

## FILM

## The Phantom of the Opera

While college theses and books have undertaken the task to deconstruct exactly why gay men are so drawn to Broadway musicals, one of those shows that defies easy categorization as "queer friendly" is Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Sure, it has a tragic and misunderstood lead male who hides his true self, but who wants to compare their closet to the dank dungeons of the Phantom—or their hair-don'ts with a misshapen face?

Yes, it has a comely heroine in Christine, who's torn between suitor Raoul's true love and money and the Phantom's charisma and career-advancing lessons, but Christine is neither the take-charge ballsy bitch nor the oppressed woman we secretly root for, both of which are popular themes for showtune queens.

Yes, *Phantom* has shamelessly-stolen-from-Puccini music that swells and recedes, yet it also alternately threatens to induce sleep or confusion, depending on the length of the love ballads or the five-person counter-songs.

So it must be the chandelier. Gorgeous and full of crystalline lights, the crashing chandelier is as orgasmic a sight for many gay men as a car jumping through a fireball is for hetero guys.

Gay director Joel Schumacher knows chandeliers, as well as gilded statuary, dark-cloaked men in shadows and overwrought music. After all, this is the man who went from *The Lost Boys* to *Batman & Robin*, and although the Phantom has not been reimagined with nipples



The Phantom menace: A young singer (Golden Globe nominee Emily Rossum) is charmed by a mysterious specter who haunts the Paris Opera house (Gerard Butler) in Joel Schumacher's gaudy musical

and a codpiece, Schumacher's overly gaudy stamp is all over the screen.

But is it fair to blame the director for set designs that look as if King Midas got touchy-feely during an orgy? After all, by now, even Schumacher must realize no one comes to his films expecting subtlety, so he gives none here.

Which is not to say that his *Phantom* is a failure. *Au contraire*. Schumacher's *Phantom* is so close to Webber's stage version that I had to research to figure out what few scenes were missing from the original (to make room for a dreadfully shoehorned-in origin for Li'l Phantom).

Gerard Butler does an acceptable turn in the lead role, thankfully not aping Michael Crawford's original take on the character. Emily Rossum is a pretty and winsome Christine, and both Minnie Driver (as a bitchy diva) and Miranda Richardson (as an uptight ballet mistress) shine. Only Patrick Wilson disappoints, showing both zero charisma and a lack of lip-sync ability that would make Ashlee Simpson blush.

—Andy Mangels

## Beyond the Sea

Bobby Darin died when he was 37. Kevin Spacey is 46. His Darin biopic, *Beyond the Sea*, is dead in the water.

Although Spacey acquits himself nicely doing all of his own singing and dancing, one can never escape the fact that he's just too old to play a baby-faced lounge singer.

Darin enjoyed a huge pop and film following in the 1960s—he was the highest-paid singer in Vegas—but his life was a race against time. A bout of rheumatic fever left his heart damaged at the age of 8; his doctor predicted he wouldn't live past 15. This Sword of Damocles sparked his frantic work ethic and tireless ambition.

Darin's story—his drive and his meteoric rise to fame; his celebrity marriage to Sandra Dee, the No. 1 box office star at the time (imagine marrying Julia Roberts); his political awakening; and his surprise discovery that his sister was actually his mother—invites dramatization. Yet Spacey, who is credited with the screenplay, has written a downright dull movie filled with silly clichés. ("Memories are like moonbeams; we do what we want with them." Huh?)

## Queer ears

Tone-deaf musical directors Joel Schumacher and Kevin Spacey can't compete with visionary artist who's actually losing his hearing



Kevin Spacey rocks the cradle with Kate Bosworth in the Bobby Darin biopic *Beyond the Sea*

While the supporting cast (including Bob Hoskins, Brenda Blethyn and, especially, Caroline Aaron as his sister) is terrific, when an actor writes, directs, produces and stars, you naturally focus on him, which brings us back to the age problem.

Older men playing opposite much younger women is an established movie tradition. (Remember Clint Eastwood and Rene Russo in *In the Line of Fire* or Richard Gere and Winona Ryder in *Autumn in New York*? Ick!). But seeing Spacey woo Kate Bosworth (*Win a Date with Tad Hamilton!*) as Sandra Dee just feels wrong.

In the film, Darin's manager calls him "brash, cocky and arrogant." But the middle-aged Spacey, with his doughy face, deep lines and double chin, doesn't exude a young man's energy and enthusiasm, no matter how hard he tries. I can't help wondering what *Beyond the Sea* would have been like with Matt Damon or Ewan McGregor (who was so Darin-like in the musical number that played during the closing credits of *Down with Love*) instead.

—Floyd Sklaver

## David Hockney: The Colors of Music

It seems to me poetry is better than prose, and poetry with music is heightened poetry. And that's what opera is—it's heightened experience."

That's how gay artist David Hockney summarizes his passion for the fat lady in *The Colors of Music*, screening Jan. 9 as part of the Northwest Film Center's 22nd annual Reel Music Festival. (See Page 24 for details.)

As an opera virgin, I wasn't sure what to expect from this documentary, which takes us behind the scenes to watch the celebrated painter design sets for several productions performed around the world. It turns out Hockney brings a fresh outsider's perspective to the stage, adding new visual flavor to old musical compositions.

Mixing media is nothing new for Hockney, whose works include 1961's *We Two Boys Clinging Together*, a painting that incorporated graffiti-like text from a Walt Whitman poem,



Gay artist David Hockney creates *The Colors of Music*

and 1967's *Illustrations for Fourteen Poems by CP Cavafy*, a series of etchings to accompany homosexual verse by the Greek writer.

Nonetheless, it's impressive to see Hockney remain relevant at the age of 67. He makes a sly reference to current events in his analysis of the Eric Satie ballet *Parade*: "The messages are against war. We begin, as it were, with the ugliness of war and end with the innocent vision of a child that thinks kindness is our only hope. I like that."

Sadly, Hockney is going deaf from a genetic condition, so he doesn't have much longer to enjoy the music that accompanies his colorful décor. But he maintains a bright outlook on life that is a joy to behold: "We are all touched by tragedy...yet we're not, unfortunately, all touched by the comic. Life must have two sides."

—Jim Radosta

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