

## FILMS AND MUSIC

by Geoff Cowart



HAIR-RAISING: A stellar cast

### HAIRSPRAY (PG)

THE stellar cast of *Hairspray* appear to be having a ball and their energy is infectious, carrying the film along for two giddy hours on a wave of rousing musical numbers and tender emotion. The cast is sensational, from Nikki Blonsky's star-making turn, to John Travolta and Christopher Walken, who make us believe completely in Edna and Wilbur's unerring love.

### FIREHOUSE DOG (PG)

DIRECTOR Todd Holland ignores the well-worn advice about never working with animals and children to craft this gentle comedy for the whole family. Josh Hutcherson, as a rebellious 12-year-old, is maturing into one of the most watchable actors of his generation. *Firehouse Dog* is undeniably charming, barking along a predictable narrative path, though thankfully without too much sugary sentimentality.

### HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX (12A)

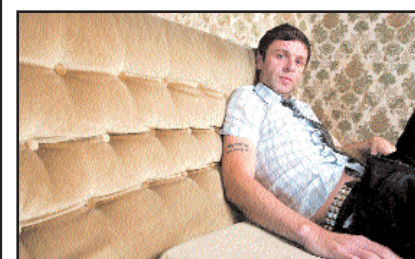
WIDELY considered to be the weakest book, it seems somewhat fitting that the film version of *The Order Of The Phoenix* is, in some respects, the least satisfying instalment too. Daniel Radcliffe puts in an improved performance as the young wizard, but for all of the visual splendour, this fifth film is all gloss and scant emotion.

### MOLIERE (12A)

POSSESSING the same irresistible blend of comedy and romance as *Shakespeare In Love*, *Moliere* is an exuberant and delectable romp concocting an imaginary collision between the 17th century French playwright and his work. This film is truly a delight, anchored by a sensational performance from Romain Duris.

### DEAD SILENCE (15)

IT'S hard to believe that director James Wan and screenwriter Leigh Whannell, creators of the fiendish *Saw*, are the driving force behind such a dull, dumb and scare-free ghost story. Ryan Kwanten's lifeless hero – a paragon of stupidity – does nothing to rescue the film.



FRIENDLY: The tuneful Cherry Ghost

THE iTunes Music Festival continues with more fantastic gigs for free. Today (Friday): Stereophonics and Little Man Tate. Saturday (21): Aqualung and Jamie Scott. UK singer/songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Matt Hales, otherwise known as Aqualung, returns after two years of major US success with his truthful, articulate, candid, poetic songs. Sunday (22): Cherry Ghost and Air Traffic. A dizzy and euphoric musical rush with real edge and frailty. Monday (23): Wir sind Helden and Leash. Ridiculous and brilliant German pop monsters. Tuesday (24): Kano and Natty. Wednesday (25): Amy Winehouse, The Rumble Strips and Remi Nicole. Thursday (19): Just Jack and Mr Hudson & the Library. All gigs at ICA, The Mall, St James's Park. Visit: [www.ica.org.uk](http://www.ica.org.uk) or call 020 7930 3647 for more details. **Christian McLaughlin**

# REACH THE STAGE OF RISK TAKING

YOUNG PRODUCERS, WRITERS AND ACTORS ARE AGAIN DEFINING THE REVOLUTIONARY REPUTATION OF THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE, FINDS **CHRISTIAN McLAUGHLIN**

**T**O PAY or not to pay, for only half a play? That was the question recently posed when considering the new Rough Cuts programme at Sloane Square's Royal Court Theatre.

Described as a season of diverse and experimental works-in-progress, and two plays – *Posh*, by Laura Wade and *The Girlfriend Experience* by Alecky Blythe – were on the bill the night of my visit... yet neither was performed in its entirety.

Unlike traditional theatre, rehearsed to perfection before gracing the stage, this two-week programme (planned to run every two years) was showing snippets of plays which it is hoped to develop into full-scale productions.

Emily McLaughlin, 35, of Jeddo Road, Shepherd's Bush, has been responsible for the project under the guidance of the theatre's new director, Dominic Cooke, who took over in January this year.

She said: "We wanted to offer a different way of developing a play.

"The selection process is very rigorous but essentially anyone with a bit of a script or an idea can approach us. "The chosen works or ideas then go on to show in an informal context, where experimentation, freedom to try new angles and feedback from the audience become a part of the process.

"We don't know yet which ones will be taken on for full direction, but definitely some of the works will."

One hopeful is Bloomsbury resident

Laura Wade, the 29-year-old in the process of writing *Posh*, an investigation into the privileged lives of members of Oxford University's raucous tail-coated Bullingdon dining club, which famously included London mayoral hopeful Boris Johnson and Conservative leader David Cameron.

She said: "Sometimes you can't see the wood for the trees. You can spend so long working on your own that you get tunnel vision.

"You start to like your characters too much, only to discover that the audience hate them.

"That's why it's a real gift to be able to put something in front of an audience and test it out before it's finished.

"I've not worked in this way before. Most theatres have developmental techniques, but to put something on at such an early stage is both healthy and brave."

Healthy, brave and highly entertaining.

Each play only lasted half an hour, but the spontaneous energy, excellent acting and humour gave the performances an interesting edge over watching a finished product.

**'YOU START TO LIKE YOUR CHARACTERS TOO MUCH, ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT THE AUDIENCE HATE THEM'**



DARING: Rough Cuts producer Emily McLaughlin, outside the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square

Andrew Buchan was simply outstanding as a violent, snobbish cad in *Posh*.

Laura said: "I started writing the final version only two weeks before the show and I owe much of this ability to the training I received on the Young Writers Programme I joined back in 2003.

"Anyone between 13 and 26 who is vaguely interested in theatre should join. From the idea to the finished play, the Royal Court is uniquely supportive in its approach to young writers."

This is a cornerstone of the Royal Court history, which recently celebrated the 51st anniversary since the English Stage Company and artistic director George Devine took over.

### ENTER STAGE RISK

A PIONEER of risk-taking, it was Devine's company which put on John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* in May 1956, which had already been rejected 25 times by other managers and agents.

It, and other early productions which unashamedly depicted the lives of the

working class, raged against the dull theatre and imported musicals of an era when commercially minded productions held sway.

Censorship continued to stifle social, religious and sexual themes on stage until the Theatres Act of 1968 abolished state interference.

"Without the Royal Court's pivotal role in paving the way for these changes, modern British drama as we know it – and talents from David Hare and Joe Orton to Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill – may never have come to light."

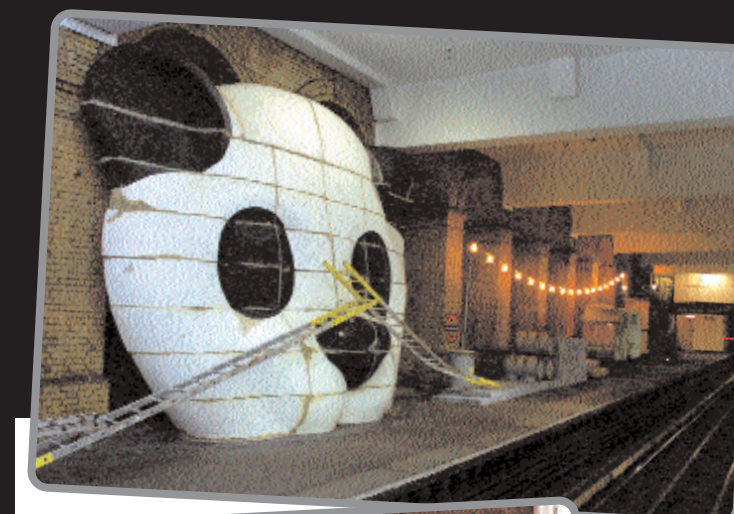
Roddy Maude-Roxby, 77, of Castelnau Row, Barnes, who starred in the British absurdist playwright NF Simpson's *One Way Pendulum* at the Royal Court in 1959, said: "It truly was a revolutionary time in British theatre.

"Theatregoing used to suppose the play had to have a class recognition and respect for its audience. The audience would be dressed up, the curtain would come up, the stage would be a recognisable space and the play would be suitably written. "A different attitude came through with George Devine.



CASTING CALL: Pictured on the front of *Review* are Andrew Buchan, Nicholas Burns, Sebastian Armesto, Pip Carter, Tom Riley and Jay Taylor, who starred in *Posh*

## THE TUBE GOES WILD WITH PANDA-MONIUM



CALL OF THE WILD: The giant tube panda under construction at Gloucester Road tube station. The concept is the brainchild of artist Brian Griffiths, left

IS IT A bird? Is it a plane? No it's a giant panda head, unveiled at Gloucester Road tube station last week.

The 7.5-metre panda head is part of the *Life is a Laugh* installation by artist Brian Griffiths.

The artwork was commissioned by Platform for Art to take advantage of the 70-metre disused platform at the tube station. Opening night was celebrated with Pimms and a host of curious onlookers. **Heather Scarlett**

## DOING THE DOUBLE



STARS IN HER EYES: 10-year-old Moroccan artist Thuraya

BRITISH-Moroccan children celebrated their dual backgrounds at a three-day art exhibition in Ladbroke Grove this week.

Organised by the Migrant and Refugee Community Forum (MRCF) the exhibition *Moroccan Memories in Britain* gave the children the chance to explore their cultural identities.

The children, all from the Al-Noor Youth Association in Acklam Road, Westbourne Park, put together the artworks in a series of workshops in which they talked about their backgrounds and experiences. **Aidan Jones**

## LORD'S AT WAR

CRICKET fans can find out how the sport helped Londoners pad away their wartime woes at a new exhibition at Lord's.

The *Playing the Game: Cricket at War* display, at Lord's, in St John's Wood, shows the role cricket played in maintaining troop and public morale during the two world wars.

The exhibition runs until September.

Entry £5 (concs £4).

For details, visit: [www.lords.org/lords-ground/tours](http://www.lords.org/lords-ground/tours)