

Review of **Great Expectations****"Great Expectations' are well realised"**

by Avril Silk for remotegoat on 30/11/14



The title 'Great Expectations' is a gift for a reviewer. When approaching hugely popular master-storytellers such as Charles Dickens, my own expectations are often more mixed than great as I tend to find such writers emotionally manipulative. Thankfully, this is not an accusation that can be levelled at James Reynard, who adapted, directed and performed in Rain or Shine Theatre Company's winter show, or his talented cast. As in the other productions I have seen by Rain or Shine, there is **a fierce, cool intelligence at work**, never milking the character or situation. The audience is shown well-rounded characters - never orotund - in credible situations. Thus when there is passion it convinces, rather than creating an emotional recoil. James' subtle portrayal of Magwitch is a case in point; he never lapses into caricature.



At Cullompton's excellent Corn Barn, **I marvelled, once again, at the versatility** of a cast who combine several roles with the many necessary costume changes, as well as moving scenery, in a set so simple, yet versatile, that it served for locations as varied as the marshes, the Gargery's cottage, Miss Havisham's home and more besides. Chinese boxes, indeed. There's a dining chair... turn it round and it becomes a gravestone. **Such stunning ingenuity.**



Pippa Meekings brought convincing, expressive charm to the role of Pip, taking us from his boyhood through to an emotional coming of age. Her eloquent eyes, in particular, spoke volumes, adding depth to an excellent, always likeable, interpretation of a character we all feel we know well.

Claire Tucker (Mrs. Joe, Estella, Herbert) told Estella's story so well I wondered that there has never been, to my knowledge, a spin-off centred on her journey. Claire's Herbert Pocket was similarly a delight; the epitome of good-natured friendship.

Rain or Shine's founder, Jayne Lloyd, should bottle whatever it is she runs on as her energy and talent seem boundless! Wonderful costumes, as always, perfectly complementing the actors' skill; intelligent production and a first class Miss Havisham to boot. The abandoned bride motif can be impossibly Gothic but Jayne gave a nuanced performance that ranged from reasonable to raving.

Rob Keeves had two diametrically opposite characters: the benevolent Joe and the villainous Compeyson. I particularly liked the inventiveness between the lines that infused Joe's performance and spoke volumes.

Rain or Shine is an excellent company at the top of its game,
and their 'Great Expectations' are well realised in this production.