

A handful of happy Hardy

▶▶ Review

Under the Greenwood Tree, Regent Centre, Christchurch

THOMAS Hardy – the humorous side. To those who only know of Dorset's most famous writer for his doom and gloom masterpieces, this adaptation of his very first success would certainly come as a surprise, evoking as it does the warming charm of a pre-industrialised rural world.

The Mellstock church band, at the play's start, are on their door-to-door Christmas Carols round and have been part of village life for years. But when the progressive new vicar introduces a mighty

harmoniser organ the band are knocked back. Dick Dewey, though, is more affected by the instrument's player – new school-teacher Miss Fancy Day.

Unfortunately for Dick he has to compete for her affections with the boring but earnest vicar and a bumptious but wealthy local farmer before, in traditional manner, true love wins the day.

Isabelle King plays Fancy in splendid flirtatious style, while Ryan Saunders as Dick amusingly swings between determination and frustration. Laura Giddings takes the other female roles.

Christopher Talman is excellent as the aspiring vicar and Dick's sceptical father is played by Ed Burnside, who also appears as the farmer and the village horse!

Ray O'Luby

