



Don't try this at home: Revel Puck perform their chain saw routine

## REVIEW: REVEL PUCK CIRCUS

Victoria Park, Finchley Central

By Dan Crute

Revel Puck are the kind of circus that's driven by the skills, energy, and chutzpah of the performers onstage, rather than technical wizardry in set design or lighting. It's rough and ready, and bursting with the joy of physicality that is the hallmark of good acrobatics.

The show's narrative thread is held together by a sweet clown being chased by a toy lion (zooming around the stage on the wheels of a remote-controlled car). At first, she's frightened of the 'beast' but, as the show progresses and the lion grows, they develop a friendship, culminating in them dancing happily together.

The wonderfully madcap ensemble sections illustrate the need to work together as a team.

In the first of these for example, a chainsaw swings free, and the cast twist and dive to avoid it, warning each other of its approach, perfectly embodying that most big top of aesthetics; playfully dealing with danger.

For acts, we had Cyr Wheel (a steel hoop the artist dances within), Teeterboard (a seesaw the artists somersault from), Aerial Straps (hanging belts the artist uses to fly), partner acrobatics, and Cloud Swing (a

rope swing, similar to swinging trapeze). Each performed with skill and verve.

As the clown and the lion danced and the applause died down, my seven-year-old's beaming smile gave the best review possible. He loved it, as did I.

Revel Puck are a brilliant throwback to the glory days of local circus shows. Long may they continue to wow families everywhere!

## Hilary pulls some theatrical magic out of the hat

By Ruth Anders

**Hilary (aka Hat) Townley has a lot to be excited about. She and four others have launched Just Like That Productions, a theatrical company producing magic shows.**

Their first show was a runaway success in October at the Gatehouse pub theatre in Highgate. Upstairs at the Gatehouse is under new management and its intimate atmosphere provided the perfect venue for close-up magic.

Raised in north London, Hilary read geography at

Manchester University though she admits "I spent all my time in the drama department." She and her actor husband Christopher Hunter have lived in East Finchley for more than 40 years, both enjoying distinguished theatre careers.

Her company now includes three magicians: a retired GP, a retired ophthalmologist and a journalist who is a member of the Magic Circle. They are looking forward to their next



Conjurer: Hilary Townley

night of magic at the Gatehouse on Monday 26 February where audiences are invited to witness "miracles manifest before your eyes in an intimate cabaret configuration that puts you at the heart of the magic."

Hat told *The Archer*: "I'm thrilled about what we are doing together. We have at least five other projects in the pipeline." Find more details and book tickets at [www.upstairsatthegatehouse.com](http://www.upstairsatthegatehouse.com).

### Double act

Her first production company was a double act with a West End producer-turned-GP from Camden Town. Their one-man version of Shakespeare's *Venus & Adonis* was a tour de force that attracted critical acclaim in Edinburgh, before transferring to London's Rose Playhouse, the Verona Festival in Italy and is now slated to tour in the US.

The pair then commissioned and produced a mesmerisingly tense show at the Edinburgh Festival called *The Wireless Operator*, chosen by the Park Theatre, Finsbury Park as one of their Best of the Edinburgh Fringe season.

When she is not working, looking after her family and building her magic networks, Hat relaxes by swimming, running, gardening and spending time in the green spaces she loves such as Coldfall Woods and Hampstead Heath. Among the founders of the late lamented N2United, she is well known locally for a number of community activities.

## What's On at the Phoenix in February

By Zalan Pall,  
general manager



An extraordinary drama, hilarious comedies, a French indulgence, live opera and theatre, the return of Kids Club and many more treats await you at the Phoenix Cinema in February.

Dispassionately examining the ordinary existence of people complicit in horrific crimes, *The Zone of Interest*, from Friday 2 February, forces us to take a cold hard look at the mundanity behind an unforgivable brutality, in this case following the story of a Nazi commandant trying to build a life for himself and his family in a house next to the Auschwitz concentration camp.

*American Fiction*, from Friday 9 February, is Cord Jefferson's hilarious directorial debut, which confronts our culture's obsession with reducing people to outrageous stereotypes.

Then on Sunday 11 February, the past collides with our precarious present in Steve McQueen's bravura documentary *Occupied City*, examining life in occupied Amsterdam between 1940 and 1945.

As epicurean as French haute cuisine, *The Taste of Things*, from Wednesday 14 February, starts Juliette Binoche indulging our palates with an exquisite seven-course love story for the soul.

We're delighted to announce the return of the Phoenix KIDS CLUB on Saturday mornings. We start with acclaimed animation *Turning Red* on Saturday 10 Feb-

ruary and follow that up with new Studio Ghibli masterpiece *The Boy and the Heron* on Saturday 24 February.

For lovers of screen arts, we will have Royal Opera House Live's *Manon* on Wednesday 7 February and National Theatre Live's *Vanya*, starring Andrew Scott on Thursday 22 February. These are quickly followed by *EOS: Painting the Modern Garden* and *Hamlet*, starring Sir Ian McKellen, both on Monday 26 February.

In *Little Wicked Letters*, from Friday 23 February, fiery Rose Gooding (Jessie Buckley) has little in common with the pious Edith Swan (Olivia Colman) aside from them being neighbours in the seaside town of Littlehampton in the 1920s. But one day, Edith starts receiving scandalous letters written with foul language as eccentric as it is obscene, and she immediately accuses Rose of being the poison pen writer behind them. As Rose stands to lose her freedom and the custody of her daughter, outrageous letters continue to blight the town.

Find out full details of screenings and book tickets at [www.phoenixcinema.co.uk](http://www.phoenixcinema.co.uk) or pop into our foyer.

## Saxophonist out on tour

**Saxophonist Theo Travis sets off this month on a tour of the UK as part of Soft Machine, the progressive rock band he has played with for 18 years that originally featured acclaimed musician Robert Wyatt.**

Theo, of Hertford Road, N2, not only plays sax, flute and keyboards on their latest album *Other Doors*, he is also its main composer and producer.

He has his own band Double Talk, who played the Artsdepot in North Finchley last month, and has performed regularly at Ronnie Scott's Club in



Musician: Theo Travis

central London. Find out more at [www.theotravis.com](http://www.theotravis.com) and [www.softmachine.org](http://www.softmachine.org)

Theo says of living in East Finchley: "I love the fact that East Finchley is full of so many creative people. Within a road or two of me on Hertford Rd, I know musicians, composers, internationally respected artists, writers, actors and jewellery and automaton makers! It is a very vibrant and creative community."