



Review: Pippin

Upstairs at the Gatehouse, Highgate Village

By Jessica Holt

This hugely entertaining production of a 1972 Tony Award-winning show has a cast of talented singers, acrobats and musicians who work beautifully as an ensemble with superb support from all the design elements, especially lighting and costume.

As with many musicals, the plot plays a subservient role – and in this case, there is a rather ludicrous plotline involving the young prince Pippin, played by Lewis Edgar, being the rebellious son of Charlemagne who eventually kills his father and takes on his role as king.

This thankfully doesn't overshadow the sharp script and some truly magical moments. One such is in the first half when Pippin's grandmother, played by Clare Brice, delights the audience with the song No Time at All, a humorous solo giving Pippin advice concerning his quest to find some meaning in his life.

Musicals are at their best when the song reflects perfectly the action on stage. Emily Friberg's beautiful singing as The Leading Player links the many scenarios together and she plays a stereotypical temptress luring Pippin away from what makes life meaningful, leading him to greater disappointments.

The choreography by Amanda Noar, also the director, is outstanding, and it was delightful to see the tributes made to classic musicals such



In search of meaning: The cast of Pippin at Upstairs at the Gatehouse

as Cabaret and Chicago, both in the dance and the music that accompanied it.

Broadway legend Bob Fosse directed and choreographed the original New York production then called Pippin Pippin. He was also responsible for moving the musical's structure away from melodrama to the idea of a troupe of players personifying devilish and angelic attributes to challenge and confuse Pippin.

The first half is too long and the Charlemagne element, in my view, needs adapting to a different father-and-son scenario. But this is a brilliant cast, faultlessly directed, with a brilliant design team whose talent is evident throughout the show. It all adds up to a great night out.

Pippin runs at Upstairs at the Gatehouse, Highgate Village, until Sunday 11 January.

Shadowlands was my father's favourite film

By Ruth Anders

Renowned actor and director Richard Attenborough made the film Shadowlands, about the relationship between the writer C S Lewis and his American wife Joy Davidman, in 1993. Starring Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger, it moved many of the audience to tears when the Phoenix Cinema showed it at the end of November.

However, we were all very quickly cheered by the late director's son, the distinguished theatre director Michael Attenborough CBE, who was interviewed by Phoenix Cinema Trust board member Ed Sayers. Michael was an interviewer's dream, darting off unprompted on a raft of stories about the film, its genius casting, its music by composer George Fenton and the way his father directed it.

Michael told us: "Shadowlands was my dad's favourite film, even more so than Gandhi, and it was very unlike most of those he directed. Ben Kingsley told me that dad's greatest quality as an 'actors' director' was the faith and trust he placed in his actors. Tony Hopkins made five films with dad and always felt hugely supported by him." We heard about the sensitive filming of the final scene in which Lewis and Joy's orphaned son weep together in the attic, and how, knowing he couldn't ask the actors to repeat it, Michael's father used three



Close bond: Michael with his late father Richard Attenborough



Michael Attenborough, left, at the Phoenix with interviewer Ed Sayers. Photo Mike Coles

cameras to cover it all. Richard Attenborough was disappointed that Hopkins failed to be awarded an Oscar for Shadowlands, having to wait until The Remains of the Day a little later to do so.

Michael also stressed the importance of seeing movies on the big screen. "It's a totally different experience," he said, adding: "Imaginative marketing is important, but there's nothing like word of mouth to encourage people to go to the cinema."

Let's hope this word of mouth can bring more north Londoners to the Phoenix, especially younger audience members. The cinema's unique independence allows it to plan its own programming, interviews and events. As a non-profit charity, the Phoenix needs your support, so do keep buying tickets, teas and memberships! For full programme information, visit www.phoenixcinema.co.uk

What's on at the Phoenix in January

By Zalan Pall, general manager

Awards galore! The strongest line-up we had in years, acclaimed films, classics, live theatre, opera and plus many more await you at the Phoenix Cinema in January.

In Marty Supreme, from Friday 2 January, Timothée Chalamet is a young man with a dream no one respects, who goes to hell and back in pursuit of greatness.

Deftly exploring the uneasy tension between artistic expression and personal connection, Sentimental Value, also from Friday 2 January, is a bracingly mature work from writer-director Joachim Trier that's marvellously acted across the board.

Breaking hearts and mending them in one fell swoop, Hamnet, from Friday 9 January, speculates on the inspiration behind Shakespeare's masterpiece with palpable emotional force thanks to Jessie Buckley and Paul Mescal's astonishing performances.

H is for Hawk, from Friday 23 January, follows Helen (Claire Foy), who, after the sudden death of her father (Brendan Gleeson), loses herself in the memories of their time birding and exploring the natural world together and turns to the ancient art of falconry, training a wild goshawk named Mabel to navigate her profound loss. Seamlessly recreating the newwave classics Breathless, one of cinema's most



groundbreaking productions, comedy drama Nouvelle Vague, from Friday 30 January, doesn't reinvent the medium the way its subjects did, but it pays tribute to their accomplishment with infectious admiration.

For lovers of the screen arts, we will have Met Opera's I Puritani on Saturday 10 January, RBO's La Traviata on Wednesday 14 January, and NT Live's The Fifth Step on Monday 19 January and Hamlet on Thursday 22 January.

We also carry on showing classic films this month with Woody Allen's Manhattan on Sunday 18 January, A Streetcar Named Desire on Sunday 25 January and the aforementioned Breathless on Sunday 1 February. For details on times and to book, go to www.phoenixcinema.co.uk or call in at our box office.



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