

A Roman Polanski Film OLIVER TWIST

Academy Award®-winning filmmaker Roman Polanski (“The Pianist”) brings his rich, imaginative cinematic vision to one of literature’s classic stories with OLIVER TWIST, turning Charles Dickens’ timeless adventure about an orphan boy into a thrilling and humorous tale of good fighting evil.

From the wretched environs of a cruel workhouse system to the teeming streets of a newly industrialized London and its twin strata of poverty-ridden desperation and moneyed comfort, Dickens immortalized youthful peril and triumphant survival in his legendary novel. Along the way he gave us such memorable characters as the street gang leader Fagin, the fleet-footed pickpocket artist the Artful Dodger, the pompous Mr. Bumble, and the notorious criminal Bill Sykes. Now, one of the movies’ great visionaries, behind such pulsing masterworks as *Rosemary’s Baby* and *Chinatown*, offers up his version – the first feature adaptation in over 35 years – and the streets of 19th century London come alive in all their vividness, danger and unexpected goodness.

After an extensive search, Polanski chose 11-year-old London schoolboy Barney Clark in the all-important title role. A student of The Anna Scher Theatre, a world-renown community theatre in Islington, London, Clark has previously appeared in the film *The Lawless Heart*, the British wartime television drama “Foyle’s War” and the television Court drama “The Brief”.

With Ben Kingsley as Fagin, a host of talented British character actors have been cast to bring this Dickens classic to life: Jamie Foreman is Bill Sykes, Leanne Rowe is Nancy, Ian McNeice is Mr. Limbkins, Edward Hardwicke is Mr. Brownlow, Jeremy Swift is Mr. Bumble, the Beadle, Frances Cuka is Mrs. Bedwin, Michael Heath and Gillian Hanna are Mr. and Mrs. Sowerberry, Alun Armstrong is Magistrate Fang, Andy De La Tour is the Workhouse Master with

Peter Copley as his assistant, Liz Smith plays an old woman and Mark Strong plays Toby Crackit.

Among the boys, Harry Eden plays the Artful Dodger, Lewis Chase plays Charley Bates, Jake Curran plays Barney and Chris Overton plays Noah Claypole.

The very experienced crew, most of them who working with Polanski on *The Pianist*, include Director of Photography Pawel Edelman, Production Designer Allan Starski, Editor Hervé de Luze, Costume Designer Anna Sheppard, music by Rachel Portman and casting by Celestia Fox.

TriStar Pictures and R.P. Productions present OLIVER TWIST, directed by Roman Polanski from a screenplay by Ronald Harwood and from a novel by Charles Dickens; produced by Robert Benmussa, Alain Sarde and Roman Polanski. The film is an independent co-production by R.P.Films of France, Runteam II Ltd. of the U.K. and Etic Films S.R.O. of the Czech Republic.

Executive produced by Timothy Burrill (UK) and Petr Moravec (Cz), the film will be distributed in America and Canada by TriStar Pictures.

Synopsis

Brought up in a pauper's Workhouse, orphan Oliver Twist (Barney Clark) and the rest of the boys are starving and cast lots to decide who among them will ask for more gruel. Oliver is chosen. At supper that evening, after the normal allotment, Oliver advances to the Workhouse Master and asks for more.

Branded a troublemaker by the Workhouse beadle Mr. Bumble (Jeremy Swift) and the Board, Oliver is offered as an apprentice to anyone willing to take him. After narrowly escaping being bound to a chimney sweep – a dangerous business where small boys, lowered into chimneys, are routinely smothered – Oliver is apprenticed to the undertaker Mr. Sowerberry (Michael Heath).

After being provoked about his dead mother by Noah Claypole (Chris Overton), another of the undertaker's boys, Oliver instigates a fight. Unjustly beaten for his offense, Oliver makes his escape and runs away to London.

On the outskirts of the city, tired and hungry, Oliver meets the Artful Dodger (Harry Eden) who offers him a place to stay in London. Naive of life in London's seedy underworld and unaware of their real trade, Oliver is thrown

together with a band of boy pickpockets run by the sinister Fagin (Ben Kingsley). He also meets the brutal Bill Sykes (Jamie Foreman), his girlfriend Nancy (Leanne Rowe) and his dog Sykes.

One morning Oliver innocently goes out with the Dodger and Charley Bates (Lewis Chase), another of Fagin's boys, and witnesses their real business when the Dodger picks the pocket of a gentleman, Mr. Brownlow (Edward Hardwicke). When Brownlow discovers the robbery in progress Oliver is mistaken for the culprit and, after a chase which comes to an end when he is felled by a hefty blow to the head, Oliver is caught and taken to the police.

While being questioned by the stern Magistrate Fang (Alun Armstrong), a witness proves Oliver's innocence and the kindly Brownlow takes him to his home to recuperate. His accuser becomes his benefactor and Oliver is treated well by Brownlow and his housekeeper Mrs. Bedwin (Frances Cuka).

Meanwhile, Fagin and Bill Sykes are concerned that Oliver will betray them to the authorities and they are determined to track him down and bring him back to Fagin's lair.

Convinced of Oliver's honesty, Brownlow sends him on an errand to pay a local merchant five pounds and to return some books. But he is abducted by Sykes and Nancy in the street. Brownlow, thinking that Oliver has run away with his money, concludes that Oliver was a thief all along, as suspected by his friend Mr. Grimwig (Paul Brooke).

Back in the den of thieves, Oliver is tricked by Fagin to describe Brownlow's house and its valuable contents. Sykes and fellow criminal Toby Crackit (Mark Strong) force Oliver to accompany them on an armed robbery at Brownlow's house. They need a small boy to enter a window and open the front door for the housebreakers. The robbery is foiled when the household is alarmed and in the ensuing confusion, Oliver is shot. Bleeding badly with a bullet in his upper arm, Oliver is carried away by Bill Sykes, who has every intention of throwing him into the river. But it is Sykes who slips and falls into the fast-flowing water.

Toby takes Oliver back to Fagin's where he is nursed back to health. Bill Sykes struggles back to his place full of fever after his struggle in the river. He tells Fagin that they must get rid of Oliver or their livelihoods will be over. A sympathetic Nancy, fearful for Oliver's life, makes contact with Brownlow and

arranges to meet him beneath London Bridge. But Fagin has Nancy followed and in a fit of rage Bill Sykes kills her.

Nancy's friend Bet (Ophelia Lovibond) discovers the body and informs the police. The hunt is on for Bill Sykes.

Brownlow is concerned for Oliver's safety, even more so when he discovers that the police have tracked Sykes and Oliver to Toby Crackit's house in the London slums. As the police move in, Sykes, using Oliver as a shield, scampers over sloping roofs pursued by the police and a hostile crowd. Suddenly, distracted by his dog, the murdering robber slips and accidentally hangs himself.

Some time later, Oliver and Mr. Brownlow visit Fagin in Newgate prison where the thief-maker is rapidly losing his mind. Despite all that has happened, Oliver feels sympathy for the wretched man. Fighting tears, Oliver offers up a silent prayer before he and Brownlow leave on a coach traveling towards a rising sun and the promise of a bright new day.

A Master Meets a Master

"A child's perception of things has a clarity and immediacy unmatched by any subsequent experience." – from Roman Polanski's autobiography Roman

Having just stirred audiences worldwide with the deeply affecting *The Pianist*, an amazing story of suffering and pain in the Warsaw ghetto of World War II, Polanski wanted to turn to another tale of survival, one with a child at the center.

"It was difficult for me to decide what I wanted to do next," says Polanski. "I thought I owed my children a movie because they were always very interested in my work, so I started looking around for a children's story and eventually landed on Dickens. And 'Oliver Twist' was the obvious choice. The story is a series of adventures, or misadventures, that happen to the orphan Oliver throughout the picture. Dickens always enchanted me when I was a child, and I like the period very much, both on the screen and in literature."

As a combination of fantasy and historical truth, Polanski believes Dickens's saga of the good-hearted English lad eager to better himself can't be beat: "This is a Dickensian tale in the truest sense, which means it is exuberant, intriguing and timeless. And it's full of incident that is constantly surprising."

Ben Kingsley, who plays Fagin for Polanski, thought this particular combination of filmmaker and English novelist was a fitting one. "Roman has such an irony and a wit and a perception of human behavior and human types and human categories that he's able to caricature those extraordinary characters from the novel," says Kingsley. "I immediately felt that Roman could spend time with Charles Dickens and have a wonderful evening and a great laugh. It's no good having a pedestrian director directing Shakespeare when he couldn't actually spend five minutes in a pub with Shakespeare – he would be totally crushed and intellectually intimidated. You have to have a director who still has this intellectual vigor, confidence, stamina and curiosity. And here's Roman, newly awarded an Oscar® for his brilliant re-examination of the Holocaust through one man's eyes in *The Pianist*, still at the peak of his powers."

In fact, it's impossible to separate the intense journey of young Oliver – from faceless rebel memorably asking for more gruel to workhouse escapee and finally pawn in the machinations of men both moral and immoral – from the young Roman Polanski, a scrappy child maneuvering the awfulness of the Polish ghetto in World War II. Personal experience, then, informed his rollicking retelling of *Oliver Twist* as much as it gave *The Pianist* dramatic urgency.

Says Polanski's producing partner Alain Sarde, "Roman is telling the story through the eyes of Oliver. Just as Wladislaw Szpilman's story was a fight for survival in *The Pianist*, so it is a fight for this young boy to survive against what appear to be insurmountable odds, firstly in the austere surroundings of the Workhouse and then in the seedy side of London's underworld. And Roman is at his best when he is dealing with characters that have to fight against adversity."

Jamie Foreman, who plays Bill Sykes, concurs. "What Roman and Dickens have in common was that they shared the same kind of childhood. Dickens had a very unhappy childhood; his father was a scoundrel who was always in trouble. Dickens had to survive the best way he could. Roman's life story is very well-documented with the tragic childhood he had in the ghettos of World War II. There is a *simpatico* there straight away. The more I worked on the

project, the more I understood Roman. I saw more and more of Oliver in him. He's still this wonderful imaginative child himself, even at this stage of his life. To come to this project was inevitability to him."

There are dark elements to *Oliver Twist*, but mixed in with the larger-than-life trappings of the characters and the more fanciful bends in the story, Polanski feels, they will appeal across all ages. "I was never afraid of the dark part of 'Oliver' as far as the young audience is concerned because they love dark stories. The fairy tales of Grimm and Andersen are quite frightening. At the same time, there's a tremendous amount of humor in every Charles Dickens book, a great deal of irony and sarcasm, and that appeals to me very much. And I think it appeals to children, within the scope of their comprehension."

Executive Producer Timothy Burrill says, "There are many people around the world who look forward to a new Roman Polanski film because they know they'll see something extraordinary, where the performances are special, where the visual appearance of the film is amazing."

Adapting OLIVER TWIST (1838) – 19th century England

When *Oliver Twist* first began in serialized form in the monthly magazine Bentley's Miscellany in 1837, its subtitle was "The Parish Boy's Progress." For the first few installments, Dickens' intention was to describe for his readers what it was like to be a "parish boy" in the years following the passing of the new Poor Law Act of 1834. Dickens would have seen the bill being hotly debated when he was a parliamentary reporter for the Morning Chronicle, and he would continue to attack it in his fiction and journalism for the rest of his life.

Prior to 1834, poor workers were given a tiny sum, or "dole," by their parish to keep them from starvation on their fixed agricultural wages. It was intended as emergency funds to tide people over until they could get on their feet again. The infirm and unemployable were also the responsibility of each parish. While there were many problems in the old system that the new legislation was intended to redress, many people felt that the cure was much worse than the disease. The new act designed to prevent idle people from living off the community, grouped parishes together into "poor law unions" and established

“workhouses” (which became known as “unions”); here, people with no other home or means of support were housed and put to work for the parish.

“That is the social background to the story of ‘*Oliver Twist*,’” says Roman Polanski. “London in that period was the biggest city in the world and it was developing with incredible speed. It had masses of people drifting to the city from the country and then finding themselves without any means of survival. Of course, it’s incomparable with today’s London or today’s Paris, but if you think of cities like Bombay or Bangkok, they still have a number of poor children. An orphan boy in a developing country always seems the same and always meets the same destiny.”

Polanski turned to his Academy Award®-winning *Pianist* screenwriter Ronald Harwood to turn Oliver Twist into a screenplay, an idea which Harwood took to instantly. Harwood calls Dickens “the first real social realist writer of his time. The workhouses, the way the poor were treated, the way orphans were treated, that’s what inspired him. Dickens himself came from a poor family and he worked in a blacking factory when he was a child because they needed money. There’s a sequence in the film in which the boys are made to pick oakum – the fibers of a rope that had worn – so you could reuse the rope. It was the most awful, painful, agonizing, filthy work, and they put kids and convicts in prison to it. Dickens knew all about these things.”

Kingsley sees Polanski’s new film as “a gift to that next generation who are starved of any kind of historical depth and historical density. The children of Dickens’ London were alcoholics and prostitutes. Whole streets were given away to brothels. Child abuse, child prostitution and murder were probably equivalent to the street kids in Rio de Janeiro today...and the life expectancy was about the same.”

Kingsley adds, “What we don’t have today is a Charles Dickens who will say ‘Come over here, go round that corner, there are three kids who are playing truant and sniffing glue ... and one of them will be dead by the afternoon!’ That is what Dickens did. He actually had the guts. Today you have a lot of posturing and speech-making, but nobody is answerable to anybody. We can get away with stuff but nobody says ‘This is enough.’ So Roman looks at how we continue to squander the great wealth of children and he shows us that through his perception of Charles Dickens.”

What fascinates Harwood about Oliver Twist is how Dickens dramatizes and deals with every level of English society of the time in a way both eye-opening and entertaining. “In Oliver Twist it starts at the lowest level, in the workhouse, with pompous officials like the Beadle, who are violently cruel to the poor kids. And then he slowly works his way up. There’s the undertaker, then he escapes to London and falls in among thieves. Then he meets Mr. Brownlow and is introduced to polite society before being dragged back to the savage world of Fagin and Bill Sykes. Dickens does that better than anybody. He tells you what it was like to be alive then – which fiction can do much better than non-fiction.”

To Harwood, there’s a direct link between the kind of mesmerizing yarn-spinning Dickens did and the incredible legacy of Polanski’s cinematic storytelling. “Dickens was also a great actor, who filled out vast halls doing readings from his novels. People were spellbound by it. Roman has that quality of storytelling also. You get Roman to tell you the story of Oliver Twist and he would tell it exactly as Dickens told it – and probably invent a few things as he went along.”

When it came to adapting the novel, the challenge was retaining the book’s scope of socially pungent character – its complex patchwork of the needy, the seedy and the greedy -- without diminishing the propulsive plotting Dickens fans love.

Says Polanski, “The book is dense and very long and meanders, since it was a period when writers wrote for magazines or papers in daily, weekly or monthly instalments. So the novels of that period don’t have the rigid construction which is required for a motion picture. Our work on the adaptation consisted mainly in keeping the spirit of the book with scenes and characters untouched, but eliminating the subplots so we could stick to the main plot. We planned it like a Greek tragedy with three acts.”

Harwood, fresh off his Academy Award® for adapting The Pianist into a wrenching film, wasn’t daunted by the task of winnowing a massive book into a two-hour film. “It’s a driving narrative,” says Harwood. “The great genius of Dickens is the storytelling power he has. What happens next? And then? It’s breathtaking.”

Producer Alain Sarde remarks that although *Oliver Twist* is a period piece, it has contemporary overtones. “Roman wanted to make a film that would interest

an audience of all ages and a story with which everybody could associate. He wants the audience to feel that they are living in London at that time and involved with the adventures of this young boy.”

Casting

Director Roman Polanski describes as “phenomenal” the sensation of getting to know the myriad characters in a Charles Dickens novel. “One of the attractions of Dickens is his variety of colorful characters,” he says. “They are extremely well described in every book he wrote, from ‘Pickwick Papers’ to ‘Bleak House.’”

Imperative, then, to any adaptation of a Charles Dickens novel is who is going to embody his outsized creations, among the most cherished in literature. Right away, Polanski wanted Ben Kingsley, whom he’d worked with on *Death and the Maiden*, to play the simultaneously appalling and appealing thief master Fagin. He even convinced his producers by taking a picture of the actor and drawing his vision of Fagin on it. The Academy Award®-winning actor was only too happy to sign on for such an iconic role. “My interaction with Roman is as good as it was when we worked together on *Death and the Maiden*,” says Kingsley. “We have both changed but changed in the same ways. We’ve maybe had a parallel growth that’s allowed us to communicate now as easily as we did ten years ago. I think that is the test of a good working relationship.”

Kingsley adds, “Roman is on a quest and therefore insists, in a very detailed and caring way, on the audience being presented a flawless equation of human behavior so they can discover for themselves the cause and effect. This is what interested me in Fagin, ‘cause and effect.’ He has been marginalized, and therefore forced to exploit. I had to create a portrait that you can connect with as a member of the audience. There is a side of people who will say, ‘Look, without Fagin, these children would be dead! Without Fagin, they would starve to death.’”

The actor calls his portrait “very intuitive, not an academic exercise.” His approach, therefore, was led in part by how a child perceives the world. “The important thing is how Oliver sees this man. If you ask a child to draw somebody they will draw all those features that the person hoped hadn’t been noticed.

Dickens had the same pureness. He managed to write people's monstrous attributes as perceived through a child's eyes, which is baffled and curious at the same time."

Jamie Foreman, who plays Bill Sykes, says of Kingsley, "He's fabulous on the set with the children". He comes on set in character and plays and jokes. He's very giving and very sharing, a lovely man. And when he looks at other actors' performances on set, he'll give you a smile and a little wink that says 'That was nice, what you did.'"

Leanne Rowe, who plays Nancy, said Kingsley's staying in character was like a gift for helping the cast get into their roles before a take. "As soon as I'm around him and he's Fagin, then I slip into Nancy and Jamie slips into Bill and when the cameras roll we're in character."

Kingsley notes that Fagin represents his second major Dickens portrayal, after the Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Nicholas Nickleby*, and that coming from the theater might have given him a heads up for *Oliver Twist*. "I had fifteen years doing classical theater," he says. "My preparation for this film was probably done 20 years ago."

Casting *Oliver* was going to be tricky. As producer Alain Sarde puts it, "My worry was finding a young boy who had the stamina to be there in nearly every shot. But I also knew that Roman had a marvelous ability to find a new face, a new actor."

Working with his casting director from *The Pianist*, Celestia Fox, Polanski was able to whittle down hundreds of applicants to a handful of potential *Olivers*, and 11-year-old Barney Clark from Hackney, London, was chosen after a screen test in Prague. "Barney struck me as the most interesting. I was looking for a boy who wasn't too cute but would nevertheless be attractive, a boy who had a certain intelligence and a bit of melancholy, and that's Barney."

Sarde was more than convinced. "I think the boy is a genius," he says. "He has incredible talent and has developed an understanding with Roman which is worthy of a much older and more experienced actor."

Clark, who had seen both Carol Reed's 1948 film of *Oliver Twist* and the 1968 musical film "Oliver!" says Polanski told him that Clark's *Oliver* would be different from previous incarnations. "He wanted *Oliver* to be braver than in the other films. When he asks for more, for example, he's not as scared as other

Olivers have been. And in this film Oliver has fights and stuff. He's still scared of a lot of things, though, because he would be. He's an orphan in the Workhouse." Mastering Oliver's slight Birmingham accent – a subtle roughening up of the character's background to make him less educated-sounding than in Dickens' book -- was tough, but, says Clark, "the dialect coach showed me how to position my mouth so you don't even have to think about what you're going to say. It just comes out."

For an energetic young boy, there were perks to the job, too, like stunt work. One of Clark's favorite scenes was climbing on the rooftops with Jamie Foreman, who plays Bill Sykes. "That was really fun. We had on green harnesses so later they just push a button on a computer and it wipes out the harness so they can fill in the background."

Foreman calls Sykes a "very strong character and a real survivor. He reminds me of a killer shark and I tried to convey that with a lack of anything going on behind the eyes, which I know sounds weird for an actor who always wants to project with his eyes."

Although he calls Sykes "unrelentingly awful," Foreman didn't consider him "one-dimensionally aggressive and horrible. There's a man there trying to keep his life together, keep on the move, keep safe. People often love playing the bad guy, but the bad guy's hard work. You have to find something else to make you want to keep watching him and wonder what he's going to do next. For a London actor, playing Bill Sykes, the ultimate British gangster, is a dream come true."

Many of Sykes' most dramatic scenes are with the young Nancy, who Bill looks after with a fierce kind of love. But when Oliver enters the picture, Nancy's loyalties are divided. Says Nancy's portrayer, British actress Leanne Rowe, "When she first meets Oliver, he bows to her, which she finds endearing, and she takes him under her wing. She can tell he's not like the rest of Fagin's boys. Although she wants to help Oliver, she would never betray Bill. Nancy loves Bill, or she wouldn't still be with him, the way he treats her. In those days, if you had someone like Bill to look out for you, you were okay."

Nancy starts out with the appearance of a common-looking streetwalker – "Roman would be like, 'She has to be vulgar,'" says Rowe – but as the story goes

on, the look changed. “As Nancy became more depressed, she wasn’t worrying about her appearance so much and the make-up got less as the film went on.”

For Harry Eden, who plays Oliver’s stealing friend the Artful Dodger, learning the art of pickpocketing was beyond fun. “Roman told me that the Dodger was very clever, very street wise and very quick with his hands,” says Eden, who along with Clark learned about surreptitious pilfering from a master magician. “He also taught us many card tricks so that our hands became clever and quick. Roman said the pickpocketing scenes should feel like a dance because they do it so perfectly.”

Rounding out the excellent cast are Lewis Chase, making his motion picture debut as Charley Bates, one of Fagin’s boys; Edward Hardwicke, son of the great English actor Sir Cedric Hardwicke, who plays the kind, wealthy Mr. Brownlow; Mark Strong as Sykes’ criminal cohort Toby Crackit; Michael Heath as the undertaker Mr. Sowerberry; Gillian Hanna as Mrs. Sowerberry; Jeremy Swift as the beadle Mr. Bumble; and Chris Overton as Noah Claypole.

Building “Oliver Twist”

Roman Polanski knew that for his *Oliver Twist* to stand out, London itself would have to be a major character, so before a script had even been completed, Polanski and his production designer Allan Starski, who had worked with the director on *The Pianist*, were devising and researching the visual elements of this classic story. Says Polanski, “It’s very exciting if you do a film set in a particular period, to really dig into it and find all the little things that help you actually create the scenes.”

Starski adds, “We discussed the book and previous screen versions but mostly we discussed how to make this a Roman Polanski film. He wanted to show not only the story of Oliver Twist but also the story of England, which at the time was in a transition from an idyllic England to the age of the industrial revolution.”

Taking inspiration from not just maps of the time but the legendary engravings of 19th century artist Gustave Dore, who memorably depicted

England's poorer corners, Starski took aim at a massive composite of London at Prague's Barrandov Studios, which has the biggest back lot in Europe. Nothing less than an entire society had to be depicted. "It was important for us to show the poverty of Londoners. The city was growing at an enormous rate and along with the elegant areas there were a number of rundown slum areas where the poor people survived in their red brick houses."

The complex, interlocking set – comprised of five major streets and numerous market squares and side streets -- spread over 40,000 square meters and took three months to build, with an additional three weeks to age it properly. "We used more than two hundred construction workers plus the workshop people," says Starski, who cherished the craftsmanship of the studio's crew. "The studio carpenter shop built all the profiles and the plasterer shop made all the bricks. I used eleven different types of brick for finishing the houses because we took some moulds and casts from London and made the copies in Prague. It was a fantastic experience for me."

The principal thoroughfare, the long and elegant Kings Street, contains a number of shops, seven of which still exist in London today: 'Paxton and Whitfield' (Cheese Makers); 'James Lock and Co.' (Hatters); 'John Lobb' (Boot Makers); 'Berry Bros. and Rudd' (Wine Merchants); 'Floris' (Perfumiers); 'David Salmon' (Fine Furniture); and 'Robert Lewis' (Tobacconist). The first five are still entitled to display above their doorways the prestigious sign 'By Royal Appointment.'

Because of strict copyright laws, all the above-named shops had to give permission for their names to be used in the film. Needless to say, all were delighted and most of them offered the production genuine items of the period from their archives.

Recreated sets that also existed in Dickens' time were the massive slum area in the dockland known as Jacob's Island – where Toby Crackit lives and where Bill Sykes plans his rooftop escape -- and the more up-market section called Pentonville, where the wealthy Mr. Brownlow lives. Wherever possible, Starski wanted to build instead of suggest with photographic trickery. The background behind the London Bridge set was an example. "London Bridge" plays an important role in the film," says Starski. "It is where Nancy tells Mr. Brownlow of the danger that Oliver is in. It is also the place where the Dodger

overhears the conversation and reports back to Fagin and Bill Sykes. Part of the bridge is built on the backlot and a huge part is built on stage. Mostly in movies, when the camera sees through a window or an open doorway, they use a photographic background. In 'Oliver' I decided to build what is seen. Usually it's other houses, so I copied the houses from the backlot and built them on stage."

As for the interior sets, Starski understood that Fagin's place – like a cozily decayed retreat with cobwebs and chipped plaster – was one of the most important, so he decided to give it the aura of something that was once nicer. "His living place was an attic, but for this man, who is living like a rat, I thought it would be nice if we showed him in some abandoned mansion. It's totally ruined, but still you feel the grandeur that once was, in the ghosts from years ago."

Naturally, Starski had to ensure he was in synch with the other key members of the visual team --- director of photography Pawel Edelman and costume designer Anna Sheppard – so that the movie would feel of a piece. "We discussed a palette of colors, and this is important," he says. "We had to be very careful that the colors matched together. We were creating an ambiance, a look for the whole movie. And Pawel Edelman, who really lit those sets fantastically, is also involved. It's a process of finding the aesthetic. We have to capture the right tone of the movie."

To that end, Starski wanted the sets to be furnished with real material. "It's important for the movie but more so for Roman," says Starski. "He's used to real props and he uses them beautifully. You always see the close-ups with the actors using the props in the proper way. Because of this, we really tried to get everything real. I was lucky in having a very good team and my set decorator, Jille Azis, did her job perfectly."

Ultimately, Starski saw his job as echoing and reflecting what the characters are going through, using place to strengthen the mood and enrich the emotions. That meant the Workhouse at the beginning – from the dining hall to the room where the boys separate oakum from rope --had to feel bigger, have a factory to feel, to stress the inhumanity of Oliver's conditions. Contrarily, says Starski, "the villain Bill Sykes' place is small and very narrow because it's a drama between Sykes and Nancy. Nancy has a secret. She tries to conceal the secret but she can't avoid him. She can't hide her emotions because they are in

this very small space. I always try to help show more about the characters of the movie by my sets. This is my goal.”

Dressing “Oliver Twist”

Polish costume designer Anna Sheppard, who established her international credentials with such films as *Schindler’s List* and the more recent *The Pianist*, was Roman Polanski’s first choice to design the all-important costumes for his new version of the Charles Dickens classic, *Oliver Twist*.

Sheppard understood immediately that this was a personal movie for Polanski, and that the director would be very specific about what he wanted. She offers a bit of insight into how much Polanski used the memories of his unusual childhood to make his version of Oliver Twist breathe with life: “Roman is incredibly sensitive to the costumes. Sometimes, I was satisfied with the result that we achieved but he had a feeling that something was missing. Well, Roman called me about the shoes, which were given to Oliver by Fagin. He said, ‘When I was a boy of this age and the war ended, I couldn’t find shoes my size. Somebody gave me a man’s shoes. So I turned my trousers in and put the shoes over the trousers.’ And he wanted that same image for Oliver. That’s how he drew from personal experience and memory when creating the look of Oliver. So suddenly Oliver is wearing shoes that are probably about four sizes bigger than his feet.”

Because there are so many dramatic personae in *Oliver Twist*, with varying degrees of screen time, it was important that the essence of a character be grasped quickly and etched in the brain of the moviegoer. “You cannot add to the character during the span of the movie so they had to have immediate distinction,” says Sheppard. “And Roman wanted clothes. He didn’t want costumes. This is a bit of a contradiction of course, and it was difficult for me to divide my approach between characters that are distinctive in every detail and then dress a huge crowd that is supposed to look natural and really Victorian.”

To get the right effect, Sheppard ultimately opted to make all the costumes for the main characters and children’s costumes from scratch, because the right colors and textures in the numbers needed didn’t exist. “That was the biggest challenge for me when I started the film. The main characters were in my head

from the start so it was a case of just finding fabrics, dyeing, making, aging, finding the little details like jewellery, buttons, etc. That's the pleasant part of it. But with a big scene like the workhouse – and no one had used such a big crowd on previous 'Oliver' films – we did the entire sequence from scratch in the Czech Republic. The fabrics came from all over – Italy, London, Prague – and in a little room at the back of a huge space full of costumes we had the little dying area. Everyone worked very hard and all the costumes for over 100 children were created in four weeks.”

Oliver had to have two entirely different sets of costumes, poor and rich. The rich costumes were easier to accomplish – Sheppard says, “It's just a matter of finding a good tailor who will make the costumes perfectly” – but with the poor clothes, the choices were endless. “We did a lot of different shapes and a lot of different proportions between the jacket and the length of trousers and how big the shoes should be and how distressed the clothes have to be. Then there is the full costume given him by Fagin. The Fagin boys are much more flamboyant in comparison with the workhouse boys. They were a kind of uniform made with very poor fabrics. And that was difficult.” Sheppard continues, “Roman wanted something that Barney would feel very comfortable wearing, that wouldn't restrict him in any way so that he thinks he's wearing a costume as opposed to everyday clothing. I think we achieved that.”

Young Barney Clark concurs. “I must say that the rags are quite comfortable, more comfortable than the posh clothes. They were really tight. I wore braces [suspenders] with a little waistcoat and jacket.” Sheppard remarks, “Barney wanted me to donate his poor costume so that he could keep it for himself. He didn't want the beautiful costume, he wanted my rags.”

Another enormous undertaking was the fitting of extras for the large crowd scenes. Thankfully, Sheppard's experience with such period scenes came in handy. “London is such a fantastic source for English costumes from that period. They came from three prominent English costume houses and it wasn't very difficult to obtain them, except I wanted specific colours. I eliminated certain colours completely and that made it more difficult to complete the one thousand costumes required for the extras, so we had additional costumes imported from Vienna.”

When it came to fitting Nancy, Sheppard came across an original dress from the period, but she had worries. “People were much smaller in the 19th century. Women had 22-inch waists. I wondered who would fit into that dress. Along came Leanne Rowe, who is tiny and petite, and we put her in a corset and the dress fit. She did a screen test in this dress, so she considers that to be her lucky dress.”

Nancy’s red dress, however – her “prostitute” dress -- was more difficult to find. “It’s very hard to make somebody as young and pretty and fair-skinned look vulgar. All the other actresses who played Nancy on film were older – Leanne is only 22 – and making a little whore out of her proved to be very difficult. But we managed it. It looks really worn but is old beautiful taffeta that catches the light beautifully and adds to her beauty – adds to her colouring, to her red hair, to her make-up. I wanted her to have a dress that used to be very grand and now is really old, like she maybe bought second-hand from one of those Victorian stands on the street. It took me three months to create it.”

Sheppard already knew Ben Kingsley would be playing Fagin when she began to consider his clothing, and having already worked with the actor on *Schindler’s List*, she knew that a character’s threads were very important to him.

So when Kingsley offered up a childhood remembrance – his fascination with a junkshop proprietor from Manchester who dressed in a coat tied together with string – Fagin’s look was cinched. “I think Ben wanted Fagin to look as created by children’s imagination,” says Sheppard. “How they see this distinctive character that is bad and good at the same time.” The other key was consistency of appearance. Adds Sheppard, “He never changes his costume; the only thing he takes off is his hat. It was Ben’s idea, saying ‘No, I want to stay the same; like Father Christmas is always the same, the good character. I want to be this bad character that is consistent throughout the whole movie so that children will always remember me looking as I look.’”

Sheppard notes that even a character like Bill Sykes’ criminal chum Toby Crackit – colorful, flamboyant, in high boots and a long, swishy coat – never changes his look, and that such consistency is “one of the movie’s little secrets. Once we created a character, we kept it exactly the same, so there’s no mistake. Seeing somebody even from a distance as a silhouette, you recognize who it is.”