

The Phantom of the Opera

On Wednesday 10th November, sixteen members enjoyed the 2004 production of the Phantom of the Opera. Starring Gerard Butler as the Phantom, Emmy Rossum as Christine, Minnie Driver as Carlotta, Patrick Wilson as Raoul, and Miranda Richardson as Madame Giri, Joel Schumacher's direction of the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical expands the story beyond the immediate theatre setting, adding a fight scene at the cemetery and altering the plot line slightly (the chandelier is used in the climax of the film rather than being the device to separate acts I and II of the musical). Consequently, several sections of the musical's lyrics were adjusted to adapt to the changed storyline.

Schumacher used intercut black and white sections for the "current day" (1919) to separate the major acts (as well as a couple of scenes of the stage version), but made good use of the opportunity to see more of the theatre setting (behind the scenes, in the rafters and the chapel), although some members felt that the film was still too stage centric.

Butler hadn't had any singing experience before this role, so received lessons in advance. Although not the most powerful of voices, his acting ability - especially in close up - meant that his performance was solid if not up to the standard of Ramin Karimloo (who appears briefly as the portrait of Christine's father Gustave in the film) in the 25th anniversary performance (with Sierra Boggess as Christine) at the Albert Hall (available on DVD and Sky Arts download, and well worth a watch). Emmy Rossum is both vulnerable and beguiling and performs her solos well (she, along with Minnie Driver and Patrick Wilson, had previous singing experience).

Minnie Driver's camp and over-the-top performance as the self-centred diva Carlotta injected some fun into film, and the supporting cast (particularly Simon Callow as Giles Andre) appear to be having a great time.

The film was shot entirely at Pinewood Studios on a budget of about \$84million (it grossed over \$154 million worldwide at the box office). It was generally slated by the critics, but cinema audiences enjoyed the film as it made the story accessible to a wider audience.

The underlying themes of bigotry (because of looks) and coercive control (the Phantom trying to keep Christine for himself) were highlighted as being very relevant, whilst not detracting from what was a visually and musically stunning experience.