

# The Dear Boy's Rags-to-Riches Tale Exceeds Expectations

BY MARINELL H.

## *Great Expectations*

By Charles Dickens

Adapted by Paul Glaser

English Theatre of Hamburg

Director: Paul Glaser

Launching their forty-sixth season with the world premiere of a new adaptation of Charles Dickens' universally beloved, acclaimed 1861 novel is ingenious; utilizing pioneering technology to bring his favorite book to the English Theatre's stage supports Paul Glaser's vision. *Great Expectations* tells the socially sobering story of Victorian England's stringent class structure and the hopelessness, yet possibility, of rising above one's birthstation. The director personally thanks Hamburg's Kulturbehörde for supporting his vision by allowing the theater to purchase the projectors and hardware needed for this—and future—productions.

Mrs. Joe continually nags young Pip, reminding him that it's her and Joe Gargery, the village blacksmith, who provide home and hearth; her unsophisticated, generous-hearted husband is Pip's friend and defender, contrasting his sister's hot-tempered resentment. One portentous day, while visiting his parents' tombstones, Pip is accosted by escaped convict Abel Magwitch: fear dictates helping Magwitch. The self-important Uncle Pumblechook takes Pip to wealthy Miss Havisham's home. When Miss Havisham was jilted decades past while dressing for her wedding, both time and clocks stood still; still attired so, she startles timid Pip. Regular visits ensue to amuse her equally young



Left to right: Naomi O'Taylor as Estella, Theo Watt as Pip, Michelle Todd as Miss Havisham

(Photos courtesy of English Theatre of Hamburg)



Left to right: Michelle Todd as Mrs. Hubble, Dominic Charman as Mrs. Joe, Charles Cromwell as Herbert Pocket, Jonny Magnanti as Joe Gargery, and (under table) Theo Watt as Pip

ward, the cold-hearted Estella. It's at Satis House that Pip first feels the sting of lower-class status. Some years later, the London lawyer Jaggers appears; Pip has been

bequeathed a large fortune by an anonymous benefactor. The young man is to be London-educated in the ways of a gentleman, with Jaggers' law clerk, Wemmick, handling Pip's monetary affairs. Matthew Pocket is to conduct Pip's tutorage, and he'll share housing with Pocket's son, Herbert. They become fast friends and live a carefree life. Years on and rather snobbish, Pip is shocked by his patron's sudden appearance; nevertheless, Pip navigates dangerous territory, helping his benefactor with Herbert's assistance. Eventually though, Pip's fortunes turn, and he then finds out who his true friends are, and about his better nature.

Glaser spent one week in London narrowing down the 1,200 applica-

tions, choosing six talented thespians. From adolescence to manhood, Theo Watt captures Pip's emotional/moral quandaries on Pip's odyssey of expectations. Evocatively colorful characters impacting Pip's choices are Jonny Magnanti, Charles Cromwell, Dominic Charman, and Naomi O'Taylor, each portraying two characters, while Michelle Todd performs three, including Miss Havisham. They brilliantly breathe life into Dickens' *dramatis personae*; Michelle performs in one shoe because Miss Havisham's sudden rejection had stopped everything, i.e., dressing, while Dominic had to get the hang of adding Mrs. Joe's bosom while swapping characters. It was somewhat crazy backstage with the lightning-fast costume and prop changes. Concurrently, Glaser worked incredibly hard on the music, soundtrack, and original mood-inducing songs bookending the production.

Available adaptations didn't match Glaser's vision; early this year he began adapting *Great Expectations*, making slight deviations for theatrical purposes, e.g., Pip is 4-5-years older here than in the book. When the actors arrived, during rehearsals Glaser cut (three scenes), modified, adjusted. Relying on narration for providing important points, Glaser's choices were pragmatic, focusing on moving the story forward and creating emotional impact for audiences. The multi-

### Upcoming Productions

**GREAT EXPECTATIONS** runs through Oct. 29.

James Sherman's **ROMANCE IN D**, a romantic comedy, premieres Nov. 10 and runs through Jan. 7.

Evening and matinee performances. Tickets online ([eth-hamburg.de](http://eth-hamburg.de)) or at the theater (Lerchenfeld 14, telephone is 040-227 70 89).

award-winning Gordon Griffin's richly resonant narration harkens to the magical elements and heightened fairytale-like romance reminiscent of the Dickens era.

Midyear, while working out set designs for the small stage, it became clear that video projections provided lots of solutions: atmosphere, location anchors, time passage, stage depth, and widening the scope, e.g., the marsh scenes. Two years ago, Glaser met with a local studio to sate his curiosity about other dimensions and tools available for productions. As he explains, "The theater of tomorrow is starting today."

After installing the projectors/hardware, there was tight collaboration among Glaser; the theater's skilled Heiko Böttner, light designer and lighting/sound technician; video director Christian Striboll; and 3D artist Eric Lutz. Technical and artistic solutions were found on the fly while compromising and improvising, with everything coming together for the premiere performance.

Step onto the English Theatre's magic carpet and be whisked back to mid-nineteenth century Kent and London. Experience Dickens' imagery of hardships, cruelties sans class distinction, and the diametrically different lifestyles. Surely, you'll perceive the deeper colors, the characters' textured vividness, and discern the shadow of romanticism magically quivering.

## Triennial of Photography Did Not Dissapoint

Spontaneously checking out art exhibitions is worth it. Mary Francis L. and I took a last-minute trip to check out the Eighth Triennial of Photography 2022 exhibition in the Deichtorhallen, which ran from May until September 18. This year's theme was *Currency: Photography Beyond Capture* and was curated by Koyo Kouch, Rasha Salti, Gabriella Beckhurst Feijoo, and Oluremi C. Onabanjo.

As explained in the program, this

exhibition explored conceptual engagements with photography in the retinal age. It looks past this accelerated era of circulation and instrumentation and focuses on the images which work on recording the events as imprints of experiences as well as catching acts of seeing as well as being seen. It was a very provocative and experimental exhibition, with many surprises around each corner. The currency theme made me think of resources, inflation, global warming, and many

other ideas related to the word and its interpretations by the various international artists.

The Triennial of Photography takes place every third year and was originally founded by collector and photographer F.C. Gundlach in 1999. He is currently the director of the Deichtorhallen Art Center. There were approximately 70 exhibitions located in many galleries and museums in and out of Hamburg this year. (Shelly S.)