



Fencing champions: Romy Aspinall (left) and Alice Donnachie.

No stage fright for stage fighter

By David Melsome

When young actor Alice Donnachie landed the part of the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* she had no idea that she was about to uncover a hidden sporting talent and end up competing in a national championship.

As part of her acting training at Finchley Youth Theatre, Alice, of Hertford Road, was given some stage fighting lessons. She enjoyed the fencing so much that she joined a local fencing club.

Just six months later, Alice and her friend Romy Aspinall, both 15, competed in the Under-18 London Fencing Championships. They wound up fighting against each other, with Alice becoming female épée champion and Romy winning the silver medal.

Champions in training

Now the two Fortismere School pupils are set to compete in the under-class at the National Youth Championships in Stoke later this month.

Alice said: "The national championships will be daunting because they are eight solid hours of fencing. We're training three days a week to get up to standard. You need good stomach muscles and a lot of stamina."

So what is it about fencing that Alice enjoys? "I'd never tried a combat sport before. It's exciting, and quite painful sometimes, but you never know what's going to happen. With a bit of luck and technique, you can beat someone who's a lot better than you."

Épée is a style of fencing that uses a heavier sword than the normal fencing foil and where the whole of the body is a target area.

Springboard for talent

Finchley Youth Theatre in the High Road creates opportunities for young people aged between 10 and 25 to take part in drama, dance and technical theatre skills workshops.

Ian Trimmer, youth drama worker at the theatre, said: "Alice was a very committed and talented member of Finchley Youth Theatre and I'm delighted she has done so well by taking on these basic stage combat skills and pursuing them to another level."

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not too late

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Thank you to everyone who has bought a copy and helped support the crucial work of Contact, based in Church Lane. Each calendar costs £5 and every penny goes to the charity.

Contact holds social events, runs transport services and organises a befriending network, all of which make a huge difference to the lives of elderly, disabled and isolated people in our community.

The calendar has a different perspective on East Finchley for each month, some of them well-known and some of them hidden treasures. Order copies for yourself or friends now.

THE ARCHER thanks all the readers who sent in photographs to be used in the calendar; and Photobox.co.uk for designing and printing it free of charge.

Competition winners

Congratulations to the winners of our competition in November's issue to win two pairs of tickets to see the Piccadilly Dance Orchestra and the Joyful Company of Singers at artsdepot in North Finchley. They were S Carroll, of Squires Lane, N3, and Katharine Turner, of Baronsmere Road, N2.



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Hurdles cleared for Phoenix restoration

By John Lawrence

The £1 million plan to restore the Phoenix Cinema to its 1930s art deco glory in time for its centenary celebrations in 2010 has cleared two major hurdles.

First, the proposals were given the full consent of Barnet's planners, including the plan's most ambitious idea to add a glass-fronted café and terrace bar to the front of the cinema.

Secondly, the hard work of drawing up detailed documents led to the proposal receiving first-stage backing by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Now there is a lot more work to do to get the plan through a second stage that will, it is hoped, see the Fund provide 56% of the money required.

A long-term goal

Phoenix chief executive Paul Homer is delighted with the progress of the restoration project so far but is still appealing for local people, businesses and organisations to help the cinema reach its fundraising target.

If the Heritage Lottery Fund application is successful, and once other donations have been taken into account, the cinema will still need to find £280,000 from public donations.

Paul said: "We know it's a difficult time for everyone at the moment but the reaction we've had to our restoration plans has been very positive and we're extremely grateful to the people who've given what they can afford so far."

"The project we are trying to do will have a long-term positive impact on East Finchley and the whole area. We're not saying help us or we close but we do need



Phoenix manager Paul Homer.

Photo by John Dearing

to do this work on the building now if the Phoenix is to have a long-term future."

The restoration project includes the complete renovation of the cinema's 1910 auditorium and a smart new look for the exterior façade. The terrace café would be a major visual landmark in the High Road.

Timetable

The Phoenix Cinema's second submission to the Heritage Lottery Fund must be completed by the end of February, with a yes or no expected in June. One hopeful sign is that the Fund has appointed a special advisor to the Phoenix to help it succeed in the application process.

If you would like to help the Phoenix Cinema, donations can be made online at www.phoenixcinema.co.uk/support/campaigns, by post to Phoenix Cinema, 52 High Road, London N2 9PJ, or by contacting Paul Homer through the box office on 020 8444 6789 or info@phoenixcinema.co.uk.

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