This was our first visit to the Oldham Coliseum, despite it being in the back of our mind to go sometime - and what a delightful experience it was! From the convivial and relaxed welcoming reception of box office, ushers and bar staff to the familiar faces from the northern soaps sat next to us in the bar chatting freely with those around. No pretence and a down to earth directness you expect in Oldham, and just being part of an extended family of theatre goers and doers. The brochure references supporters and volunteers and this really does permeate the mood around the foyer and bar.
Notably spacious, the auditorium has really comfy seating, with plenty of leg-room and something also commented on by the people behind us (in the stalls). It transpires that they were installed last year which just adds to the experience, and even just a few rows from the stage we didn’t have to crane our necks to look at the stage as is sometimes the case in theatres. The acoustics were great too - just there when they were needed without ever thinking about them, indicating some elegant delivery which doesn’t distract from the focus of the stage.

**David Copperfield** is a wondrous tale of **triumph over adversity** as we follow David Copperfield’s journey from boy to man - in circumstances not of his own choosing. We encounter a host of diverse and influential characters that shape his life. No matter what trials and tribulations are thrown at young Master Copperfield, he has a fantastic drive, innocence and enthusiasm to overcome, and pushes himself forward and grows ever stronger and more rounded for it. The production clearly compacts a nuanced story for performance on the stage, and is fast-paced because of it, but does capture the transformation very well, and includes great roles for **Uriah Heep**, **Peggotty** and **Steerforth**.

The acting was incredible and each actor portrayed at least two characters (with the exception of **Jack Wilkinson** who played a fabulous David Copperfield), all unique, and demonstrated the versatility and diversity of their acting skills, as they transformed before our very eyes into a new character with a whole new voice, style and demeanour. The way they managed to do the costume changes so quickly and efficiently, is surely testament to the costume designers as much as the actors, and such an authentic impact of the period. Everyone, to a man, gave an energetic and heartfelt performance, and you could tell, even without looking at the brochure for previous acting credits, that what you were witnessing was a wealth of acting talent and experience which shone through.
Jack Wilkinson gives us a perfect performance as the main character, David Copperfield and delights with his gradual transformation from a young boy into a man. There is no need for flamboyant costume changes or make-up - he depicts perfectly the characteristics of a young boy, thirsting for knowledge and adventure which he obtains from his collection of books. As the play progresses, even though the clothes are basically the same, we see subtle changes in his demeanour and character, the way he stands, talks and becomes more confident. A truly brilliant portrayal.

Joanna Higson brings out the richness of the wise and loving Agnes, as well as intriguingly doubling up as Mother and Traddles. The young David Copperfield with his thirst for knowledge and life experiences is drawn to the endearing
Agnes who offers warmth and a beguilingly tender maturity. 
Agnes sees beyond the pup that David presents himself as, and offers insight that guides him thoughtfully away from her, only to be drawn back to her as his adventures improve his depth but leave his heart wanting. This relationship was so well handled in its appreciation of the the depth of human personality, and the mystery involved in sparking love.

Kieran Buckeridge played posh boy and bounder Steerforth, and in the blink of an eye a tremendous Uriah Heep. As Uriah Heep, he blended a very 'umble Frank Spencer and Colin Jeavons (played Mr Shadrack in the 1970s TV Series Billy Liar), in a very funny performance, with just the right amount of hand wringing as his fortune changed, in total contrast to the portrayal of confident and debonair Steerforth.

Tim Treslove played Murdstone, Micawber and Daniel Peggotty, which was a wide range indeed, and perhaps one of the most challenging and diverse range of characters, which he delivered with aplomb. From the jovial, honourable, down to earth Daniel Peggotty to the strict, controlling and harsh Murdstone and then thrown into the mix is Mr Micawber, a raucous and verbose character. Today's world of bleeding heart entitlement and timidity, it must take quite an imagination to produce the effect of masterful control oozing from Murdstone's authoritative click of a finger.
Robin Simpson was a funny throwback to the days of warped and sadistic headmasters as Creakle, and also doubles up as the heartening Ham & the eccentric and slightly dotty Mr Dick. Although the instinctive reaction to Creakle is that of annoyance at unimaginative rote teaching, but with the impact of the character of Murdstone, it was a mindful reminder of how self-assured adults used to be.

Rounding out David Copperfield's experiences, Isabel Ford was delightfully versatile and rounded as Peggotty, Mrs Steerforth, & Mrs Micawber; Helen Kay played Betsey Trotwood & Jane Murdstone, the wicked witch of Murdstone's alter ego, and Jo Mousley finished out with Dora & Emily. It's hard to believe now that there were so many characters, but they were all played so well and seamlessly moved through the scenes that it really was like moving through the various personalities that impact and shape your own character and behaviours.

Alastair Cording should be congratulated for his ingenious adaptation of this classic. The script
flowed brilliantly, and although at times dealing with some sad, unfortunate incidents he managed to convey the sadness and distress without being maudlin and brought out a real sense of humour and our desire to get on with whatever life throws at us, no matter how hard. He managed to condense a 700 page novel into this two hour show without any hint of it being rushed or piecemeal. It was a witty and compact masterpiece.

The set (Alison Hefferman), sound (Lorna Munden) and lighting (Jane Barrek) all worked seamlessly, and we loved the flow and ingenuity of how the actors participated in the scene changes and the wonderful use of a minimal amount of props, the way the lighting ensured the audience focussed on the central characters, slightly dimming those who were manoeuvring the props. For example the central prop of a bed was then transformed into a cart used to transport passengers and baggage, then becoming the Peggotty's house simply by adding a smoking chimney to the loaded cart – fantastic and so inventive. It then masqueraded as Uriah Heep’s accountancy workbench and even a ship – brilliant!

Also impressive was the shipwreck scene, where the actors donned capes to portray fishermen and then utilised this to depict the ravaging waves, which then carried Ham as he swam to save a stranded survivor. Excellent and such a wonderful portrayal of a rough, unforgiving sea, you actually felt that those bodies were the rising, crashing waves.
During the play itself I didn't actually notice the lighting changes, which I think is a testament to the designer and operator, and it was only whilst writing this review that I reflected on the subtle changes and natural usage. For example the storm scene on a wild wintery night, worked perfectly and in contrast to the delicate lighting used to highlight the copper leaves on trees in the main set. Extremely subtle and well-orchestrated.

The sound was timed and pitched perfectly and at one stage I was looking round to try to identify where a 'ticking' noise was coming from, which was quite distinctive, only then did I realise that there was a clock on a table on stage – wow, without the sound, don't think I would have noticed it, but transformed the stage to a more intimate room space. The storm scene was impressive, as was the effects of the pebbles being thrown into the water – perfect timing and just enough time from the throw until that recognisable 'plop', great.

All credit to Kevin Shaw, Director, for pulling together a flawless, professional and utterly enjoyable show. The whole cast seemed to thoroughly enjoy the performance and this definitely shone through in what was a spectacular show and one that I would whole heartedly recommend as a Must See. It was also a lovely touch at the end, when it seemed that the applause would go on forever, that Tim Treslove (who played Murdstone, Micawber & Daniel Peggotty), held up his hand to acknowledge the audience's appreciation, but that honestly we didn't need to continue and then announced that there would be pizza in the bar afterwards if we would like to join them. Wow, what an end to a great night, being able to mingle with the performers - brilliant.

The story was in such stark contrast to the predominant and deadening dullness of how damaged for life any incident or experience really is for us. What tosh indeed and if ever there was a script and performance to surely shake us up, this is a strong contender. Despite the wasted chances, devastating events and schemers attempting to thwart our lives along the way, David Copperfield sings from the rafters about our innate resilience and resourcefulness to achieve our goals, and realise our dreams by making the most of our circumstances. To bring Dickens to such vibrancy and life must be a highpoint in the career of everyone involved in this production. Ok, it may be just the programme, but it should be noted that it's appreciated to have such a good quality and interesting programme as the one produced by Lizzie Carter!