of the East End and, more specifically, for first-generation Jewish settlers in London. This is all the more surprising as it was in the first instance through depictions of *Oliver Twist* and the problematic figure of Fagin that an Anglo-Jewish sensibility was able to express itself. Other texts by Dickens, notably *Pickwick Papers*, *A Christmas Carol* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, were also adapted to musical forms with varying results, but the period of their heyday was relatively short, as their use of traditional and communitarian forms gave place in the people’s affection to manufactured pop/rock and operetta forms. I will argue that this decline was partly the product of changing London demographics and shifts in theatre economics and partly of the appropriation of Dickens by the academy.

**Keywords:** Dickens, musical, stage, screen, *Oliver!*

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In this article, I would like to attempt to recreate what the fiction of Dickens meant for many of the citizens and readers of London in the period around 1960. By so doing, I hope to be able to characterize the particular shape and style of the musical adaptations of his work which came upon the stage over the following twenty years. Finally, I briefly review the period after 1980 when the nature of musical Dickens seemed to darken and respond to other communal expectations.

So, in pursuance of my first objective, here is an extract from a family memoir by the poet and children's writer Michael Rosen:

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We are on holiday on the coast of Yorkshire, not far from Whitby. It's a campsite and there are two families . . . It is 1959 and I am 13. . . . So we sit ourselves down on sleeping bags, blankets and cushions. The trolley lamp sits on a fold-up wooden chair, my father sits on another in the middle of us. Looking around the tent, I can only see our faces catching the light, as if we are just masks hanging there, our bodies left outside in the dark perhaps. In my father's hand is a book—*Great Expectations*—and every night, there in the tent, he reads it to us. Without any hesitation, backtracking or explanation he reads Pip's story in the voice of the secondary-school teacher he is, but each and every character is given a flavour—some more than others: Magwitch, of course, allows him to do his native cockney.

Thinking about it now, I can see that his Jagers was probably based on a suburban headteacher from one of the schools he taught in; Uncle Pumblechook could have been derived from the strangely pompous shopkeepers and publicans who peopled the hardware stores and cafés of outer London, where we lived in the 1950s. But over the years, as my father tells us about his own upbringing, some of Dickens characters start to mix and merge with our own relatives. (2)

In this passage about a school teacher doing not just the police in different voices (which is, I must say, only one of a number of detailed connections he establishes), Rosen makes clear the extraordinary bond which existed between the fiction of Dickens and the life narratives of Londoners of Jewish extraction in the middle years of the twentieth century. In another passage, he reads his father Harold's rendering of Trabb's boy from *Great Expectations*, and his catch-phrase "Don't know yer!" as an expression of repressed guilt about escaping family and social connections in the East End and even further eastward, associations which are embarrassing and redolent of hardship. As he writes:

In the shuffling of the pack of these East End boys, each in their own different ways got what they needed to leave this place, to move northwards or eastwards to get out of this poverty and foreignness, to become less “heimish,” as it was called—the “heim” being the mythical faraway place in eastern Europe where everyone looked and talked like their grandparents, lived in tiny houses and kept chickens. (Rosen 5)

The history I would like to relate is exactly about this desire to move onward and upward from these roots, again using Dickens as a vehicle, and again releasing in the process complex emotional reactions of longing, affection, loyalty and guilt. It is the history of the Dickens stage musical and it concerns itself essentially with the period 1960 to 1975. The Dickens musical of this period was exclusively the creation of Londoners and almost exclusively the creation of London’s East End Jewish community. Their life experiences and cultural styles inform the stage musical at this time, and bring in an unprecedentedly successful period for British musical artists. Before 1960, the stage musical was with very few exceptions an American art form. Hardly any British musical, and there were not many, travelled well. *The Boyfriend* (1954) by Sandy Wilson had some impact in London and New York but Julian Slade and Dorothy Reynolds’s London success *Salad Days* (also 1954) was too parochial and class-bound to be staged elsewhere (see Lerner 199). Since the early 1970s, the native British musicals of Andrew Lloyd Webber have vied with the American musicals (of his great rival Stephen Sondheim but also of many other talents) for hegemony. After the society musicals of Ivor Novello and Noël Coward and before Lloyd Webber, there was really only the cockney musical of the 1960s and its curious affinity with Dickens.

East End songwriters and composers began to emerge, mostly from the Music Hall tradition, in the mid-1950s. They rose to prominence following the first wave of British pop music, centring on the vocal styles of Lonnie Donegan, Tommy Steele, Cliff Richard, Marty Wilde and Anthony Newley, a stable of singers managed in emulation of Elvis Presley’s management by Col Tom Parker by British impresario Larry Parnes. Best among the new brigade of writers was the Stepney-born Lionel Begleiter, son of a Jewish tailor from Lvov in Poland (now Ukraine), better known as Lionel Bart, who changed his name to Bart after passing Bart’s Hospital in London aboard a bus. Bart had played in a band with Tommy Steele and Mike Pratt, and was responsible for such hits as “Living Doll” and “The Young Ones” for Cliff Richards, “Little White Bull” and “Rock with the Caveman” for Tommy Steele, “Do You Mind!” for Anthony Newley and the Bond theme “From Russia with Love” for Matt Monro.

Bart had no musical training at all but he was a very gifted lyricist. His career took off when he provided the lyrics for the inaugural Mermaid Theatre production of a Henry Fielding adaptation *Lock Up Your Daughters* (1959), with music supplied by bandleader and film composer Laurie Johnson. Also working on this show were director Peter Coe and stage designer Sean Kenny. *Lock Up Your Daughters* ran for six months and was made into a bawdy (but not musical) film in the late 1960s. On the basis of his work here, his song-writing for films and performing with the Unity Theatre earlier in the decade, Bart was invited to provide music and lyrics for the Theatre Workshop production of *Fings ain't Wot They Used T'Be*. Both Unity and Theatre Workshop grew out of working-class leftist movements of the mid-century. Their leading lights, like Joan Littlewood and Evan McColl, were regularly monitored (and ostracized) for their communist sympathies. *Fings* was a Brechtian raunchy celebration of the east London underworld. Based on a memoir of his gangland experiences by ex-con Frank Norman, the behaviour of gamblers, pimps, tarts and bent coppers was palliated by lively up-tempo music and song from Bart. Theatre Workshop's method under Joan Littlewood was improvisational, which was just as well because Frank Norman himself was barely literate. The show was put together in little over a fortnight. A successful Theatre Royal Stratford East production was followed rapidly by three more, one of which was a lucrative West End transfer. As both composer and lyricist this time, and working alongside fellow East Ender soul-mates and wholly in his native argot, Bart was able to make his name in musical theatre.

The tale is told that Lionel Bart never at any time read Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. The musical *Oliver!*, the book, lyrics and music for which were all written by Bart, was based essentially on David Lean's 1948 movie, which Bart had seen and admired when in the army doing National Service. These were Bart's most fertile years and he was looking for a follow-up success. The Dickens idea came on the scene later than many of the songs he had already written:

“He wrote a show called *Petticoat Lane*,” said Tommy Steele in a BBC interview. “It was a sort of synopsis of a show that he wanted me to do with him: and listening to some of the songs he tinkered about with . . . there were things like ‘Consider Yourself,’ little embryos coming out which were later to become the *Oliver!* score. . . .”

Nobody knew and nobody seemed to care—not even when Lionel abandoned the original *Petticoat Lane* idea and ported the songs over to

a tentative adaptation of Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (Stafford and Stafford 59; 1<sup>st</sup> ellipsis in orig.).

It is of critical interest that many of the songs for *Oliver!* pre-existed the show and were written to animate another show called *Petticoat Lane*. The said lane was the East End’s premier street market and clearly the songs were intended to do for London’s street trading fraternity what Fings had done for its criminal fringe.

Dickens’s work has constantly been brought upon the stage but there had never been a successful musical version of one of his novels. The complex narratives and proliferation of differentiated characters work against their adaptation for “the 2 hours’ traffic” of the stage, to say nothing of the musical styles that would render Dickens’s social milieu. Indeed, it is doubtful if the founding musical text of this emergent sub-genre would have been performed if Bart had not been able to solve the problem of *Oliver Twist*’s presumed anti-Semitism. David Lean’s film had hit the cinemas as a follow-up to his wildly successful *Great Expectations* of 1946, but he had been naïve in imagining that he could produce a faithful version of Fagin in the period immediately after the revelations about the concentration camps. The pejorative portrayal of Fagin was something of a blind-spot in Dickens himself; when it was pointed out to him by a reader, he defended himself vigorously. But he was careful to dilute the criticism a little in a republishing of 1867 (see Meyer 239–52). Lionel Bart managed the transformation more satisfactorily, using the tools of a musical comedy. Fagin has a series of comic patter songs which emphasize playfulness at the expense of roguishness, yet do not underplay his Yiddishness. With these songs came dance routines with his gang of pick-pocket boys, which show Fagin as the biggest kid in the group. In particular, he is allowed to bond with the Artful Dodger, and to act with Nancy as a seconder to her defence of Oliver. All opprobrium attaches to Bill Sykes; Sykes himself has only one song in the musical and even that was cut from the film version. The keynote of Bart’s Dickensian criminals is inclusiveness. For example, the moment in Lean’s film when Dodger (played by Anthony Newley) spots the newly-arrived and solitary Oliver in London and takes him down dark alleys and slums to Fagin’s lair is replaced in the musical by the winning song “Consider Yourself One of Us,” which is delivered not just by Dodger but by the whole of London’s teeming street-life. Later, Dodger’s song for Nancy, “I’d Do Anything,” draws in Oliver and Bet, and finally Fagin himself. Fagin’s later song, “Be Back Soon,” is solicitous of the boys’ welfare rather than nervous about exposure or being caught. The show’s opening number, “Food Glorious Food,” might just be the greatest celebration of pleasure in food, coming as it does from a chorus of

young boys starving in the workhouse and delivered to an audience with an active memory in 1960 of war-time and post-war food rationing. Bart's choral piece, "Who will buy?", which opens the second act of the musical, is another piece merging young Oliver's expressed need for love and family with the idea of Mr. Bumble's song, "Boy for Sale," and enclosing them within the welcoming calls of street traders (presumably another transfer from *Petticoat Lane* but this time influenced by similar choral effects from Gershwin's 1935 *Porgy and Bess*).

Stage musicals traditionally look for show-stoppers, songs that will have a musical life outside the drama, and in Nancy's "As Long as He Needs me" *Oliver!* has a classic torch-song. But other songs are so good that five or six others could lay claim to show-stopper status, including most of the songs mentioned above and Oliver's own keening "Where is Love?" An American master of musical theatre, Alan Jay Lerner, described *Oliver!* as "a score that could not have been improved upon" (219). Great music can transform a story; it can make dark light and light dark. Bart's *Oliver!* shares in the exuberance of Dickens's invention and Lean's visual stylings (themselves modelled on Cruikshank's illustrations) but supplements them with a certain cockney communality in the play's song and dance. At one point Nancy sings a song called "Um-Pa-pa," which is one of the show's weakest precisely because it does not do enough to hide its origins in pub-songs of the simple "Knees Up Mother Brown" variety. Bart's other great strength was his lyrics, which are in their rhyming and use of internal rhymes as great as any by the master Cole Porter. *Oliver!* ran for 2618 performances in London and 724 more in New York. It was revived in 1977 and 1982 for long London runs using the same sets and stagings that Sean Kenny designed, and the same musical arrangements as the original, and again transferred successfully to New York in 1984.

One man who most certainly had read Dickens was Sam Mendes, the director of the 1993 revival of *Oliver!* Mendes took the lead with the now elderly and infirm Lionel Bart in rewriting certain scenes, and providing new dialogue, notably the opening, where we now witness Oliver's traumatic birth. The staging was also palpably darker, as were the renderings of Fagin and Sykes, and there were new orchestral arrangements in order to chime in with the new theatrical styles made overwhelmingly popular by *Les Misérables* and *Phantom of the Opera*. Mendes's new production ran for four years at the London Palladium, with multiple cast changes. It was essentially this same Mendes staging that was revived by Rupert Goold in 2008 and which ran for another three years at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. By the time Mendes had made over the piece in the 1990s, the

cockney musical was in truth something of an exercise in nostalgia; hence a subtle shift towards light opera treatment was warranted.

Success breeds success and *Oliver!* gave other artists the impetus to transform Dickens’s works into musical theatre. Another creative East Ender, Wolf Mankowitz, came from a similar background to Lionel Be-gleiter, but he was much more closely identified with the craft of the street-vendor. Mankowitz had been the classic scholarship boy, lifted out of poverty and sent to Cambridge University. He wrote fiction and his first successes were novels dealing with a Jewish upbringing amid the tailors and market traders of the East End. *A Kid for Two Farthings* (1953) and *Make Me an Offer* (1955) were both made into popular films in the 1950s and the latter formed the basis for a stage musical, as did another Mankowitz tale about the early days of British pop music, *Expresso Bongo* (1959). Mankowitz was brought up in the house-clearance business and grew to be a leading expert and author on porcelains. He spent his childhood in Petticoat Lane, as did, a half a generation later, entrepreneur Alan Sugar—the founder of Amstrad computers. The most literate of the East End boys, Mankowitz was also a Dickensian by spirit and education in a way that Bart was not.

Mankowitz wrote the book for a musical based upon *Pickwick Papers*, and bandleader and composer Cyril Ornadel wrote the music for it. A third talent, Leslie Bricusse was engaged to write the lyrics. Both Mankowitz and Bricusse had been to Cambridge University and Ornadel was partly trained at the Royal College of Music (he was expelled when his father, who worked in the rag trade and who resented his son’s desire to be a musician because he wanted him to take over the family business, betrayed his own son to the Principal for moonlighting in bands, against the RCM’s rules). The Mankowitz-Ornadel-Bricusse musical was mounted and staged at the Saville Theatre in London in 1963, and ran for two years (or nearly 700 performances). During *Pickwick*’s run, Mankowitz and Bricusse bought and opened a club in Newport Street Soho, called the Pickwick Club, which was a watering hole for actors, dancers, writers and musicians. *Pickwick* was more clearly a comic farce than *Oliver!*, as befits its source text. Unfortunately, it suffered from having few moments of emotional intensity; indeed, it had only one hit song, Mr. Pickwick’s “If I Ruled the World.” Bricusse, born south of the river in Wandsworth, but the one figure in this story who is not Jewish, being of mixed Belgian Huguenot and Irish origins, could not match the brio of Bart’s patter songs nor could Ornadel match his melodies. Moreover, Dickensian whimsy was an educated taste that might succeed in its native Britain but it had to work



much harder abroad. Bricusse relates what happened when the show transferred to America in 1965:

We returned to New York for the Broadway opening of *Pickwick* at the 36<sup>th</sup> Street Theater. Then, and only then, did I witness the full horror of what [producer] Merrick had done to the show, and what Peter Coe, as director, had allowed him to do. Three or four anonymous new songs, with Americanised lyrics that displayed zero understanding of the style or cadence of Dickensian speech, in flagrant violation of our contractual rights, had been interpolated into the show. They had replaced perfectly good story songs and comedy songs, in the misguided hope of producing a long-shot show-stopper. What they produced instead was the opposite, a surefire show-closer. The storyline had become disjointed as a result of these intrusions, and even Harry Secombe's balanced central performance, which had always held the ship steady, had taken on a touch of discomfort and despair. (168)

This production befuddled its cast and audiences alike and closed after 56 performances. The musical, largely with its original cast, was successfully staged for BBC television and broadcast on 11 June 1969. It continues to exist, like the many productions of *Oliver!*, in the only form available, that of a successful cast album. At around the same time as the Mendes revamping of *Oliver!*, *Pickwick* was revived for the Chichester Festival Theatre season of 1993, from where it went on a national tour. The young Harry Secombe who had played Mr. Pickwick in 1963 now reprised the role somewhere nearer Mr. Pickwick's real age.

Following *Oliver!*, all musicals of Dickens pick out the main character as the eponymous hero of the story. *Pickwick* (1963) was followed by *Scrooge* in 1970. The only qualified success of *Pickwick* had deterred further efforts until the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of Dickens's death. Leslie Bricusse took up the assignment on the basis of his successes, writing musicals for both stage and screen throughout the 1960s, including film musicals of *Dr Dolittle* (1967) and *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1969). Film musicals at the end of the 1960s had the alarming tendency of casting non-singers in the key roles. Rex Harrison had developed a talky style of non-singing in *My Fair Lady* which he brought less memorably to *Dr Dolittle* but Peter O'Toole could not and does not really sing a note in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. Both of these films are put to shame by Carol Reed's film version of *Oliver!* Indeed, *Oliver Twist* is blessed on screen by being directed by the two greatest British directors of the post-war period, David Lean and Carol Reed. The former is famous for his visual flair and epic effects, and the latter for teasing great performances out of children.



Both are also rightly valued for their literary sensibilities. In addition, it was Reed who directed the 1955 version of Mankowitz’s autobiographical novel *A Kid for Two Farthings*, which featured largely untrained children in leading roles.

Bricusse’s *Scrooge* was to be written for the screen, and the gifted actor (but limited singer) Albert Finney was engaged to play him. The strength of *Scrooge* is essentially dramatic: it has a strong cast including the veteran of both Lean movies, Alec Guinness, as Jacob Marley, and is directed by another veteran, long-time Lean associate, Ronald Neame. In addition, it is a Christmas film and therefore it can tie many of its melodies to Christmas carols and other forms of traditional singing. Like *Pickwick*, it generated only one memorable song, “Thank You Very Much,” a cockneyfied tune sung ironically by members of the chorus which the unseen *Scrooge* imagines is some recognition of his worth but which is in fact gratitude for his timely dying. It opens out into a lively dance sequence and jolly funeral procession, in what is at best a homage to *Oliver!* and at worst a poor pastiche. The film did good business, opening at Radio City in New York for the 1970 Christmas season and does satisfactorily on television because Christmas-themed films have a special longevity irrespective of their quality. The score had an interesting afterlife however. It was recuperated by Bricusse in the early 1990s, again on the back of the Mendes revival of *Oliver!*, new songs were written and it reappeared as a stage musical produced seasonally throughout the 1990s. Anthony Newley, whose very successful career as a lounge singer on both sides of the Atlantic had gone into decline, made a popular comeback playing Scrooge in his old partner Bricusse’s musical. After Newley’s death, Lionel Bart’s old associate Tommy Steele took over the role.

At the time of Lionel Bart’s first great success, the only British partnership to compete with him were the team of Bricusse and Newley. Joking about the stranglehold of Jewish composers/lyricists on the stage musical, Bricusse and Newley always referred to their team as “Brickman and Newberg.” In fact, Anthony Newley was, like Joan Littlewood, illegitimate and raised by his Jewish mother in the East End. He escaped his poor Hackney upbringing by stage school, from whence he obtained the role of the Artful Dodger in Lean’s *Oliver Twist*. Thereafter he became a successful actor and recording artist. Brickman and Newberg’s *Stop the World—I Want to Get Off* (1961) and *The Roar of the Greasepaint—The Smell of the Crowd* (1965) were cockney musicals which were successful in London and on Broadway, and which threw up a number of popular songs covered by major American singers like Nina Simone, Sammy Davis Jr. and Tony Bennett. It is worth remembering that this was the time of

the early James Bond films (the themes for the first three of which were written by Bart, Norman, and Bricusse and Newley) and of the Beatles' breakthrough. Briefly, all things British were marketable.

Anthony Newley was the next composer to try to musicalize Dickens. He was engaged in 1974 to write the songs for a musical film of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. By 1974, the cockney wave had passed; even by the end of the 1960s it had become an object of derision as people had started making an affected display of their working class credentials, which provoked the coining of the term "mockney," as the swinging London phenomenon was seen to run out of energy. Originating movements like Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop had broken up in disarray. Perhaps its last great flowering was David Heneker's *Half a Sixpence* (1963–1965), a musical version of H. G. Wells's *Kipps*, which played to full houses in both London and New York in the mid-decade. The film version of 1967 has Bermondsey boy Tommy Steele act out the cockney dream of upward mobility, unsurprisingly showing the poor to be generous and carefree, and the rich to be snobbish and miserable. When Heneker went on to compose *Charley Girl* in 1965, a cockney musical which ran for six years in London, it was considered too risky to mount a New York production and it was never filmed. By this time, Lionel Bart's career had stalled and he was engulfed by bankruptcy, alcohol addiction and drug abuse. Into this unpropitious scenario came *The Old Curiosity Shop*, or *Mr. Quilp*, as it was titled in America.

The film is now something of a rarity. It was a Reader's Digest-financed initiative to produce wholesome family entertainment in the early 1970s, and suffers a little from this modest ambition. Newley's songs are mostly patter songs, dramatic in conception rather than sweepingly musical. But the problem is the conception of Quilp—is he comic or is he sinister? Newley follows the line developed by Ron Moody as Fagin and gives a bravura performance of comic energy. But Fagin's performance in *Oliver!* is balanced by the lyricism of Nancy and Oliver himself (it is unusual in being a musical that has three near equal leads). *Mr. Quilp* is something of a one-man-show, and the rest of the cast fail to engage. There is a second reason for the failure of this production. It is no accident that all good versions of musical Dickens are of novels from which successful films had already been made (the Lean films, the Alastair Sim *Christmas Carol* [1951], the 1952 *Pickwick Papers*). One suspects that to the theatre and movie-going public of the 1960s and 70s these films were better known than the books. Certainly Dickens musicals only attempted to incorporate plot elements known from the films. *Mr. Quilp*'s writers, Irene and Louis Kemp, had no familiar movie original to work from and so had to go back into

Dickens and fashion their own. This proved to be too much of a challenge, both for them and for their audience.

Shortly before Newley’s film went into production, there was a BBC Children’s television musical production of *Nicholas Nickleby*, called *Smike!* Produced by Paul Ciani and adapted by him in collaboration with John Morley, it was broadcast on Boxing Day 1973 as part of the BBC’s Christmas programming. A small professional cast of actors worked together with schoolchildren from Kingston Grammar School in a free adaptation that took contemporary children back to the conditions of Dotheboys Hall to learn to appreciate living in the twentieth century. The music was provided by Roger Holman and Simon May. This musical lasted only an hour, having a specific didactic purpose. Largely unconcerned about the rest of Dickens’s novel, it proved to be of little narrative or musical distinction. Most of its principals worked all their lives in children’s television, and only Simon May achieved any prominence, ironically as the co-author of the theme to the BBC’s long-running soap *EastEnders* (1985+).

The last cockney Dickens stage musical was an attempt to mount a production of *Great Expectations*, also in 1975. Cyril Ornadel tried to repeat the success of *Pickwick* more than ten years later, this time working with lyricist Hal Shaper. As ever, the musical followed the plot of the film, and cast Lean’s Pip, John Mills, an ever youthful 67-year-old, as Pip again. The musical played in the provinces at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in Guildford and then was taken on tour to Canada. But all attempts to find a West End home for the production failed and it was abandoned without ever being performed in London. Indeed, the record shows that quite a few musical versions of Dickens have been written and composed which have never been professionally mounted. The costs of setting up such a production, and its prospects for success, have been prohibitive. Since 1975, most attempts have been in America by Americans and in a more recognizably American idiom. The most successful of these was *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (later re-titled just *Drood*, 1985), with book, music and lyrics by Rupert Holmes. One might imagine that the author and performer of classic American pop hits like “Escape (the Pina Colada Song)” was American through and through but he was born “David Goldstein” in Northwich, England to a Jewish American bandleader father and English mother. *Drood* played 608 performances over two years at the Imperial Theater in New York, and then transferred for a further year to the Savoy Theatre in London. Dickens’s unfinished novel creates an opportunity for Holmes’s clever postmodern musical, which plays with a camp whodunit aesthetic and offers alternative endings.

At the end of the 1970s, two significant events took place which have had an enormous impact on Dickens on the stage. The first was the huge critical success of Trevor Nunn and John Caird's RSC stage version of *Nicholas Nickleby*, adapted by David Edgar. At 8 hours long, this production taught theatre to take *all* of Dickens seriously. Edgar describes what the guiding rule of the production was going to be: "we were going to adapt the whole of *Nicholas Nickleby*, or, at the very least, we were going to tell the whole story" (149). This purist comprehensive approach encapsulated the appropriation of Dickens by the educated establishment and the erosion of his position as a cockney talisman. Although coming from early comic Dickens, like most of the sources for the musicals, Nunn, Caird and Edgar darkened Dickens's *Nickleby* and made the treatment of Smike and the evil of Ralph Nickleby central. The second event was the movement of RSC professionals into the realm of the musical. To a lesser extent with *Cats*, but resoundingly with *Les Misérables* and *Phantom of the Opera*, Nunn and Caird produced sophisticated stagings which gave emphasis to the musical's operatic pretensions. Heavier later Dickens accordingly fitted the bill. Post-1985, the year of *Les Misérables*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *A Tale of Two Cities* (inevitably) and *Great Expectations* were the texts to excite most new (and it must be said mostly unsuccessful) musical adaptations. Only *A Christmas Carol*, as an alternative to Christmas pantomime, could keep its place in this company. Bricusse's revival of Scrooge has been competing since the mid-1990s with an American version of *A Christmas Carol* by Lynn Ahrens and Alan Menken, staged annually at Madison Square Garden in New York in November and running through the Christmas season. This Ahrens-Menken version is the basis for the Hallmark musical film of *A Christmas Carol* released in 2003 and starring Kelsey Grammer. With the singular exception of Dickens's populist Christmas classic, one can see since the 1970s the Dickens of the people giving way to the more appreciated Dickens of the academy.

A postscript to the final phase of East End Dickens is the 13-part Yorkshire Television series, produced and directed by Marc Miller and written by Wolf Mankowitz, appropriately called *Dickens of London* (1976/77). This ran in the autumn of 1976 in England and in the summer of 1977 in the United States. Clearly a labour of love by Mankowitz, he produced a tie-in biography of Dickens to accompany the series, also entitled *Dickens of London* (1976). One does not have to work very hard to make the association between *Dickens and London*. There are dozens of books in print called *Dickens's London*, almost a parallel title to that of Victorian London. Another common title, *Dickens's England*, for in-

stance, was used by Michael Hardwick, an adviser to the TV series, in his 1970 publication, which was reissued in 1976 by the Book Club of America to prepare for the screening of the series (without directly competing with Mankowitz’s book). Michael Hardwick, along with his wife Mollie, was a prodigious producer of Dickens histories and reference works, from his *Dickens Companion* in 1965 to his *Dickens Encyclopedia* in 1973, *Dickens Quizbook* in 1974 and his novelization of the TV series *The Gaslight Boy* in 1976. When one considers that these books were re-edited and printed many times between 1965 and 1985, one can see the place of these works in the popular consumption of the Dickens legend, operating in parallel alongside other more academic appropriations of the writer. The Hardwicks also polished and expanded the Sherlock Holmes legend and moved in the waters of tie-ins for TV serializations of the period kind, including the ersatz *Upstairs Downstairs* (1971–75) television series.

In retrospect, Mankowitz’s series and book are not works of great originality or scholarship but the series is certainly of interest for other reasons. Stage actor Roy Dotrice plays both Charles and his father John Dickens. Indeed, the series is almost entirely about the relationship between Dickens and his father. Although a lot of the drama is in flashback, the reflections of the mature author, often while touring in America, the thirteenth and last episode concludes with the death of John Dickens. In other words, the main story only reaches 1851, just after the publication of *David Copperfield*. Early comic Dickens is all there, Dickens’s first autobiographical novel is finished, but the series comes to an end without equal attention paid to his later life or the compositions of his maturity. It seems fairly clear that the series was not hugely popular and was cancelled. Even a man as father-worshipping as Mankowitz (*Make Me an Offer* is clearly a tribute to his worldly street-trading father) would not have designed the series to finish at this point; the book *Dickens of London* for example is much better balanced in this respect. But the flashback structure gives inordinate attention to Dickens’s early life and youth, and Dotrice spends as much time in his make-up as John, opposite a child actor as Dickens, as he does as Charles. In using the same actor for both roles, Mankowitz is asserting an identity between the achieving protean son and the dreaming shiftless father. Indeed, we see the father urging his son to musical and dance performance at many phases of the series, moulding Charles Dickens as actor and performer in compensation for his own disappointments. With the series’ attention to the texture of nineteenth-century London life, it makes sense to see Dickens as an avatar for all poor-born but gifted Londoners who, with the help of

their relatives, have gone on to success. Indeed, Mankowitz writes about Dickens as a community hero, carrying the aspirations of his class. This, for example, is what he says about him in *Dickens of London*:

Of no one can it be more truly said than of Dickens that the child was father of the man. That is why his life reads like a novel.

The world of his childhood is vital in another sense to the understanding of his work. It was as a child that he heard, around him, the speech of people born in the eighteenth century, and he immersed himself in the classic novels of English literature, which deeply influenced him as a writer, especially in his earlier works. It is not just a question of picaresque constructions, but of the very tone of voice he adopts: the “mock verbosity,” in Angus Wilson’s phrase, reveling in parody, irony, hyperbole. Writing at the intersection of the Romantic-Regency epoch and the full-blown industrialism of the Victorian era, he brought to what are still, in essence, modern problems, the language of an earlier way of life in England. Like all the classic humorists, he was on the side of sanity against excess; and like them he fought excess with greater excess.

He was the first great writer to confront the social problems he saw around him, and he remains the poet of the politico-economic wasteland we still, unhappily, inhabit even though the abuses are not as vividly before our eyes as they were in Dickens’s time. (Mankowitz 244–45)

Mankowitz’s perspective is that Dickens was an avatar of London’s poor and disadvantaged in his life, and he was their spokesman in his work. His, and London’s, feelings about Dickens are further expressed in the biography’s final tribute:

He had wished for a quiet burial . . . What he got was a grave in Westminster Abbey . . .

The service was short, and ended with a dead march on the organ. Above the bell was tolling, and gradually London found out that Dickens was lying in Poets’ Corner, in a grave that would be left open for a few days. The grave was closed by the flowers thrown in until they overflowed. (246)

These were the sentiments of an assimilationist generation formed by a childhood during the Blitz, and by the late 1940s and 50s, a world



evoked in a slightly different register, for example, in the early plays of Harold Pinter, with their specific topographical references and celebration of London bus routes. The 60s and 70s saw the exodus of London’s Jewry, northward and westward, to other, plusher parts of London. The new East End saw immigrants from the sub-continent, for whom Dickens was not, at first, part of some wider pan-European process of assimilation but rather something largely of the host culture. This was the beginning of the emergence of a London of multiple self-affirming cultures, not of *pluribus unum*, the London of European Union cosmopolitanism, of political asylum and short-term economic migration, the London of the 7/7 bombings, the London to which the Olympic Games were awarded on the basis of it being a city of all the world. “Consider yourself one of us” had and has a quite different meaning for these Londoners.

#### APPENDIX: DICKENS’S FICTION—A SELECTED LIST OF MUSICAL PRODUCTIONS

- 1. *Oliver* (1960):** book, music and lyrics by Lionel Bart (born “Lionel Begleiter,” Stepney)  
(1960–67) New Theatre, London, dir. Peter Coe; 2,618 performances  
(1963–65) Schubert/Mark Beck Theatres, New York; 724 performances  
(1968) film, dir. Carol Reed (Best Film, Best Director Oscars)  
(1977–79) London revival, Albery Theatre, dir. Peter Coe  
(1982–83) 2<sup>nd</sup> London revival, Aldwych Theatre  
(1984) New York transfer, Mark Hellinger Theatre  
(1994–98) 3<sup>rd</sup> London revival, London Palladium, dir. Sam Mendes  
(2003–05) USA tour, most major US (and some Australian) venues  
(2008–11) 4<sup>th</sup> London revival, Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, dir. Rupert Goold
- 2. *Pickwick* (1963):** book by Wolf Mankowitz (born Spitalfields), music by Cyril Ornadel (born Whitechapel), lyrics by Leslie Bricusse (born Wandsworth)  
(1963–65) Saville Theatre, London, dir. Peter Coe; 694 performances  
(1965) 46<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre, New York; 56 performances  
(1969) BBC television production, 11<sup>th</sup> June, dir. Terry Hughes  
(1993) revival, Chichester Festival Theatre, and national tour
- 3. *Scrooge* (1970):** book, music and lyrics by Leslie Bricusse  
(1970) film, dir. Ronald Neame  
(1992–96) adapted stage musical, Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham and on tour, starring Anthony Newley



- (2003–05) annual Christmas revival tour, starring Tommy Steele (born Bermondsey)
4. *Smike!* (1973): BBC Children's Television adaptation of *Nicholas Nickleby* by Paul Ciani and John Morley, music by Roger Holman and Simon May, broadcast on Boxing Day 1973 (60 minutes)
  5. *The Old Curiosity Shop/Mr. Quilp* (1975): book by Irene and Louis Kamp, music and lyrics by Anthony Newley (born Hackney)  
(1974/75) film release in UK as *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Reader's Digest production)  
(1975) film release in USA as *Mr. Quilp*, dir. Michael Tuchner
  6. *Great Expectations* (1975): book and lyrics by Hal Shaper, music by Cyril Ornadel  
(1975) Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford and tour of Canada, with John Mills
  7. *Copperfield* (1981): music and lyrics by Al Kasha and Joel Hirschhorn (1981) ANTA Theater; 39 performances
  8. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood/Drood* (1985): book, music and lyrics by Rupert Holmes (born "David Goldstein," Northwich, UK)  
(1985–87) Imperial Theatre, New York; 608 performances  
(1987–88) transfer, Savoy Theatre, London
  9. *A Tale of Two Cities* (1985): book by Greg Peterson, music and lyrics by Larry Nestor; no professional performance recorded
  10. *A Tale of Two Cities* (1990): book by Dave Ross and Vivienne Carter, music and lyrics by Dave Ross, Neil Parker and Michael Mullane only amateur Thameside Youth Theatre production
  11. *A Christmas Carol* (1994): book by Lynn Ahrens, music by Alan Menken, lyrics by Lynn Ahrens  
(1994–2003) seasonal production at the Paramount Theatre, Madison Square Garden, New York, dir. Mike Ockrent (born Highgate)  
(2004) film, dir. Arthur Seidelman (Hallmark films), starring Kelsey Grammer
  12. *A Tale of Two Cities* (2008): book, music and lyrics by Jill Santoriello (2008) Hirschfield Theatre, New York; 61 performances
  13. *Great Expectations* (2009): book by Steve Lozier and Brian Van der ██████████ Witt, music by Richard Winzeler and lyrics by Steve Lane (2009) performed at the Utah Shakespeare Festival; 60 performances
  14. *Copperfield and Co.* (?): an unperformed musical by Frank Kirwan

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