



# NEWSLETTER C-8

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## Welcome to 2021

It was tremendous to hold our first virtual Members' meeting on Zoom just before Christmas and we hope we will be able to entice more of you to join us when we hold our next one at some stage in this new year. As I write, the country's third lockdown is well under way, and it does rather look as though things may get worse before they get better. At least the vaccine programme is up and



running, and it was one of the highlights at our meeting that some Members could announce their imminent first job as an early Christmas present!

However, the present confinement is another knock on the head for any planned cinema-going any of us might have had for these next few weeks. It was interesting to hear from Members at the meeting that whilst most had not visited a cinema in those brief periods when it was possible to do so, one Member, Pam, commented that she had attended a screening of **The Secret Garden** and had been alone in the 200-seater auditorium! And in an article in a recent edition of the Grauniad, a Herefordshire cinemagoer commented "I went to London a

few weeks ago, met up with a friend for brunch and then popped into a cinema to watch **Hope Gap**. We were an audience of two. Weird, and sad." Other Members said there had been a dearth of good quality films available to the public, perhaps partly as a result of the pandemic, so they had not seen anything in cinemas for a long time.



## Whither (Wither?) Cinema in 2021?

And now, of course, the major issue that is troubling cinema managers and organisers of film societies like the Phoenix across the country as they try to plan for the future is how the covid virus pandemic is affecting the cinema and film industries in general, and thus their own customers or members. As more and more people (are forced to) watch movies at home, either on terrestrial/satellite television channels, or on DVD/Bluray or by streaming, one must ask whether or not there is a future for cinemas as we have known and loved them for well over a century, or whether seeing films in the future will not be something involving

"congregational viewing" as two of our Council members Adrian and Andrew have called it. Are the days of the silver, oh, alright then, the multi-coloured screen, with key



terms like Panavision, Technicolor, Cinerama, 3-D, Dolby Atmos, b&w (!), IMAX, stop-motion and so on, a thing of the past? Are we all destined to watch films on a tablet or, worse still, a smartphone, where the only possibility of congregational watching is probably the anonymity of the 7.59 commuter train to nowhere? The Phoenix Council has debated these issues long and hard at our recent virtual meetings, often with much sadness that the

small-screen phenomenon has become very common, particularly amongst younger film watchers, and that big-screen venues like Harbour Lights and other chain commercial cinemas have all but gone to the wall. The subject of small-screen viewing came up at our recent online Members' meeting, when our new UF manager, Liam MacDonald, said that although he far prefers seeing films on the big screen, more often than not student penury means he does watch things on a small screen, because he has no television! Meanwhile, another of our Members, Frank Green, said at the same meeting "In our household, the youngest member of the family only ever watches things on a small screen - so on a laptop or whatever, and in fact all her friends, who are probably very much the same age as Liam, that's the only way they tend to watch films. To go to the cinema is a very rare experience and usually only when we go as a family."

However, without any doubt, part of the Phoenix Council's "We'll be back" thinking includes our belief that cinema *will* survive as a congregational viewing experience, and this seems to be a view shared by esteemed critic Mark Kermode. The BBC and Guardian film correspondent closed his wonderful Review of the Cinema Year 2020 on the BBC World Service with the following words:



"As I've been saying for years, simultaneous releasing is the future, whether you like it or not, and we're increasingly moving to a situation where audiences will be able to decide where and how they watch movies whether it's on a phone, a computer screen, a TV or up there on the big screen. Now personally I think the cinema experience is profound and important enough to survive this change, and, like many people I know, that I get something from seeing a movie in a movie theatre that I cannot get at home. And nothing can ever replace that thrill of sitting in a darkened auditorium watching a movie in the best possible environment, so yes, the world is changing, but cinema is forever. Let's leave

things on a high note with **Bill and Ted Face the Music**, a belated threequel that put a smile on my face in the midst of the darkness of 2020. In the US the film was released simultaneously in theatres and on demand whereas in the UK it was in cinemas only with digital coming later. Having watched it on both big and small screens all I can tell you is that I grinned like an idiot from start to finish in both formats and testing times like these, that's a real treat!"

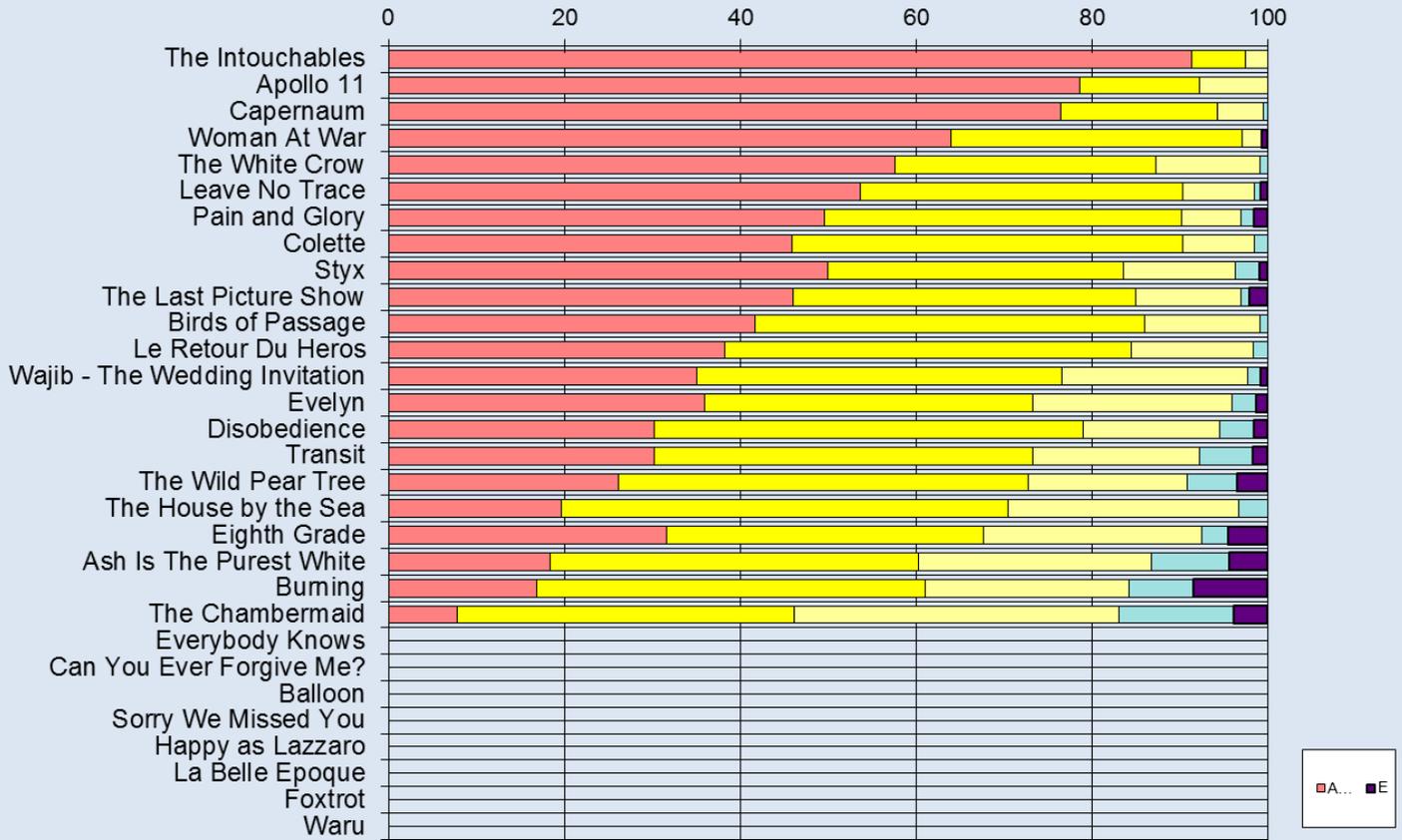


Mark Kermode (catch his Review on BBC iPlayer) remains steadfastly positive in such a refreshing way, and we on the Phoenix Council continue to share that optimism as this new year begins. The article in the Guardian mentioned earlier, '**Cinema brings hope in a way laptops cannot: what readers miss most about the movies.** is worth reading since it looks hard at what folks feel they have lost film-wise over the past ten months, and the readers' comments offer a wide range of opinions on the state of watching films in 2021. You can find the piece at <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/oct/13/what-readers-miss-most-about-the-cinema>

And of course, along with Mark K's optimistic thoughts, it is worth remembering in any case, that Phoenixes always return!

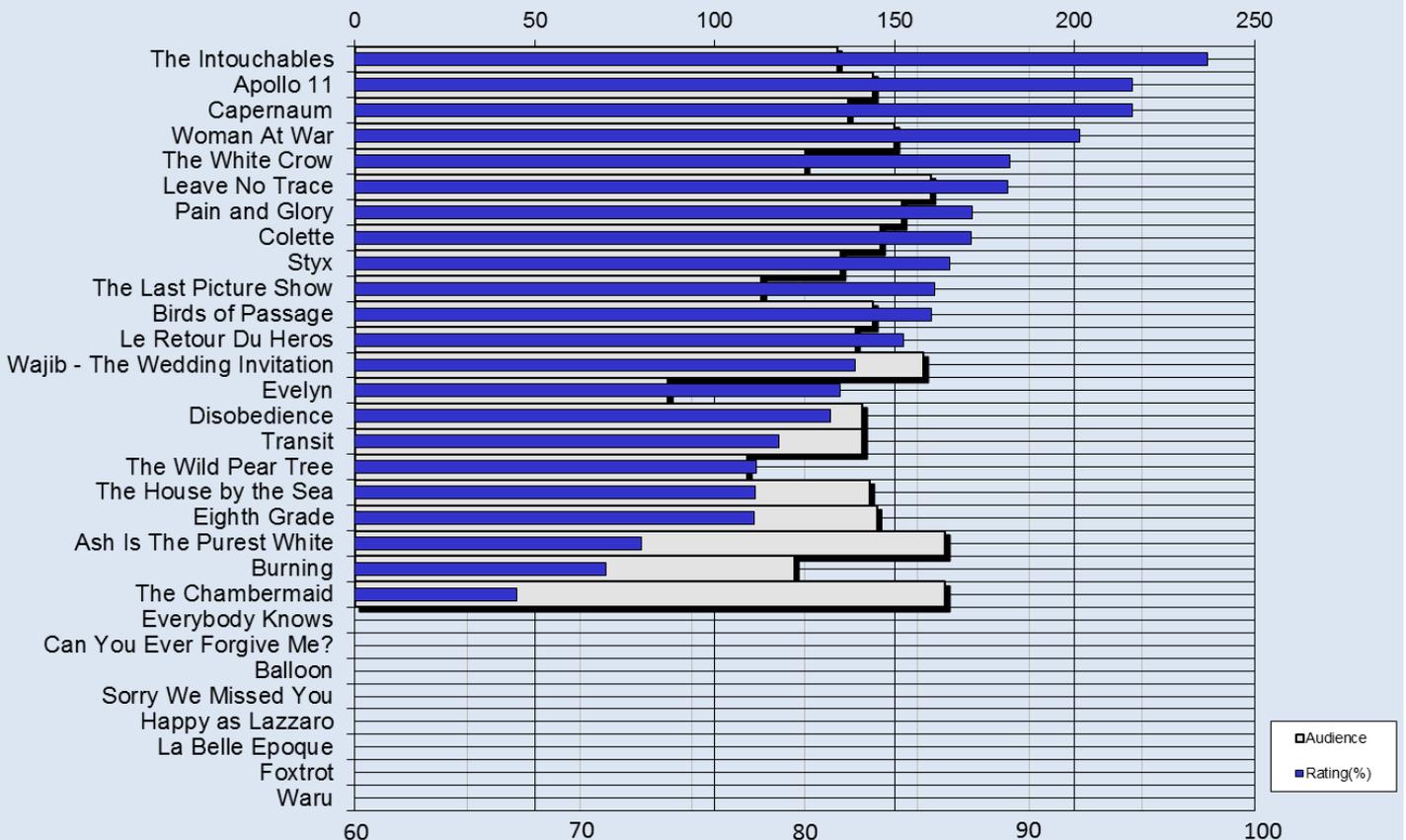
## Voting Profile 2019/20

Normalised vote



## Audience Rating 2019/20

Audience



Watching our films nigh on a year ago may seem distant, but at least we can show you the statistics of how you voted during our 2019-2020 season, and our updated 1999-2020 catalogue of films is now on our website.

## Holiday time?

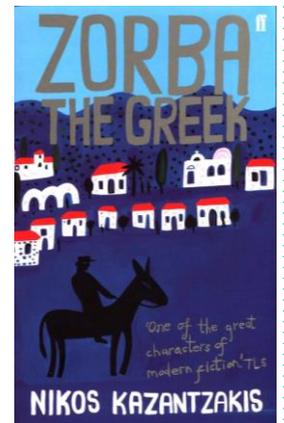
The post-Christmas/early new year period is usually the time when our thoughts turn to holidays – where shall we go next Summer? – and television ads abound extolling the joys of here, there and almost everywhere. Perhaps it will be more difficult to plan for 2021, although with covid vaccines being rolled out with, we hope, increasing rapidity, maybe it will be possible to get away eventually. Where we may be able and permitted to travel to remains unclear, but presently, perhaps there is no harm in dreaming!

Three years ago, I had the great fortune to visit Thessaloniki with a tour group called The Greek Project (GP). For me, it was primarily a visit exploring that city and its surrounding area, and its homeland's Holocaust experiences, particularly in the years 1941-44. Whilst I was there, in my exploratory downtime, I visited the excellent Cinema Museum beautifully located on the quayside. Where once fishing boats and inter-island ferries docked, now one of the warehouses has been imaginatively converted to display a history of Cinema and Film in Greece.



That history is rich and thriving, and goes back as far as those first

days when folks saw moving pictures on the big screen, in the case of Athens in 1897. Greek Cinema was born in 1906 when the Manakis brothers started recording in Macedonia and the first commercially successful Greek film was **Villar in the Women's Baths of Faliro (Ο Βιλλάρ στα γυναικεία λουτρά του Φαλήρου)** (1922). Some of the names with which you may be familiar include Melina Mercouri (1920-1994, **Never On a Sunday (Ποτέ την Κυριακή)** (1960), **Τορκαπι** (1964)), Irene Papas (1926-, **The Guns of Navarone** (1961), **Chronicle of a Death Foretold** (1987)), and more recently Yorgos Lanthimos, and of course there is that fellow named Alexis Zorba. Michael Cacoyannis' 1964 film, **Zorba the Greek**, which starred Anthony Quinn and indeed Irene Papas, was based on the novel of the same name by author Nikos Kazantzakis. It was a major international commercial success, and was nominated for the Academy Awards for Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Film. Other important films during this period include **Antigone** (1961) and **Electra** (1962), both of which starred Irene Papas, **The Red Lanterns (Τα κόκκινα φανάρια)** (1963) by director Vasilis Georgiadis, and **Lieutenant Natassa (Υπολοχαγός Νατάσα)** (1970), which starred the "Greek Brigitte Bardot," Aiki Vougiouklaki. In 1969, the Costa-Gavras film **Z** was another big worldwide box-office success, and was nominated for the Academy Award for both Best Foreign Language Film and Best Picture. Latterly, Yorgos Lanthimos has hit screens across the world with very successful titles such as **Dogtooth (Κυνόδοντας)** (2009), **The Lobster (Ο αστακός)** (2015, 68% audience vote), **The Killing of a Sacred Deer (Ο θάνατος του ιερού ελαφιού)** (2017), and **The Favourite** (2018), and from 2016 we screened Athina Rachel Tsangari's **Chevalier**, though to a rather disappointing 50% audience vote score!



The Thessaloniki International Film Festival was first held in 1960, and would subsequently evolve into the primary showcase for emerging filmmakers from Greece and the Balkans region. The festival showcases both international and Greek films, and awards the "Golden Alexander" for the best feature film.

With my film-lover's hat on, I spoke with one of the GP organisers, Mark Levene. Mark is a former lecturer at the UoS, and I suggested to him that it might be interesting to set up a film-related visit to the city. In Newsletter 14 (May 2018, during our 2017-18 season), I wrote about the annual Film Festival held there every November, and guess what, the Greek Project has now organised a proposed visit to explore the cinema heritage of Greece and its second city - [Salonika at the Pictures: a weekend of Greek film](#).

The trip is scheduled for October 27-31 2021 (though like so many travel events subject to possible change), and it will include exploration of the city's history, its culture (particularly film-related) and its gastronomic delights. It will be an absorbing few days in a wonderfully vibrant Greek city, and full details are available on the Greek Project website where you can sign up for more information <https://www.greekproject.co.uk/project/salonika-at-the-pictures/>