

## **FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS - Film at CONCA VERDE on 30.01.17**

**Talk by Peter Anderson - From WIKIPEDIA**

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### **The film**

*Florence Foster Jenkins* is a 2016 British biographical comedy-drama film directed by Stephen Frears /stiːvən friːəz/ and written by Nicholas Martin. The film stars Meryl Streep as Florence stiːvən friːəz Foster Jenkins, a New York heiress who became an opera singer known for her painful lack of singing skill. Hugh Grant plays her husband and manager, English Shakespearean actor, St. Clair Bayfield. Other cast members include Simon Helberg, Rebecca Ferguson, and Nina Arianda.

Filming began in May 2015, and the premiere was held in London on 12 April 2016. The film was released on 6 May 2016 in the United Kingdom, 13 July in France, 12 August in the United States and 22 December in Italy. The film has been nominated for two Oscars at the 89th Academy Awards: Best Actress for Streep (making this her twentieth nomination) and Best Costume Design.

### **Plot**

Florence Foster Jenkins (Meryl Streep) is a New York City heiress and socialite who founded the Verdi Club to celebrate a passionate love for opera and music. As it is 1944 and the U.S. is in the midst of World War II, Florence is of the opinion that "music matters more than ever." English Shakespearean actor, St. Clair Bayfield (Hugh Grant), is her husband and manager. Despite being married, Florence and Bayfield live in separate residences. She has an apartment in the city while he resides in a house with his secret mistress, Kathleen Weatherley (Rebecca Ferguson). Florence suffers from a long-term case of syphilis, which she contracted from her first husband. The illness has caused her to have various health problems and she takes medications that have toxic side effects, such as mercury and arsenic. Due to the fear of passing the disease on to Bayfield, she remains abstinent from all sexual intercourse in her marriage, and Bayfield fulfills his sexual urges with Kathleen.

Florence decides to resume her singing lessons, which she has neglected. She hires pianist Cosmé McMoon (Simon Helberg) and introduces him to her vocal coach, Carlo Edwards (David Haig), the assistant conductor at the Metropolitan Opera. McMoon is shocked to discover that Florence is a terrible singer, yet Bayfield and Edwards pretend she is wonderful, the former giving McMoon a dire warning not to criticize her.

Bayfield makes arrangements for a small recital, hand picking people allowed to buy tickets. On the night of the performance, loyal members of the Verdi Club sit respectfully, but others can barely contain their laughter. Feeling encouraged by her recital's good reviews, she makes a recording of her singing as a Christmas gift for the Verdi Club. Florence gives McMoon a copy of the record, which leads to her recalling how Bayfield was not always a very successful actor and she would hide negative reviews to protect his feelings. She also informs McMoon of her history as a piano player and teacher, having once played for the President as a child. McMoon realizes at this moment that Florence is not as musically inept as he had thought, strengthening their friendship.

Florence and McMoon write and perform original songs together, one of which gets airtime on the radio, much to the shock and horror of Bayfield and Kathleen, despite many listeners finding much enjoyment from her music, believing it to be comedic. With this burst in popularity, Florence informs Bayfield that she has booked Carnegie Hall for a one night performance and will give away a thousand tickets to soldiers. Bayfield tries to talk her out of it, but fails. With Bayfield stressed over the impending performance, which culminates into him getting into a fight with a group of men listening and laughing at Florence and McMoon's song at a bar, Kathleen cannot put up with the lack of attention and leaves him. McMoon confides to Bayfield that he fears that the recital will humiliate him to the point of ruining his career. Bayfield replies that he gave up his acting career to support his wife and urges McMoon to possibly do the same for the sake of his friend. McMoon agrees, elated that he will at least get to play at Carnegie Hall.

The concert is packed and attended by the likes of Cole Porter and Tallulah Bankhead. When Florence begins singing, the soldiers laugh and jeer. Her supporters and loyal friends, however, scold them and then cheer for her to keep singing. She happily continues her performance. Meanwhile, an editor for the *New York Post*, refuses to continue listening, promising a desperate Bayfield that he will write a damning review of the recital.

Bayfield, with McMoon's help, goes to great lengths so that she only receives good reviews by buying every copy of the *New York Post* in the vicinity and throwing them away. After being given sarcastically patronizing comments about her performance alluding to the *New York Post's* review by a pair of young men, Florence is driven to find a copy of the review in a trash can and is upset to the point of collapse. As she is dying in bed, Bayfield by her side, Florence remembers a fancy angel costume worn for the concert as an angel and imagines herself singing beautiful opera. She imagines that she, McMoon and Bayfield all take a triumphant bow to a standing ovation. She points out proudly that even though people can say she *could not* sing, no one can say she *did not* sing. Peacefully, she dies.

### The reviews

On Rotten Tomatoes, the film has an approval rating of 87%, based on 175 reviews, with an average rating of 7/10. The performances of Streep, Grant, and Helberg received particular praise as well as the screenplay and the warm tone of the film. The site's critical consensus reads, "*Florence Foster Jenkins* makes poignant, crowd-pleasing dramedy out of its stranger-than-fiction tale – and does its subject justice with a reliably terrific turn from star Meryl Streep." On Metacritic, the film has a score of 71 out of 100, based on 41 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews". Audiences polled by CinemaScore gave the film an average grade of "A–" on an A+ to F scale.

Wai Chee Dimock, writing in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, linked the film to Hamlet and The Magic Flute, saying that the film "is neither tragedy nor farce, but a passable admixture of the two, defining both negatively."

### Carnegie Hall

**Carnegie Hall** (/ˈkɑːrnɪˈhɑːl/, also frequently /kɑːrneɪˈhɑːl/ or /kɑːrnɪˈhɑːl/) is a concert venue in Midtown Manhattan in New York City, United States, located at 881 Seventh Avenue, occupying the east side of Seventh Avenue between West 56th Street and West 57th Street, two blocks south of Central Park.

Designed by architect William Burnet Tuthill and built by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1891, it is one of the most prestigious venues in the world for both classical music and popular music. Carnegie Hall has its own artistic programming, development, and marketing departments, and presents about 250 performances each season. It is also rented out to performing groups. The hall has not had a resident company since 1962, when the New York Philharmonic moved to Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall (renamed Avery Fisher Hall in 1973 and David Geffen Hall in 2015).

Carnegie Hall has 3,671 seats, divided among its three auditoriums.

### Carnegie Hall joke

*Rumor is that a pedestrian on Fifty-seventh Street, Manhattan, stopped Jascha Heifetz /dʒɑːhɑːfɛts/ and inquired, "Could you tell me how to get to Carnegie Hall?" "Yes," said Heifetz. "Practice!"*

This old joke has become part of the folklore of the hall, but its origins remain a mystery. According to *The New York Times*, the main player in the story has been described at various times as either an unnamed man, violinist Jascha Heifetz or the pianist Arthur Rubinstein. On its webpage, Carnegie Hall quotes the wife of violinist Mischa Elman as having perhaps the best story of its origin: "One day, after a rehearsal that hadn't pleased Elman, the couple was leaving Carnegie Hall by the backstage entrance when they were approached by two tourists looking for the hall's entrance. Seeing his violin case, they asked, 'How do you get to Carnegie Hall?' Without looking up and continuing on his way, Elman simply replied, 'Practice.'"

### Stephen Frears

**Stephen Arthur Frears** (born 20 June 1941) is an English film director. Frears has directed British films since the 1980s including *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Dangerous Liaisons*, *High Fidelity*, *The Queen* and *Philomena*. He has been nominated for two Academy Awards for Best Director for *The Grifters* and *The Queen*.

In the late 1980s, Frears came to international attention as a director of feature films. His directorial film debut was the detective spoof *Gumshoe* (1971), but it was his direction of *My Beautiful Laundrette* that unexpectedly led to wider notice. The interracial romance, based on a Hanif Kureishi /həˈnɪf kəˈreɪʃi/ screenplay and shot on 16 mm film, was released theatrically in 1985 to great acclaim, and received an Academy Award nomination and two nominations for BAFTA Awards: it is known as the film that helped launch both Frears and actor Daniel Day Lewis. In 1987, Frears worked with Adrian Edmondson on *Mr Jolly Lives Next Door*, for a 45-minute programme by cult ensemble *The Comic Strip Presents*. In 1985, Frears also directed a Comic Strip parody of *Rebecca*.

Frears next directed Joe Orton biopic *Prick Up Your Ears*, another collaboration with playwright Alan Bennett, which was followed by his second film from a Kureishi screenplay, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987). The following year, Frears made *Dangerous Liaisons* in France, with a cast that included Glenn Close, John Malkovich and Michelle Pfeiffer. Based on the novel of romantic game playing, the film received numerous Academy Awards and BAFTA nominations, and Frears himself was nominated for the BAFTA Award for Best Direction.

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### **The film show**

**This is the fourth film this year. The next film will be in English – the title being SING STREET, followed by AMERICAN PASTORAL in English. There will be a staggering 21 films altogether till the summer – 18 in English, 1 in French, 1 in German and 1 in Spanish.**

**Enjoy the film!**