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| <p>Volume<br/>27<br/>Number 5<br/>MAY 2024</p> |  | <p>Website<br/><a href="https://www.williamstown-film-society.org">https://www.williamstown-film-society.org</a><br/>Email<br/>michaeljslee58@gmail.com<br/>Phone<br/>0478 624 528</p> |
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Council Chamber of the Town Hall, 104 Ferguson St, Williamstown, 7.30pm, Wednesday 29th May, 2024.

## Quartet

There are some people who will loathe *Quartet*, a cutesy chamber piece about a retirement home for classical musicians. But they are not likely to be the film's target demographic. Dustin Hoffman's directorial debut is the latest example of a recent Hollywood effort to cater more to an older audience. Most prominent has been *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, like *Quartet* about a group of retirees whiling away the twilight of their lives in an unfeasibly attractive location - and also like *Quartet* starring Dame Maggie Smith. Patronising as it may be, the "pensioner pound" has never been so powerful.

*Quartet* does not go down the racy retirees route of some similar films, instead choosing to err very much on the cuddly side of caution where the romantic exploits of its characters are concerned. Lifelong friends and former colleagues Cissy (Pauline Collins), Wilf (Billy Connolly) and Reg (Tom Courtenay) live in Beecham House, a gorgeous stone edifice set somewhere in the English countryside dedicated to housing ageing artistes and nurturing what is left of their talent (rather a lot as a matter of fact). Around every corner is a lofty soprano or earnest clarinet player. But Beecham is on the brink of closure. When snooty grande dame Jean Horton (Smith) moves in it seems there may be a way to save it. But can she and her old pals, with whom she once sang a world-renowned recording of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, including her ex-husband, manage to get along?

It's definitely not what the musical would call verismo. The idea, for example, that a place like this could possibly be publicly funded is ludicrous, the luxe drawing rooms awash with antique chaises longues and silk soft furnishings. Jean is apparently on the waiting list for a new hip but we never see her physically struggle. Indeed, the greatest worry these residents have is not quibbles with visiting relatives or financial concerns, but whether they are being given the correct condiments at breakfast.

Nonetheless, what saves *Quartet* from becoming too saccharine is the wit and warmth of its central characters. Hoffman, himself 75, clearly has great affection for his cast and they for him. Smith, of course, is haughty as ever, and Connolly, and also Michael Gambon in a smaller role, are both hilarious, especially the former as the randy old tenor intent on chatting up everything that moves (the effervescent young Dr Lucy, played by Sheridan Smith, most of all). Courtenay as Reg, still nursing a broken heart, shows with subtlety how vulnerable we can be in love, no matter what our age.

It's a fairytale retirement for sure. If what you're after is an unbridled look at time's barbarity then you will be better off with Michael Haneke's *Amour*. But as light, heartfelt entertainment this will certainly hit the spot for some. Especially Verdi fans. Bravo.

*Independent (UK) Francesca Steele - 18th October 2012*

## Starbox Results

|              | 5  | 4  | 3 | 2 | 1 | Average |
|--------------|----|----|---|---|---|---------|
| Darkest Hour | 25 | 14 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4.6     |

To watch a trailer (& read more) head to the 2024 program on our website

[https://: www.williamstown-film-society.org](https://www.williamstown-film-society.org)