



NEWSLETTER C-5

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Walkout films

Have you ever walked out of a film for any reason? Of course, we would like to think that every Phoenix screening will hold everyone's interest to the end, but we accept that reality doesn't work like that. As you will be aware, John is the one who sees any Phoenix early leavers and discovers a variety of reasons for such an action at a Phoenix presentation. It may be easier to exit early from a commercial venue's screening, but wait, either way there is always that faint possibility that the movie will turn itself around sooner or later and you've missed out on a future classic or cult movie. Perhaps much depends on whether you are a glass half empty person, in which case you just cannot see any reason to grit it out to the closing credits, or, with your glass half full, you are determined to catch those credits in case the director throws a curveball into the field. We asked some of our Members as well as our Council members about their own "walkout" experiences ...

Stephen Edwards: I can't think of the last cinema film I walked out of, or even if I ever have. I have walked out a play though - it was an Edinburgh festival 2 hander version of Becket that was being performed at the (late, lamented) Nuffield. As it was mumblecore central, I left at the interval - clearly the performers were not used to a large auditorium. I have usually chosen to see films in the cinema because I definitely want to see them, or I have read a good review, or it is a Phoenix film that I am willing to give the benefit of the doubt. I can't think of too many Phoenix films that were a mistake to show - one that was, the weird and unpleasant SF movie **District 9**, I managed to stay put in my seat. Films on TV are a different matter though - sometimes I choose something different just to try it out and may or may not stay with it. As I am currently in France, and French TV is pretty poor when compared to the UK (for the moment - just you wait until the Tory right manage to abolish the licence fee), I am usually reduced to watching, if anything, the *Arte* channel. They have had some good stuff in the last couple of months including an absolute cracker of a classic, **Le Président** (1961) starring Jean Gabin. Watching it with the French subtitles turned on, I managed to make out most of it and it turned out to be highly relevant to Brexit, being about how French entry to an early form of the EEC was prevented by Gabin's unscrupulous rival. If it were available with English subtitles, I think the Phoenix should show it. However, this last week, *Arte* had a 2013 Canadian film directed by Denis Villeneuve called **Enemy**. Christine and I decided to give it a go (vaguely recalling half decent reviews a few years back), but I ended up wishing we hadn't. It was a stupid story about doppelgangers and stalking, with pretentious direction, pseudly meaningless dialogue, and pretty rubbish acting (including Jake Gyllenhaal). We did not turn it off but ... I read my book instead, and Christine said at the end, "My God, that was terrible". Oh for BBC2 or BBC4 or the Phoenix ... Luckily we do have a great local French art-house picture house, the Cinema Eden, the oldest cinema in the world, and their programming is wonderful, though with the present *couvre-feu* in our area, screenings there are time limited, grrr!



Margaret Chiari (long-time loyal Member): I was interested in your request for information about films people have walked out of, in particular for my own experience in this regard. Two films came to mind immediately. The first film I walked out of was **In the Heat of the Night** (1967), starring Rod Steiger and Sydney Poitier. The setting is a small town in Mississippi where a murder investigation is taking place.

The film was probably being shown in a cinema in Paris, on the Left Bank I would say, and I was living and working in Paris at the time. I was completely gripped from the moment the film started and bit by bit an ominous atmosphere was built up, in which it became clear that racism was to play a large part. As the tension grew, I became increasingly uncomfortable. Sydney Poitier was playing a black policeman from out of town, and Rod Steiger a white policeman in the town. I could sense that Rod Steiger was going to be put under pressure by powerful town politicians to entrap Poitier or worse; I seem to remember Rod Steiger walking through something like a cornfield, gun in hand looking for someone he was going to be pressured to kill, most likely the Poitier character. At that point, I left the cinema. I couldn't bear the thought of what was to come and the explosion of the tension so skilfully created by the director. I was afraid, but also horrified to recognise to what depths 'bad' men can descend. I had to leave because I couldn't watch that badness happen.





The second film I walked out of was **The Shining** (1980). This was my first - and probably last - horror film. I was living in Beirut, Lebanon at the time, and friends persuaded me that it would be a good idea to go in a group to see this film which was just premiering - I agreed. There were several good cinemas at that time in West Beirut, large, comfortable, and up to date. I can't remember the cinema's name but I can remember the cinema's layout very well. The cinema was very slightly subterranean. After leaving the foyer, there were a number of steps to go down, which led directly into the cinema. There was a large, wide seating area with an aisle at each side, which meant the rows of seats were very long. We took our seats in the middle of a row. I was feeling a little nervous in advance and tried to ask my neighbour what the film was about, in order to reassure myself. Then the lights went down and the publicity films began.

Just as the main film started, there was a loud noise from the back of the cinema and a number of ceiling tiles crashed to the floor. At the time, the civil war was not yet over and there was a general feeling that anything could happen at any time - so everyone reacted and turned round to look, reassuring themselves by talking to their neighbour, and settling down when it was clear there were no armed men involved.

This incident left me on edge however, sitting as I was in the middle of a long row of people. How would I get out if I had to? The film began in this already heightened climate of tension. The hotel was vast, cold and eerie. Jack Nicholson gradually revealed his obsession; ghostly things began to happen; the sense that all was not well installed itself. I cracked at the point where Nicholson's character began to reveal his undeniable madness as he pursued his wife around the deserted building.

As he hacked at the door which sheltered her, I had to go. In this case it was the sense of how horrible the next part of the narrative might be. Again, the director (Stanley Kubrick) had cunningly escalated the tension after a slow build-up during which he had almost played with the spectator. This time it was fear of what I might see (blood and gore!) which made me leave, as well as a claustrophobic feeling of being unable to escape if I didn't leave at that moment.

Andrew Jackman: I recall having walked out of maybe a couple of Phoenix films over the last 14 years of my Membership (and I have certainly fallen asleep during many TV films over the decades), but my mind just forgets the names. One such Phoenix film was an unbearably long Mexican movie that lasted for some three plus hours if memory serves me right. I managed an hour of this excruciating piece of cinema and felt another two plus hours was too big a price to pay. I also recall I wasn't feeling that well on that evening, not just because of the film. You may be able to put a name to that particular offering, but please, oh please, don't make me watch it again.



Our researches suggest that of the few Mexican films we have screened in the past two decades, Andrew's walkout may have occurred when we showed **Arráncame la vida** or the black and white rarity **Macario** as part of Mexico Week in 2012 and 2015 respectively. Both films were our contributions to the University's Mexico Week and scored 84% in the audience vote. However, neither film is 3 hours long, whereas **Amores Perros**, back in 2001 could be the culprit at over two and a half hours in length. Of course, many of our Members might say that the most likely candidate for Andrew's negative response was Buñuel's **El Angel Exterminador** (aka **The Exterminating Angel**) screened for the *Semana mexicana* celebrations in 2017, which scored a measly 62% and received a lot of E votes and plenty of scathing comments!

Mike Smears (long-time loyal Member): When I was studying literature fifty years ago, I learnt that there is no contradiction between thinking a book is good and not liking it; so, I regard Jane Austen as a truly great author, but I do not enjoy her novels nor do I ever read them. This applies to films too, and in my case there was a Phoenix screening recently which I would gladly have escaped from, but for one difficult and inconvenient problem.

Eighth Grade is, in my opinion, a very well-made film, with excellent direction and superb acting. It captures the spirit, mannerisms, attitudes and agonies of an adolescent's insecurity about her friendships, public persona, relationships, and attractiveness. The self-conscious uncertainty in her self-shot videos is absolutely true to life. Every detail in the film is consistent with its intention and nothing is irrelevant.

And the film drove me insane, inducing a frantic desire to get out of the auditorium and breathe fresh air!

Why? Because coming-of-age films prompt me to respond "Thank you for sharing that with me, and now you've grown up, let's have some interesting and adult conversation." We all have had some experience of teenage angst, either of our own or of friends, and I had my share. I really, really don't want to have any more, especially not at the snail's pace of this particular film.





However, and herein lies the problem, in reality, I couldn't walk out because I was seated in the middle of a row of 17 people (I counted), several places away from my wife, and it was just too inconvenient to exit. So I sat, I sighed, and I suffered ... and I dreamed of summer holidays. End of Part One – don't miss next month's walkouts!

But never mind walking out, can you actually get into a cinema presently?

At our most recent zoom Council meeting John told us that he had been to various cinemas in the general area, both here in Southampton, and further afield to Poole and Winchester. HARBOUR LIGHTS screening of **St. Maud** - it was their "surprise film" not long before it was closed as part of Cineworld's shutdown (HL and all PictureHouses across the country are part of the Cineworld empire) - had 51 customers viewing the film, whilst at the ShowCase cinema (still open at the time of writing) he estimated a few more than fifty were sitting with him (socially distanced, of course) for their presentation of **Rocks**. Otherwise, sadly, audience numbers have been low, often in single figures. But now read on for a fuller view of what is on where, or not ... Not wishing to leave you in any way uninformed about local cinema-going possibilities, we asked John to provide a rundown of what venues in the area are showing films and how they are faring presently. Here is his summary, well, gazetteer really, as his list goes quite a way west-, north- and eastwards from our own Cinema venue! and you possibly didn't know of all these film venues in the region.



The Tivoli, Wimborne - showing Wednesdays to Saturdays.

The Rex, Wareham – closed.

Odeon, Bournemouth - open 10 screens of the usual type of Odeon films.

The Regal, Fordingbridge - occasional films. Membership Club with £12.50 seats for non-members if not sold out. Mostly Odeon type material.

The Regent, Christchurch - open from mid-November with catch-up of current popular films, but with some London Film Festival films programmed in December.

The Malt (Community Centre), Lymington – closed.

Showcase, Southampton - open, with current releases plus single showings of oddities which might interest Phoenix Members. Oldies (that's films, not customers!) for £5.

Odeon, Southampton - mostly current releases, but with an occasional single showing of something out of the ordinary. Offering Members' choice of classic oldies for £5, e.g. Alien, Rocky 4.

Harbour Lights, Southampton – closed.

Vue, Eastleigh - current popular releases for £4.99 online, £1 extra at the venue.

Everyman, Winchester - current releases including some movies not showing in Southampton. The bad news is seats are £13.50 (£14.50 Premium). The better news is that Monday to Wednesday the price includes a free pizza and glass of wine or beer.



Odeon, Andover - Wednesdays to Sundays only. The usual Odeon material.

The Point, Eastleigh and The Berry, Hedge End - both have no films at present, but are planning live events following a cash handout from the government, so worth keeping an eye out for their return. Not strong on arthouse, but useful to catch up with filmed plays, operas and ballets if you miss their first run in Southampton.

Cineworld, Whiteley – closed.

The Reel, Fareham - mostly current releases, but cheap, with an occasional oddity. Unfortunately generally not of the highest quality, though they were the only cinema within 30 miles to show The Irishman. At present, tickets £2.50 before 1p.m., £3.50 after.

Vue, Portsmouth - all current popular releases, with an occasional oddity of interest (but not recently).

No.6 Cinema, Portsmouth – closed.



New Park, Chichester - re-opened 16th October with a catch-up, now moving on with more interesting arthouse material. Unfortunately seating is limited so several shows have already been sold out - and booking is on line only. They have used **Tenet** as a money-taker.

Cineworld, Chichester - closed.

Picturedrome, Bognor - very cheap, but popular releases only.

The Dome, Worthing - only £3.50 and £4.50, but popular releases only.

As you can see there is very little about in general, and particularly with regard to the kind of films the Phoenix would screen. **St. Maud**, which was critically well-received, has now been seized as the great hope after **Tenet**. It was even chosen as the Odeon surprise film a few days before its recent release. However, no-one is taking serious money at the box office, and audiences seldom appear to go much above, or are just reaching double figures, hence the offers of films for £5 or less just to get someone through the door.

John's final comment is that you are unlikely to get Covid at the cinema, there's no-one there to give it to you!

Meanwhile from deepest sunny Provence, our French correspondent and film critic Stephen offers this account of cinemas in the area around La Ciotat, near Marseille and Aix-en-Provence, whilst *en confinement*.

I think cinemas here are about to be overtaken by events (they have been - see below). Much of France is presently subject to a 9 p.m. curfew which means that cinema showings can only be in the afternoon and early evening. Both the commercial cinema, the Lumière, and the art-house Eden Théâtre cinema, the oldest cinema in the world, are still going in La Ciotat (for now).



The Eden is really well supported by both the local *commune* and the regional government as well as by an army of volunteers. In the last 8 weeks, it has had 2 international festivals, a festival of documentary films on science and exploration, and the 'Best of' International prize-winning short films. Christine and I saw the documentary prize winner, **Le Génie des Arbres**, which was a very informative, fascinating piece about how trees can help combat climate change. This included coverage of some interesting experiments in the UK where trees are being deluged with CO2 to see how well they survive. The short films were mostly great too, spanning a wide range of genres, including inventive animations, a tremendous Balkan comedy about the disasters brought about by bureaucratic incompetence, a Moroccan fantasy SF about invasion by extra-terrestrials, and a poignant Greek film about the end of the world as experienced on a remote Greek island. If that sounds rather covid-like, then when computers stop working and electricity fails, life turns out to be rather fun after all. Other films we have seen there include the prize-winning classic, **Il giardino dei Finzi Contini (The Garden of the Finzi-Continis)** (Vittorio De Sica, 1970) and the wonderful **The Perfect Candidate** (2019) from Haifaa al-Mansour, the only Saudi woman director (we screened her **Wajdja** (2012) at the Phoenix), all about a woman standing for election for her municipality despite not being able to campaign in public. A must for the Phoenix I think. The imposition of the curfew meant that we were unable to go and see **Enma** directed by Pablo Larraín (Chile, 2019) - this is one that is not in UK cinemas, having been corralled by Mubi. I fear that we will find more of that happening - sigh.

Going to the Eden is not without risk, although they do take appropriate measures – mask-wearing is obligatory, as is hand gel before going in, and social distancing in terms of being seated. I would say that the restrictions here have been less stringent (1 metre separation) so the capacity is probably 50% as opposed to the average of 25% in the UK. Having said that, apart from special and international events, attendances are not threateningly large. We usually sit in the back row, so everyone else there is breathing away from us. But ... despite curfews and the like, the level of covid cases in France has risen to roughly twice that of the UK (although deaths are lower - I think they really do have a better health service than us), so ... the news is that tonight Macron will announce another nationwide lockdown. Although it will not be as strict as last time (schools to remain open), I imagine that will be it for cinemas, bars and restaurants. Hey-ho or *Eh-merde*, as they say here!

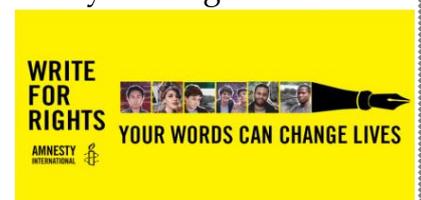
It should be noted that all this information was written, as Stephen says, a few hours before Emmanuel Macron's national *couvre-feu* announcement, so until December 1st movie-going is on hold across France. Likewise, John's summary was written prior to HMG's lockdown declaration, so the same situation will shortly apply in the U.K. as well. *Eh-merde*, indeed.



Dear Friends at The Phoenix

Many of you will know that every December the Phoenix screens a film to tie in with International Human Rights Day (December 10th) and members of the Southampton Group of Amnesty International have attended that Phoenix film screening to invite you, the audience, to send a card with a message of support to someone whose rights are being abused. This has been part of Amnesty's annual global campaign "**Write for Rights**", which over many years has given hope to those who risk their lives to stand up for freedom, justice and equality. This year, as we are unable to meet you in person, we are asking you to act independently by writing and posting a card which could make a huge difference to someone's life – can you imagine how it must feel to receive thousands of encouraging messages from all over the world showing how much their courage is valued? Full details of how you can help will appear in the December issue of the Phoenix Newsletter C-6. You have given fantastic support to this campaign over the years, supporting and encouraging human rights defenders. Please join us again in December. Thank you! from the **Amnesty International Southampton Group**

www.amnesty.org.uk/groups/southampton-city



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