



The 1982 ITV version of OLIVER TWIST is a November, 2014 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that film.

United Kingdom 1982 color 99 minutes live action feature drama ITV Studios Limited  
Entertainment One dvd Producers: Ted Childs, Norton Romsey

7 of a possible 20 points

\*\* of a possible \*\*\*\*\*

Key: \*indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates juvenile performer

Points:

- 1 Direction: Clive Donner
  - 0 Editing: Peter Tanner
  - 1 Director of Photography: Norman Langley
  - 0 Lighting: Alan Martin
  - 0 Screenplay Adaptation: James Goldman, based on the novel by Charles Dickens
  - 0 Music: Nick Bicat
  - 2 Production Design: Tony Curtis\*
  - Set Decoration: Peter Young\*
  - Costume Design: Evangeline Harrison\*
  - Make-up: Del Acevedo, Pauline Heys
  - 2 Sound: James Shields, Sandy Macrae, Doug Turner
  - Casting: Marilyn Johnson
  - 1 Acting
  - 0 Creativity
- 7 total points

Cast: George C. Scott (Fagin), Tim Curry (Bill Sikes), Michael Hordern (Mr. Brownlow), Timothy West (Mr. Bumble), Eileen Atkins (Mrs. Mann), Cherie Lunghi (Nancy), Oliver Cotton (Monks), Richard Charles (j) (Oliver Twist), Martin Tempest (j) (Jack Dawkins a.k.a. The Artful Dodger), Eleanor David (Rose Maylie), Philip Locke\* (Mr. Sowerberry), Ann Beach (Mrs. Sowerberry), Artro Morris (Mr. Giles), John Barrard (Dr. Losborne), Brenda Cowling (Mrs. Bedwin), Philip Davis\* (Noah Claypole), Michael Logan (Chairman of Workhouse Board), Ann Tirard (Mrs. Corney),

John Savident (Mr. Fang, Magistrate), Debbie Arnold (Charlotte), Timothy Spall (First Constable), Robert Russell (Second Constable), Roy Evans (Dull-Eyed Man), Matthew Duke (j) (Charlie Bates), Spencer Rheault (j) (Bob), Nicholas Davies (j) (Dick), Dax Jackson (j), Dominic Martelli (j), Paul Davies Prowles (j) (Members of Fagin's gang)

One of the literary works most frequently adapted to the screen is Charles Dickens' OLIVER TWIST. Since its creation in the 1830s, this tale of a penniless workhouse orphan who travels from parish subsidy, through a brief stint as child mute for a mortician, to a London lair of pickpockets has fascinated readers and filmgoers for decades. Peopled with colorful members of London's underworld engaged in an unanticipated struggle for control of a waif, OLIVER TWIST provides a thoroughly detailed excursion into the darker corners of Victoria's London. More properly filmed under the same title in bleak black-and-white by David Lean in 1947, the current production offers a garish, sanitized version. Like its predecessor, opening scenes depict unassisted, pregnant Agnes vainly searching for a suitable birthplace where her child can be safely delivered. She ends up at a community workshop, destitute, haggard, and feverish from exposure. There Oliver is born and his mother dies, leaving behind only a locket which the institution's matron expropriates for herself.

A running leap speeds audiences over a span of nine years to a famished Oliver pleading for more gruel to no avail. As punishment for temerity, the lad is sold to Mr. Sowerberry, an undertaker concerned more with sympathetic ambiances for funeral processions than child welfare. At his establishment Oliver encounters Noah Claypole, bully and character assassin, whose scurrilous insults about Twist's mother goad the parentless newcomer into frenzied attack. This brings a prompt end to the boy's career as mournful model. Uncowed, the workhouse reject resolves to depart before dawn. He will take his chances in London, a place massive enough to provide some window of opportunity for him.

Before the traveler can reach his destination, he's chatted up by another youth in a town not too distant from it. The stranger introduces himself, inquiring if Oliver might be in need of refreshment and lodging. Receiving an affirmation, he leads his companion to a country inn where the two of them enjoy breakfast. Then Master Dawkins conducts the runaway back to headquarters in London, where master fence Fagin can employ him as a juvenile pickpocket.

There in the slums, Oliver is provided shelter and food in return for future profitable thievery. Yet Fagin has reservations about the angelic country greenhorn steeped in mission morality. He doesn't seem desperate enough to sink into criminal behavior. Not of his own volition. But when fearsome crony Bill Sikes requests a wiry boy helper for a prospective armed robbery in Chertsey, Surrey, Fagin decides to loan him Oliver. After all, the visitor cannot forever remain a freeloader.

While breaking into the country home targeted by Sikes, Oliver is surprised by a servant and shot. Sikes flees the scene, leaving his dazed accomplice behind. The boy is tended back to health by the manor's owner, his niece, and their housekeeper, Mrs. Bedwin.

Meanwhile, his half-brother Monks has persuaded Fagin to attempt recovery of Oliver. These miscreants, informed of Twist's whereabouts by Sikes, case the Brownlow residence where the wounded orphan is recuperating and determine their intended captive is alive and hale. He might yet inform on them. To forestall this, these co-conspirators plot to kidnap the boy on their home turf in London when Brownlow takes up customary alternate residence there, presumably in the winter season.

Meanwhile, the Artful Dodger is caught red-handed and brought to a magistrate. There he's convicted of theft and given a sentence of deportation to Australia. Matters start looking grim for Fagin and dependents. On the other hand, they won't starve as long as Monks keeps bringing gambling gains to sell. So it's essential to humor him, even to the extent of facilitating the villain's plan to permanently dispose of Oliver. He offers five hundred pounds to anyone willing to eradicate his unwanted half-brother. Fagin proposes Sikes for the task. He himself, though tempted, shies away from murder and consequent hangman's noose. Perhaps Monks can assist him in doing away with two vexing problems at once. Which would leave Nancy alone for his pleasure.

While that bounty proposition is being discussed outside The Three Cripples tavern, semi-intoxicated Nancy overhears enough details to assess the danger to her pampered favorite. She also learns the London whereabouts of that unsuspecting victim. She must send a warning to Oliver's guardian. Knowing Brownlow is in residence at the Wyndham Hotel, she pays it a nocturnal visit, meeting with his niece, Rose Maylie, there. The two arrange a second interview at St. Margaret's Dock, London Bridge, the next evening at eleven o'clock. Rose is to bring her uncle along, but no one else.

Plans go awry, however, when Fagin chooses to visit Sikes the following night to offer blood money for the killing of young Twist. Finding Bill too intoxicated to manage rational conversation, Fagin tries to turn the situation to momentary advantage, making overtures to Nancy as soon as her mate dozes off. Repelled, the streetwalker threatens to turn Bullseye the dog loose on her predator. He withdraws, then locates Charlie Bates, one of his underage trainees. Fagin charges him with surveillance of Bill's girl. Charlie is to follow her furtively if she leaves home, note anyone she converses with, and report back to Fagin. This the naïve youngster agrees to do.

Will Oliver fall prey to Bill again? Can Nancy save him? Is Monks ever going to be brought to justice? Watch the rest of this film and see if Dickens' conclusion is satisfactory.

Being a television production with relatively shrunken budget saddled with an American co-lead lacking any discernible British accent, this OLIVER TWIST must make the most of Victorian era furnishings and costumes. It does so quite convincingly. Other aspects of the film are less felicitous. The screenplay, though daringly bringing oftentimes deleted Monks onto center stage, does little to capture the richly idiomatic dialogue of Mr. Dickens. Obsessed with omnipresent London fogs of the period, lighting technicians sacrifice too much lucidness for frustrating obscurity. At times, the screen simply appears a blank blackness. Music blatantly underscores onscreen action. Editing is transparently chained to commercial breaks, destroying ambience and rhythm.

Most performances are adequate, but pale in comparison to forerunners in the Lean and Reed realizations. In fact, the only alibi for creation of this supernumerary must have been to accommodate a delineation of Fagin as victim of social deprivation. George C. Scott's philosophical lecher spotlights some darker aspects of that manipulator's personality, but flinches from accenting the ringleader's readiness to sacrifice anyone else to save his own hide. Despite the script's inclination to portray this criminal mastermind as victim of religious persecution, Dickens envisioned him otherwise, as a brainy street operator with a strong drive for survival at any cost. Alec Guinness's controversial variation in Lean's 1947 film remains the most credible and disturbing, closest to what the author probably had in mind.

As Oliver, Richard Charles looks overly aristocratic and refined, especially in workhouse and Fagin's den settings. If he really is underfed, a scrawny, emaciated shrimp is what viewers should be witnessing

on screen. This is certainly not the case. There is also an independent scrappiness to the character which perhaps only Jackie Coogan grasped in the Frank Lloyd silent presentation. Mark Lester is too sweet, too clean, entirely too well-nourished in Reed's 1968 OLIVER! John Howard Davies looks the role in the 1947 picture, but is a tad over-subdued in speech and resistance to evil. Nonetheless, his is still the best protagonist on film, an Oliver both weary and wary.

As Nancy, Cherie Lunghi is credible as fallen woman, though not as a substitute mother figure Oliver would find attractive. To date, only Shani Wallis in OLIVER! has managed to exhibit the proper mixture of pulchritude, tenderness, duplicity, compassion, bawdiness, and vulnerability required.

Tim Curry is the runner-up Bill Sikes, crude, avaricious, lusty, alcoholic, choleric, vicious, completely unwilling to surrender his dream of cohabitational bliss. Bill hopes to enjoy ongoing connubial satisfaction, expecting complete loyalty in his partner while demanding her wholesale subservience. Physical and mental abuse of a lover is assumed to be an exclusive male prerogative. However, Oliver Reed has both superior bulk and more credible homicidal rages, so OLIVER! gives us the best Sikes so far.

Similar comparisons of minor supporting actors in various film releases mostly fail to turn up any superior performances in this one. For example, OLIVER!'s Mr. Bumble, enacted in resonant self-importance by Harry Secombe, vastly overshadows his counterpart on Elstree's sound stage.

There are several exceptions. Philip Locke attacks the part of Mr. Sowerberry the undertaker with icy callousness second to none. Taunting, mercenary Noah Claypole's calculated sadism is more memorably represented by Philip Davis in this picture than by rivals.

With no special bonuses to distinguish it, ITV's barebones dvd release, suitable for teens and adults only due to violence and adult themes, falls far short of an ideal OLIVER TWIST. It is watchable. But better interpretations are available in the Hugh Stoupe Library, particularly the 1947 one. OLIVER!, also available there, is superior in entertainment value and music.

Why not check out all three?