



Phoenix Cinema looks for ways to broaden its appeal

By David Gritten

Like so many East Finchley businesses, the Phoenix Cinema suffered mightily throughout the pandemic. It was first forced to close its doors early in 2020, and though they re-opened for a spell, the cinema remained shut for long periods, often opening and closing in quick succession.

Only recently in this post-Covid period have audiences started to return to the picture-house. Late last year the Bond film *No Time to Die* brought audiences back, as did Kenneth Branagh's coming-of-age drama *Belfast*.

But these were exceptions. Phoenix executive director Oliver Meek notes that other high-profile films could not entice potential viewers from their homes. These included *The Duke* and, surprisingly, Stephen Sondheim's lavish remake of *West Side Story*.



New attractions: The Phoenix

As Oliver points out: "Their release coincided with the outbreak of Omicron, people were still weighing up whether to go to a cinema, and they wanted to see their families at Christmas."

Gradually, though, Phoenix audiences are returning. As Oliver points out: "They're back and some are coming regularly. It's just the full recovery that's going to take longer. I think it will be autumn again before things are back to normal."

Unique venue can be live

Meanwhile the Phoenix is looking for ways to broaden its appeal. As Oliver puts it, "This involves diversifying audiences, developing the building a little bit beyond films. We're always going to be a cinema, but this is a unique, extraordinary venue, and we should open it up to other audiences."

With this in mind, he has plans for a wider range of attractions beyond films: poetry, comedy, book events, readings, live podcasts, and events likely to be embraced by black and gay communities. "I feel we're part of a tech industry and we need to evolve and offer new things. So we can use our space at the Phoenix as a live venue, alongside being a cinema," says Oliver.



Settling in: Tetiana Shedko with her children Dasha and Sasha at their new home in East Finchley. Photo Mike Coles.

Family flees horror of war

By Lynn Winton

Chatting over tea and cake with Tetiana Shedko and her children in their cosy garden flat in the heart of East Finchley, it was easy to forget that she and her two children had only arrived 10 days before after a harrowing 4,500km car escape across Europe from Ukraine.

Born in the now devastated southern city of Mariupol, Tetiana graduated in Economics and Business and settled in Kyiv, where she married, had two children, a successful career as a photographer and a "good life".

When Russia sent in the troops and her children's safety looked impossible to predict, Tetiana wasted no time, hurrying Dasha, 11, and Sasha, 9, into her car with as many essential items as she could fit in. She drove south-west towards Romania, stopping short of the border to rent an empty dacha or summerhouse away from the bombs and mayhem. Giving shelter in freezing temperatures to other fleeing families meant the house was soon overcrowded with 20 people and often no water because it froze in the pipes.

Crossing borders

Only two weeks passed before there were bombs in a neighbouring town, much too close for comfort, and Tetiana at that point decided to drive over the border to Romania without a clear plan. She just knew she must flee.

Constantly moving, she drove through many countries seeking accommodation wherever she could find it. Arriving in Italy, they were allowed to stay in a Red Cross emergency hostel, where Tetiana made the decision to apply for a UK visa. This country had always

been her first choice; they had visited many times and the family's English is good. Visas came quite quickly in just under three weeks. So she drove to Dieppe, took the ferry to Dunkirk and finally reached her new home.

Death, and a new life

Whilst driving, with all the stress of living with her children on the road, she received some terrible news: her father in Mari-

life is going well with their English rapidly improving.

Whilst her first weeks here were consumed by huge amounts of bureaucracy, she sent me a message: 'I have just filled in my work permit application. What a weight off my shoulders. Every time I complete one of these tasks I feel I can do anything!'

Back to work

Tetiana is determined to get



Striking: An example of Tetiana's photography

upol had been killed. She has no knowledge of how he met his death as communications with Mariupol are severely limited, but at time of going to press she has had word that her mother and brother are still alive.

Her UK sponsors were known to the family, and their furnished flat in East Finchley is Tetiana's to use until she gets settled. Living in a friendly road, she has nothing but praise for the typical N2 welcome she has received.

Neighbours have been a huge source of information, help, resources and invitations to Sunday lunch. Both children have been given scooters, football-mad Sasha has found games to take part in and school

her photography career back on track, to be in charge of her own destiny and to provide for her family. She brought all her professional equipment with her and is eager to start work; she has just received her first commission, to do an informal photoshoot for a family in N2.

She is experienced in all kinds of photography including events, family, reportage, and business commissions and has readily volunteered to be a roving reporter at the East Finchley Festival later this month.

You can contact Tetiana on 07748 136262. If you would like to see some of her work, her Instagram account is @tetiana_shedko.



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