



## Review: Great Expectations, Naunton Village Hall

By [Gloucestershire Echo](#) | Posted: January 12, 2015

By Simon Lewis

I occasionally wonder how Britain's sleepy villages keep themselves regularly entertained, especially on a cold winter's night in early January. Nil desperandum, though; securing a performance by touring local thespians **Rain or Shine will guarantee an evening of top quality distraction**. Out in the wilds of rural Naunton, they served up a taut, thoroughly absorbing and frequently moving production of *Great Expectations* that again threw **the considerable talents of this minimal company into sharp and impressive relief**.



Skilfully adapting one of Charles Dickens' finest works, director James Reynard has fashioned a splendid piece of theatre that fully showcased Rain or Shine's principal hallmarks: multiple role-playing, strong characterisation, cut-glass diction, a whirlwind of costume changes, and on a remarkable, all-locations-in-one set shoe-horned onto the tiny stage, be it mistbound Romney Marsh or Miss Havisham's cheerless mansion. Meanwhile, improvisation knew few bounds. Turning chairs into gravestones, creating a London-bound stagecoach, Miss Havisham's terrible fiery death and the fatal confrontation between mutual enemies Magwitch and Compeyson on a river Thames jetty displayed similar, **eyebrow-raising ingenuity**.

Driven by some lingering Christmas spirit, **the entertainment level never dipped**. From the opening Yuletide jollifications to Pip and Estella's bitter last dance, the capable five-strong cast was kept busy charting the landmark moments of orphan Pip's formative years from humble apprentice to wealthy country gentleman. For all their collective versatility, however, each actor excelled in one particular role, notably Jayne Lloyd as the lugubrious Miss Havisham, steadfastly enthroned beneath the clock whose hands never moved, and James Reynard as reformed convict Magwitch, whilst Rob Keeves was especially endearing as good-hearted blacksmith Joe Gargery. But tonight's biggest laurels went to central anchor, and aptly-named, Pippa Meekings as parvenu Pip, and to the assured Claire Tucker, who simply dazzled as the haughty Estella and jovial Herbert Pocket.

The stars shone on Naunton tonight. I had once again seen **this highly talented troupe at the top of their game** and after over two immensely engaging hours, I returned home beneath a clear, moonlit sky with **all my expectations more than fulfilled**.