



Loach brings "Free World" to The Phoenix

By James Luxford

East Finchley was once again a Mecca for film fans when the renowned and controversial film-maker Ken Loach came to screen his latest work *It's a Free World*, and participate in an audience Q&A afterwards. It's the latest in a long line of events at The Phoenix, backing its claim to be the best single-screen cinema in London.

Loach's engaging film was premiered on Channel 4 earlier this year, and has won three awards at the Venice Film Festival.

The film centres on the world of immigrant labour, and a young woman (played by Kierston Wareing) who sets up a company outsourcing these workers. As the film progresses, she becomes more deeply involved in illegal business decisions, and has to choose between playing by the rules or taking a risk for more money.

It's a very even-handed film: Angie is no tyrant; she's poor herself and sees this risky profession as a way to a more affluent existence for herself and her son.

The making of the film

Loach, who at 71 has the energy and enthusiasm of someone half his age, took the Phoenix audience through

the making of the film, and highlighted some of the issues behind the story. After questions by the host of the evening, the floor was thrown open to the audience who asked a variety of questions on subjects both on screen and off.

The answers gave some insight into the research Loach did for the film. Many of the film's cast had no acting experience and most of the worker extras were real workers from Poland (all paid fairly for their time, he hastened to add). He also briefly touched on his controversial reputation, one that has led to his recent film funding coming mainly from Spain and France, rather than his native Britain.

Following this event, Loach announced that he has become the latest patron of the Phoenix Cinema. He joins a host of well-known personalities who support the venue.

Alien trees must go

By Ann Bronkhorst

Balancing on the steep slope the team dug, swung pickaxes and tugged at tough roots. Eventually they were victorious and the Norway Maple saplings admitted defeat.

Nine or so men and women from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, led by Catherine Price, were tackling one of the tasks that have emerged since Coldfall Wood got its makeover. With more awareness of the wood's fragile ecological balance, invasive species of plants and trees, especially non-native ones, are seen as suspect. Left any longer, the maple saplings would have taken firm hold, shutting out light and affecting slower-growing native species.

The team worked through a December morning, breaking for a brew-up and a chat. We discussed the new bat boxes installed high up in trees bordering the stream (for good flight paths and plenty of insects). I learned what one man puts in his cordon bleu brown bread sarnies for foxes: Marmite and

honey plus a dab of vegetable oil for sleek coats.

Some people were studying subjects like Ecology while others were there just because they enjoy being active outdoors. What this group, and all the other urban BTCV groups do is make a difference to the little bits of wild land surviving in the urban jungle. To know more or to get involved locally, contact Catherine Price on 020 8348 6005 or www.btcv.org.

Veggie aliens and rock boots

By John Lawrence

What happens when you ask children to write their own songs and perform them? The Kaos Signing Choir has the answer.



Children of the Kaos Choir

You may think you'd end up with something somewhere between a nursery rhyme and an R&B pop song. In fact, you get fantastically funny accounts of young life in 2008, all about ditching junk food, finding your hamster dead or wearing your favourite boots to make you feel special.

With titles like *Veggie Aliens With Attitude* and *Build It High*, the upbeat music and cheeky lyrics perfectly capture the way children think, rather than the way adults think they think.

The choir is a mix of deaf and hearing children who sing and sign their self-composed songs. All the songs originate at workshops where the children sit with musicians and boil down their ideas to some snappy two-minute numbers.

Rivron drums up support

On 15 December, scores of choir members and proud parents came together at the

Phoenix Cinema to launch a collection of their best songs on CD and DVD. Comedian and musician Rowland Rivron is one high-profile supporter and plays drums for them.

Introducing the screening, he said: "Welcome to seven of arguably the most annoyingly catchy songs ever recorded." And he wasn't wrong. All the songs are instantly memorable.

It's a joy to watch the choir singing with obvious enjoyment and performing their signing actions with gusto so that the whole stage moves to the beat. Kaos are certainly a far cry from the staid and static image of a traditional choir.

Kaos are winners

Suzy Davies set up The Kaos Organisation 12 years ago and now works with 120 children from all over north London, meeting at St Mary's Junior School in Hornsey and the Blanche Nevile Primary

School in Highgate. They have won the North London Festival of Music and Drama for the last two years.

She said: "It was lovely to see the children's reactions to the film today. We're trying to create a new brand of children's songs. What they produce bridges the gap between *Old MacDonald Had a Farm* and 50 Cent."

To find out more about the Kaos Signing Choir, visit www.thekaos.org.

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Where are they now?

"My grandmother had one of these but she threw it away" is how Maurice Collins describes his forthcoming talk to the Finchley Society.

Among the items he'll be bringing along will be a clock-work burglar alarm, skirt lifters and the first Teasmade. Audience suggestions will be welcome.

Everyone is welcome to the talk at Avenue House, East End Road, on Thursday 31 January at 2.30pm. Entry for non-members is £2.

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