

Peterborough Arts Cinema

Films that make you think

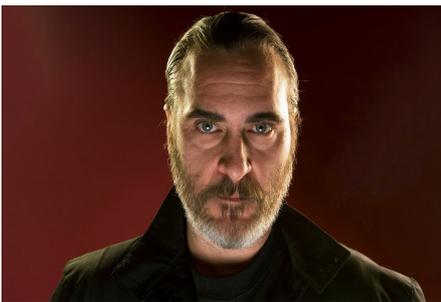
Thursday 22nd November at 7:30 pm
You Were Never Really Here
(2017) US
R | 1h 29min

Director; Lynne Ramsay.

Stars Joaquin Phoenix, Judith Roberts, Ekaterin Sasonov

Joe, a traumatised Gulf War veteran and now an unflinching hired gun who lives with his frail elderly mother, has just finished yet another successful job. With an infernal reputation of being a brutal man of results, the specialised in recovering missing teens enforcer will embark on a blood-drenched rescue mission, when Nina, the innocent 13-year-old daughter of an ambitious New York senator, never returns home. But amidst half-baked leads and a desperate desire to shake off his shoulders the heavy burden of a personal hell, Joe's frenzied plummet into the depths of Tartarus is inevitable, and every step Joe takes to flee the pain, brings him closer to the horrors of insanity.

Cannes Winner Best Actor, Joaquin Phoenix



Xan Brooks interviewed Joaquin Phoenix March 2018

Phoenix has been a turbulent screen presence for so many years that it is startling to realise that he is only 43. He has played dented Johnny Cash, the depraved emperor Commodus, an introverted lonely heart in Spike Jonze's *Her* and a raging, rough beast in Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master*. Some great actors are deliberate and precise, but Phoenix is at his best when he seems on the outer edge of control; when he threatens to break loose from the picture and bring the scenery crashing about his ears. The man goes at things freestyle, for better or worse. He says: "The great thing about film is that you get to make mistakes." "Just be in the moment," Phoenix advises at one point. "Don't overthink it, let it be what it is. If you keep trying to find what's unique in the moment, then the danger is that you miss that very thing." I think he's talking about the craft of film acting. He may be talking about life.

On his latest film, *You Were Never Really Here*, he has found a kindred spirit in the British film-maker Lynne Ramsay – another wild talent who sometimes courts disaster. Ramsay bashed out the script on spec, at speed, after bailing out of another movie (*Jane Got a Gun*) on the first day of production. She tells me she wrote the lead role with Phoenix expressly in mind. "Stuck his picture above the computer, as though I could telepathically put him in my film." Sure enough, the actor materialised on set having never met her before. "He's instinctual and unpredictable," Ramsay says. "The range of stuff that he gave me ... I could have made several other completely different films." Phoenix plays Joe, a traumatised former soldier on a mission to retrieve a trafficked teenager. He says he did some research – spoke to an ex-military guy who does similar work. Mainly, though, he followed his gut. "Lynne sent me an audio file of Fourth of July fireworks. She said: 'That's what's happening inside Joe's head.' That's one thing that really clicked for me."

He recalls his first time in front of a camera as though it happened yesterday: "Instantaneous joy. The most enjoyable thing. For some kids, it's the first time they crack a ball or score a goal. For me, it was this. I was eight years old, and I remember the first scene on the TV set so vividly. And I knew that I loved it – the physical sensation; how powerful it was. That's the feeling I've been chasing ever since." At the time, he was one of five children: a band of pint-sized performers; Haight-Ashbury von Trapps. The Phoenixes had alighted in California with their footloose hippy parents and started busking on the streets. He says: "My mom got a job at NBC. And then through her boss we were introduced to an agent. She was the only agent who would take all five of us because my parents didn't want us to be split up." He snorts. "We were a very expressive, creative bunch."

