



## Griff Rhys Jones grabs Oliver! role in the West End

Griff Rhys Jones enters the den at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, replacing Omid Djalili. Plus, Green Day and Torchwood get musical makeovers. As Omid Djalili packs up his spoils and hides them under his coat, Griff Rhys Jones is waiting in the wings, ready to take over as Fagin in Oliver! Yes, he's leaving behind the rivers and the houseboats in favour of Victorian squalor and song this Christmas. He may have spent a while presenting travel documentaries, but his comic credentials are impeccable, as are his live performance skills. He's got two Olivier awards on his mantelpiece already.

Cameron Mackintosh is, unsurprisingly, chuffed. The producer declared that he has wanted to work with the star for years, praising his new signing's 'amazing array of successful talents, all of which will undoubtedly be poured into his unique and entertaining interpretation'. Incidentally, Griff is the second of the Not the Nine O'Clock News team to play the grubby gangmaster in this production, following Rowan Atkinson. That means the smart money must surely be on Mel Smith to take over in 2010.

Jodie Prenger famously won the part of Nancy in Oliver! via one of Andrew Lloyd Webber's TV talent searches. Now he's on the hunt for a Dorothy for The Wizard of Oz. What's more, she'll be singing songs he's written especially for this new West End production. Old favourites such as Somewhere Over the Rainbow will still be in the show, but he has revealed he's hard at work composing new music now that he's been given the all clear to add to the film's score.

John Barrowman told me last week that there is no chance whatsoever of there being a musical Torchwood episode. But now some eager enthusiasts are set to prove him wrong, with a fan-made show of their own ready to stage in London next year. They're auditioning for the lead roles now and : the brooding Captain Jack, policewoman Gwen and her long-suffering fianc Rhys, disgruntled doctor Owen, well-tailored tea boy Ianto and science nerd Tosh. The most fascinating part that they're casting has to be Myfanwy the Torchwood team's pterodactyl. They explain: 'We don't know if this will even be a speaking or singing part, but it will definitely be a dancer's role. We need someone with strong ballet skills, who is good on pointes and can wear a Lycra catsuit.' Congratulations to Green Day, whose musical American Idiot has been unveiled in Berkeley, California. The band's keenest fans were the first to see the show during previews, and although they may be a little biased, the word of mouth has been good, including comparisons to Rent. However, a reviewer (and Green Day fan) at the San Jose Mercury News laments that 'the music isn't moving'.

# Oliver!

Let's see what the other critics make of it. It's playing at the Berkeley Rep until 1 November.

Hot ticket: I can't believe this has not been done before, but It's a Wonderful Life has been turned into a musical. It's currently running for a limited time only at the New Wolsey theatre in Ipswich. It's a full-scale, fabulously cast, incredibly moving, sung-through spectacular. This is worth catching just for Paul Thornley in the central role of George Bailey (played by James Stewart in the movie). He's on stage almost all the time and you won't be able to take your eyes off him.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/theatreblog/2009/sep/17/west-end-griff-oliver-musical>