

# Peterborough Arts Cinema

Films that make you think

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> June at 7:30pm

**Phantom Boy** ([2015](#)) France

PG | 1h 24min Animation

**Directors;** Jean-Loup Felicoli, Alain Gagnol **Stars;** Edouard Baer, Audrey Tatou, Jean-Pierre Marielle

Leo has a secret. A mysterious illness has transformed him into a phantom boy, able to leave the confines of his body and explore the city as a ghostly apparition. While in the hospital, he befriends Alex, a New York City cop injured while attempting to capture a nefarious gangster who has taken control of the city's power supply, throwing the metropolis into chaos. Now they must form an extraordinary duo, using Leo's phantom powers and Alex's detective work to foil the plot and save New York from destruction.

After nabbing an Oscar nomination for the delightful “A Cat in Paris” in 2012, the French team of Jean-Loup Felicoli and Alain Gagnol get more ambitious with “Phantom Boy” (July 22), combining an ethereal superhero with a wacky crime thriller.

“We prefer working in a context and setting that are realistic but with one fantasy element,” said Gagnol, who wrote the script. Felicoli provided the flat, angular, retro graphic design. “It’s a fantastical, dream image of New York, similar to the way Paris was depicted in ‘A Cat in Paris.’”

Paris was the obvious first location but the directors realized that the flat skyline wasn’t suitable for flying. New York then became the inevitable setting. “We could really let the character fly and you could appreciate the spirals and all of the flying effects. And New York City is the birthplace of the superhero,” Gagnol suggested.

The filmmakers’ style of directing demands very little camera movement. “There are very few traveling shots, very few panoramic shots, so what we do is set the camera in a particular position and then we watch the character within the frame,” Gagnol continued. “If you think about the scenes when he’s flying, when he comes up close it’s almost as if we’re seeing him through our window. When he flies further away, we see him as a much smaller figure.”

Working, as always, at the Folimage [animation](#) studio in southern France, the animators’ hand-drawn style (still low-tech with pencil and paper) offers a sense of fragility that corresponds with Leo’s state of being. And their workflow boasts a very distinctive light vibration technique present in each drawing.

“When the people apply the color to the drawing, they’re also designing the light on the paper itself,” Gagnol explained. “It’s a very labor-intensive operation. When a character stops, the vibration continues. And we have three different kinds of vibration, so when you see a character that is completely in the dark, or completely in the light or half in the light and half in the shadow, the lighting in the shadow is also done by hand. What we’re able to do is integrate the figure of the character into the surrounding decor, as opposed to computer-generated, when you see the character imposed on top of the decor.”



Leo becomes a luminous blue during his phantom state. However, he becomes weaker if he stays a phantom for too long. This enabled the animators to make him “a silhouette void of colour.”

By contrast, the disfigured villain — “The Man with the Broken Face” — looks like something out of a Picasso Cubist painting. Gagnol was inspired by both the Joker and Claude Rains’ Invisible Man with a lot of theatrical flair, but the villain can’t seem to interest anyone in hearing his origin story.

But what’s most interesting to Gagnol is conveying the human side of the superhero through this blend of French and American styles. Indeed, his favorite moments are between Leo and his sister, when he regales her with his superhero tales.

“Even though this is a story that takes place in New York,” said Gagnol, “it is seen through the perspective of my own culture, so we can borrow a great deal from each other’s cultures while creating something new.”

Edited by Alex O'Reilly



