

Entertainment & Leisure

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Screen time: Park So-dam as Ki-jung and Choi Woo-sik as Ki-woo in *Parasite*, co-written and directed by Bong Joon-ho

Upstairs-downstairs drama is a class act

GET ready for what is arguably going to be the cinematic event of the year. (Yes, really.)

Parasite is a dark comedy thriller from South Korean auteur Bong Joon-ho, whose previous films include *The Host* (2006), *Snowpiercer* (2013) and *Okja* (2017).

Co-written with Han Jin-won, his latest offering follows the members of a poor household who scheme to become employed by a much wealthier family by infiltrating the household and posing as unrelated, highly qualified individuals.

Parasite premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May last year, where it became the first Korean film to win the Palme d'Or and the first unanimous winner since 2013's *Blue is the Warmest Colour*. It went

CINEMA PREVIEW

Film: *Parasite*

Certificate: 15

Director: Bong Joon-ho

Stars: Song Kang-ho, Chang Hyeae-jin, Choi Woo-shik, Park So-dam, Lee Sun-kyun, Jeong Ji-so, Jung Hyeon-jun, Cho Ye-jeong

on to become the third highest-grossing film in South Korean box office history and the highest-grossing Palme d'Or winner in France and Australia — outgoing *Pulp Fiction* in the process.

Described by Bong himself as “a comedy without clowns and a tragedy without villains”, the film moves quickly from one tone to another, mixing

pathos and satire with thrills and drama.

A vertical story of class struggle — punctuated by staircase scenes going from mouldy basements to top floors, from darkness to breezy spaces designed by star architects — *Parasite* observes and dissects with surgical precision the life of two families of different social backgrounds.

Ki-taek (Song Kang-ho) is a good-for-nothing, unemployed family man, patriarch of a family of grifters — his wife Chung-sook (Chang Hyeae-jin), his clever twenty-something daughter Ki-jung (Park So-dam), and his son Ki-woo (Choi Woo-shik) — who live in an overcrowded, sordid basement.

The Parks, on the other hand, live in a fabulous house with their teenage daughter Da-hye and

terribly spoiled son Da-song, who has suffered a childhood trauma that occasionally causes him seizures and strange behaviour.

When, due to an unexpected stroke of luck, Ki-woo is hired by the Parks to be the private English tutor of Da-hye, the destinies of the two families cross.

Their explosive meeting exposes the merciless evils of class inequalities, culminating in a powerful and utterly original outcome.

For every callous misfortune that befalls the protagonists, there's a glimmer of mystery or a comedic triumph that lifts the spirits both on screen and off.

● *Parasite* is showing at the Regal Picturehouse cinema from today (Friday).

Dickens by the books is where ingenuity and versatility meet

Review

Bleak House
Blackwell's, Oxford
Monday, February 3

grand estate in Lincolnshire to the Bleak House of the title. On the way we visit junk shops, lawyers' offices, slums and cemeteries.

Stepladders and packing-cases furnish the stage. The London fog is suggested by sheets of paper scattered through the air, sheets which then become the paper which fuels the law courts. Open books waded in the air double as the flapping wings of birds.

The ingenuity of the staging is matched by the versatility of the players. Joanna Holden ranges from the remote Lady Dedlock, who has a scandalous secret to keep, to the crazed Miss Flite. Newcomer Sophie Jacob plays Esther, the moral centre of the story, as well as a clutch of lesser characters, while Eleanor

House does a nice turn as the hapless Mr Guppy and a murderously comic French maid.

Morgan Philpott is an authority figure, imposing or warm depending on his role, and Bart Lambert travels the spectrum from an illiterate street-sweeper to the do-gooding Mrs Pardiggle — cue for a faintly Gilbert & Sullivan-style number — to a lawyer determined to uncover Lady Dedlock's mysterious secret.

Bleak House is in part a mystery story. It's about England as it was in the early Victorian period but, as writer Olivia Mace points out in the programme, it's also about our world now, with its inequalities of wealth, social status and gender.

Under the direction of Deborah Newbold, this show is true to Charles Dickens's vision but it fleshes out the mammoth bones of his tale with colour, wit and style.

Until March 7.

Philip Gooden

Eavesdropping play all about the UK is well worth a hearing

Review

One Million Tiny Plays About Britain, The Watermill, Bagnor
Thursday, January 30

poignant and unashamedly sad. The vehicle is a game of bingo, and as each number is called out we instantly drop in on another conversation.

The quickfire nature of the production calls for brilliant acting skills and lightning costume changes the likes of which you will never have seen before.

Cue the fabulously talented Emma Barclay and Alec Nicholls, who give a masterclass in their art that will leave you breathless.

They transform themselves into small children, irritating brats, domineering middle-class matrons, vulnerable teenagers and even more vulnerable octogenarians seamlessly and with

complete conviction. Just the costume changes alone were most impressive, and at times very funny indeed as they peeled off layer after layer to accommodate the next character they were portraying. Wigs, props, furniture, lights and buckets were all there on the stage, and they used them to magnificent effect.

After the interval we all joined in an impromptu game of bingo, which was a new departure for many of us, and a good time was had by all before we were led off again to eavesdrop into other people's lives.

This show is a tour de force that offers magnificent entertainment and is a must-see for that alone. But seeing it will also subtly affect the way you move among your fellow men and women and help you realise that there is entertainment all around you, if you only listen out for it.

Until February 15.

Mary Scriven

JOURNALIST Craig Taylor was surely inspired by the richness of the human condition when he decided to write *One Million Tiny Plays About Britain* — a collection of nearly 100 vignettes about Britishness gleaned from conversations overheard first in Canada and later in London.

First published in *The Guardian's Weekend* magazine, and later as a book, a selection of about 30 of the plays has been drawn together by director Laura Keefe and is now making a most welcome return to the Watermill Theatre at Bagnor after its first airing four years ago.

It is a breathtakingly well performed and wonderfully entertaining show. The snapshots of other people's lives give a wonderful insight into 21st century life as it is lived across every spectrum of society, reflecting complicated relationships that are by turns hilariously funny,

Rise of the Nazis musical now packs an even harder punch

Review

Cabaret
New Theatre Oxford
Tuesday, February 4

arriving in Berlin, meeting the denizens of the Kit Kat Klub and living a bohemian life against the backdrop of the development of Nazism.

Director Rufus Norris has gone big — the ensemble pieces are brash and in your face with lots of male and female flesh and splayed limbs leaving nothing to the imagination.

The choreography and movement are spectacular but when it all quietsens down and we are in the intimacy of a love scene or the confines of a poky Berlin lodging house the huge set and stage dwarf the players.

They have to move further apart to fill it and

raise their voices at the same time.

This production saw some fine acting and vocal performances, including John Partridge as Emcee, Kara Lily Hayworth as Sally Bowles, Anita Harris as Mrs Schneider and Charles Haggerty as Bradshaw.

It's impressive but seemed to lack fluency and subtlety with all the work being put into making a musical extravaganza and maybe not enough into revealing the story — other productions show the rise of Nazism more insidiously.

How prescient, though, that it should be at the New Theatre a week after Holocaust Memorial Day.

As long as it continues to be performed the memory and the warning that goes with it will survive.

Until Saturday.

Mike Rowbottom

Also showing this week:

Title	Cast	Synopsis	Rating
A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood (PG)	Tom Hanks, Matthew Rhys, Enrico Colantoni, Wendy Makkena, Chris Cooper, Tammy Blanchard	Based on the true story of a real-life friendship between the veteran US children's TV presenter Fred Rogers and journalist Tom Junod.	Much like the beloved TV personality who inspired it, <i>A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood</i> offers a powerfully affecting message about acceptance and understanding.
Little Women (U)	Saoirse Ronan, Emma Watson, Florence Pugh, Eliza Scanlen, Laura Dern, Timothée Chalamet, Meryl Streep	Four sisters come of age in America in the aftermath of the Civil War.	With a stellar cast and a smart, sensitive retelling of its classic source material, Greta Gerwig's <i>Little Women</i> proves some stories are truly timeless.
The Personal History of David Copperfield (PG)	Dev Patel, Tilda Swinton, Ben Whishaw, Gwendoline Christie, Hugh Laurie, Aneurin Barnard, Peter Capaldi	From birth to infancy, from adolescence to adulthood, the good-hearted David Copperfield is surrounded by kindness, wickedness, poverty and wealth as he meets an array of remarkable characters in Victorian England.	<i>The Personal History of David Copperfield</i> puts a fresh, funny, and utterly charming spin on the Dickens classic, proving some stories truly are timeless.
1917 (15)	George MacKay, Dean-Charles Chapman, Mark Strong, Andrew Scott, Richard Madden, Claire Duburcq, Daniel Mays, Jamie Parker, Benedict Cumberbatch, Colin Firth	Two young British soldiers during the First World War are given an impossible mission: deliver a message deep in enemy territory that will prevent 1,600 of their comrades from walking straight into a deadly trap.	Hard-hitting, immersive, and an impressive technical achievement, <i>1917</i> captures the trench warfare of the First World War with raw, startling immediacy.