



NEWSLETTER C-16

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union**films**

Equine reveries in Monmouth (or How the Snowdonia midges got me).

The Savoy Theatre, Monmouth



The Savoy has been part of Monmouth civic infrastructure since cinema began. It is a theatre in the heart of the town owned by a trust whose objective is to use it for community benefit. I first visited it well over 10 years ago to explore how its cinema mission was working. Indeed, we nearly sold one of our 35mm projectors to them as a result. At the time we were looking at any candidates that could make best use of our two 35mm projectors as we'd sensed the inevitable move to digital.

I had spent a few days walking in Snowdonia, thoroughly enjoying my exertions in such magnificent scenery in spite of the pesky insects buzzing all around me. Then, the friend in Monmouth I was visiting on the way back from those wonderful mountains suggested, 'How about we book for "Dream Horse" at the Savoy?'. So thirsty I was for visiting

any cinema, I immediately said, 'Yes'. It was perfect: a Welsh film in Wales, yet my wishing to see that particular film was not without a Phoenix purpose. Some may remember that we showed the documentary, 'Dark Horse' (91%), on which this feature film is based.

We arrived close to showtime so, given the 'social distancing' that needed to be maintained, seating was at the back, right corner of the auditorium. Not a location I'd choose for the best audio. The local audience reaction was, as one might expect, very positive! As a member of The Phoenix film selection committee, I found myself scratching my head about whether or not we'll be programming it, but it certainly qualifies as a "world cinema" title!

Both the Phoenix 35mm projectors - as a complete cinema installation - rightly went elsewhere. Like Union Films, with The Phoenix as its world cinema strand, the Savoy is now digital because you simply had to be. However, I fear the auditorium set-up standards are not what they used to be in the 'old days'. I remember attending the venue check-up we regularly got from our cinema engineer when we were at Boldrewood with Jim McWilliams in



charge. The audio performance in The Savoy was definitely substandard and wouldn't have passed those 'Dolby' tests. Here at The Phoenix I'm 'on duty' - I endeavour with Union Films to ensure picture and audio performance are the best they can be.

But it was really good to be at a community cinema that was fighting to fulfill its mission - and succeeding, as we want to do too. Details about the cinema can be found at <https://monmouth-savoy.co.uk/>

Unfortunately, later in the week I found myself scratching my ankles. Maybe the bites I got were from those varmints in Snowdonia? Not sure.

Adrian

THE PHOENIX IS BACK

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We hope that by now, you will have read our MailChimp email sent to you at the weekend about the long-awaited **return to our Wednesday screenings on October 13th at 8 o'clock**. We also sent the information about our return by snail-mail, which we hope has popped through your letterbox by now. And in the wake of one or the other of those, we also hope that you have taken advantage already of our Early Bird offer that includes membership renewal discounts for **2019/20 Full and Associate Members**.

Both communications included the provisional line-up of the Best of World Cinema for our Autumn programme, which is now pretty well a confirmed list of nine titles. If fewer countries are actually represented in the list, that is primarily because of the dearth of high-quality new foreign language releases during the pandemic. Nevertheless, we are hoping that as we work on the programme for our Spring and Summer seasons, a wider range, globally speaking, will become available to us for consideration, and already we are looking at the possibility of booking **Druk (Another Round)** (Denmark), **Qi Qui (Balloon)** (Tibet), **The Perfect Candidate** (Saudi Arabia), **Héraðið (The County)** (Iceland) amongst other recent new releases. We hope to publish the full two term programme later in the Autumn. You will be delighted to know that we hope to link our screening of **Mr. Jones** on December 1st with our usual visit from the local Amnesty International group to mark International Human Rights Day (December 10th) and we are working also to arrange our traditional Christmas celebration after our feel-good last film of the season **The Farewell** on December 8th.

So, if you haven't already done so, check your post or go to the website and do the necessary to renew your membership – after so many movie-less Wednesday evenings we are looking forward to seeing you all on October 13th.

13 Oct NOMADLAND Dir: Chloé Zhao USA 2020 107 mins 12A Lang: Eng

Frances McDormand plays a widow taking to itinerant van life after a mine closure deprives her of a livelihood. A must-see, multi-award-laden film.

20 Oct LA BELLE ÉPOQUE Dir: Nicolas Bedos France 2019 115 mins 15 Lang: Fr

Daniel Auteuil's marriage to Marianne (Fanny Ardant) is on the rocks, so given the chance to revisit the historical era of his choice, he chooses the memorable week of 40 years ago when they first met. A witty, sexy and original rom-com.

27 Oct THE FATHER Dir: Florian Zeller UK/Fr 2020 97 mins 12A Lang: Eng

Anthony Hopkins and Olivia Colman star in this powerful study of memory loss in old age. Hopkins's performance (best actor Oscar) is unforgettably stunning.

3 Nov SORRY WE MISSED YOU Dir: Ken Loach UK/Fr/Bel 2019 100 mins 15 Lang: Eng

A Newcastle building worker loses his job after the 2008 economic meltdown and his subsequent encounter with Britain's zero-hours service economy has devastating effects. An angry, gut-wrenching political punch to the solar plexus of modern Britain.

10 Nov PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE Dir: Céline Sciamma France 2019 122 mins 15 Lang: Fr/It

A gorgeous slow-burn romance which won best screenplay at Cannes. Set on a Brittany island at the end of the 18th century, a female painter is obliged to paint a wedding portrait.

17 Nov ROCKS Dir: Sarah Gavron UK 2019 93 mins 12A Lang: Eng

The heart-breaking but life-affirming story of 15 year-old Shola, who seeks to avoid being taken into care by fending for herself and her younger brother. Vibrant, gritty but optimistic.

24 Nov AMMONITE Dir: Francis Lee UK 2020 120 mins 15 Lang: Eng

Fossil hunter Mary Anning (Kate Winslet) and a young woman sent to convalesce by the sea (Saoirse Ronan) find forbidden love in 1840s Lyme Regis.

1 Dec MR JONES Dir: Agnieszka Holland Poland/UK 2019 141 mins 15 Lang: Eng/Ukr/Rus

James Norton plays the Welsh journalist who uncovered Stalin's genocidal famine in Ukraine in the 1930s. A sweepingly bold, heart-felt film to mark Human Rights Day (10 Dec).

8 Dec THE FAREWELL Dir: Lulu Wang USA 2019 98 mins 12A Lang: Eng/Mand

A Chinese family discovers their grandmother has only a short while left to live and decides to schedule a swift wedding. A human feelgood movie for Christmas.

The New European: A Top 50 European films list

A while ago two of our long-time loyal Members, Diana and Clive Barnes sent us an article from the *New European* (July 1-7, 2021) listing the 50 Greatest European Films, as compiled by Jason Solomons. Reading it as a post-Brexit list was fascinating, and although with any such list one should accept the subjectivity of choice involved in such a piece, something admitted by the author, at least Mr. Solomons avoided simply choosing endless Truffauts, Hanekes, Almodóvars, etc. and spread the selection across the whole of Europe. Indeed, a couple of the films listed, **Cabaret** (set in 1930s Germany) and the **Before ...** trilogy from Richard Linklater (Vienna-, Paris- and Greece-based stories) went beyond EU boundaries, being US titles, but the Euro theme in those films is as strong as in all the other titles, which *were* made by European directors. Mr. Solomons ranges from France to Turkey, from the Scandi nations to Greece, covering lots of diverse locations in between. Furthermore, he points out that the three top storyline themes in his fifty are war, post-colonial legacies, and, loosely, globalisation and its effects on the continent. Furthermore, although the earliest film listed is Georges Méliès' 1902 short **Le Voyage dans la lune (A Trip to the Moon)** most titles in the list date from the '60s onwards.



The thing that intrigued me was to see how many of these classic movies listed have been screened at the Phoenix (perhaps in a sort of "didn't we do well" self-congratulatory way!). You will know that Adrian has compiled a wonderful catalogue of films that the Phoenix has screened since 2000 with audience vote figures for each one (see our website if you do not know of this) and it was pleasing to see that since that year, we have shown at least 30 of the 50 films listed, including **120 battements par minute (120 BPM (Beats per Minute))** the AIDS-era story from Robin Campillo, Fra, 2017 (75%), **Mustang** from Deniz Gamze Ergüven, Turk, 2015 (89%), **Le Gamin au vélo (The Kid with a Bike)** by the Dardenne brothers, Belg, 2011(82%), **Zimna wojna (Cold War)** in black and white, Pawel Pawlikowski, Pol, 2018 (88%), and Solomon's number one title **Un Prophète (A Prophet)** the powerful piece by Jacques Audiard, Fra, 2009 (80%). Whilst none of these films topped our own audience votes, the numbers shown indicate that you might well have included them in your own similar top 50 eurofilms list, and some of the other Phoenix-screened films scored more highly. Furthermore, of the movies listed we did not present, most were in our annual film selection list of probables that did not quite make the cut. Those even include Asif Kapadia's documentary **Maradona**,



which was mysteriously rejected by the hand of god at our 2019 selection meeting. Prior to this millennium, our record is more difficult to assess, with fewer documents available to us in the way of archive records of our programmes. Looking at my own limited collection of past SFT brochures (all in good old b&w!!) I could see other classic films that would probably have been also-rans for the list, and in many ways this reinforced my thinking that such hall of fame could easily run into hundreds of titles. There was inevitably a backlash to the article in a later edition of the paper's "Letters to the editor" page, most of which commented on the subjectivity aspect, all the while those writers adding their own (equally subjective) suggestions. These included Jules Dassin's 1955 **Rififi** (87%), another Pawlikowski title, 2013's **Ida** (85%), and Polanski's outstanding 2002 film **The Pianist** (94%), as well as **La Grande Illusion** (Jean Renoir, Fra, 1937) and **Cinema Paradiso** (Giuseppe Tornatore, It, 1988) which I am certain we screened at some stage in the past. One title raised by a correspondent that intrigued me was **13 Tzameti**, a Hungarian film directed by Géla Babluani from 2005. Likened in style and content to David Fincher's 1999 **Fight Club**, I do wonder if this is one that got away or simply wasn't widely distributed in the U.K. at the time? Anyway, that was a best of Euro-cinema, that was. The question now is, do British directors still belong in such a list?

