



Girl power: The cast of Malory Towers at Alexandra Palace Theatre

Review: Malory Towers Alexandra Palace Theatre

By Jessica Holt

Alexandra Palace Theatre was packed with families for this highly praised production, adapted and directed by Emma Rice. Her enthusiasm for Enid Blyton's story stems from a heartfelt appreciation for what boarding schools achieved for young girls, one of whom was her own mother who attended Lord Digby's.

She has said: "And when I see my Mum, born into the poorest of rural backgrounds, enjoying George Elliot... and journeying to the Tate Britain to see the latest exhibition I am stopped in my tracks." Emma Rice calls the show her "happy Lord of the Flies".

However, the story set in 1947 has difficult moments for the characters, who are rather stereotypical but who clearly demonstrate to the audience their individual problems and insecurities. One is shy and unable to speak truthfully, one is a bully, while another is posh and feels she should really be in a Swiss finishing school. There is plenty of action as

the girls leave their bedroom to swim (yes, Malory Towers is on the coast) and the use of puppetry at this point is very amusing. However, when someone is nearly drowned the tension between the girls becomes toxic. The storm and the cliff-hanger just before the interval are played out with exciting visuals and sound effects.

The set was simple and flexible, moving easily from train station to assembly hall to dormitory. The lighting was colourful and the projections worked to create silhouettes, clifftops, and other landscapes which enthralled the audience. The production is well supported by the musical ability

of the company and the songs which provide a wonderful variety of genres, some Swing, some Jazz, some Gospel, all enjoyed by the audience. The company also provided us with more songs during the interval. Their energy and commitment to this production was a crowd-pleaser. And to top it all Sheila Hancock was the voice of Miss Grayling, the headmistress whose words inspired so many young girls.

This heart-warming production, though rather sentimental at times, has a really important message for young girls and women today which accounts for so many mothers with their daughters in the audience.

Bravery of resistance

By Lynn Winton

There's an exciting new drama at The Park Theatre in Finsbury Park this month. Titled *Holy Fool*, it explores the life of brilliant Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich, who walked a perilous tightrope under Stalin's brutal regime.

Interspersed with his divine music, it's the latest theatre project for Graham and Townley Productions. Comprised of actor and drama coach Hat Townley and retired GP and seasoned producer Stephen Graham, both living in East Finchley, they describe *Holy Fool* as a "darkly witty exploration

of the absurdity of tyranny and the bravery of resistance". It's playing until Saturday 10 October and at the time of going to press some dates were already sold out. You can buy your tickets at parktheatre.co.uk and see if you concur with our theatre reviewer Jessica Rose in next month's edition.



Drama duo: Stephen Graham and Hat Townley

What's on at the Phoenix

By Zalan Pall, general manager

A WW2 drama, a French coming-of-age story, a beloved period classic, special Q&As, live theatre and opera plus many more await you at the Phoenix in September.

In the tense 72 hours before D-Day, and with the fate of the free world hanging in the balance, *Pressure* (Wednesday 9 September) follows General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Captain James Stagg as they face an impossible choice: launch the largest and most dangerous seaborne invasion in history or risk losing the war altogether.

Just an Illusion (Friday 11 September) takes place in 1985 suburban Paris where 12-year-old Vincent lives with his distant older brother and quarrelling parents. Amid laughter and unease, he navigates friendship and first love, while beginning to confront the adult world.

From Friday 25 September comes an irresistible new take on Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*: a charming, witty, and deeply relatable story of love and sisterhood starring Daisy Edgar-Jones and Esmé Creed-Miles.

Classic screenings this month are Japanese Film Club: *Shall We Dance* (Saturday 12 September) and Tarkovsky's last film *The Sacrifice* (Sunday 13 September). For lovers of the screen arts, we will screen *EoS: James McNeill Whistler* (Tuesday 15 September), *MET OPERA: Twenty Years of the Met* (Saturday 19 September), and *NTLIVE: The Misanthrope* (Tuesday 22 September). We are also hosting a few Q&As this month: *A Bigger Splash*



on Sunday 20 September and *Gentle, Angry Women* on Sunday 27 September.

And the Phoenix invites you to an exclusive one-off screening of *Playing the Changes - Tracking Darius Brubeck* screens on Monday 21 September, telling the story of the son of legendary jazz musician Dave Brubeck, who built on his father's legacy as a jazz ambassador and overcame formidable challenges to inaugurate jazz education in apartheid South Africa.

The screening will be followed by an exclusive, live discussion with Darius Brubeck, director Michiel ten Kleij and film critic Mark Kermode, making it a great opportunity to discover behind-the-scenes secrets and ask questions of the film makers. This highly anticipated screening offers local audiences a rare, deeply moving glimpse into a musical revolution that defied political borders.

Find out more at www.phoenixcinema.co.uk or visit the cinema box office in the High Road.

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