

The Review

Cinema

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Provenance

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QUARTET

Directed by Dustin Hoffman

Don't go to *Quartet* expecting a dose of realism. Life in a retirement home is probably too grim for entertainment but indulge yourself for a moment with the fantasy that a small stately home, luxuriously furnished and well staffed, can be the resting place for impeccable, retired singers and musicians, still in possession of their wits and happily making music in their dotage. Where the funding comes from is a question we don't have to ask. There is even a live-in GP. And there is no discernible smell of pee or disinfectant.

Making his directorial debut, Dustin Hoffman has assembled a stellar cast of actors, singers, and musicians, perhaps none of whom required much direction. The screenplay, adapted from his original play by Ronald Harwood, is gently funny while exposing vulnerability in the elderly artistes. A life is spent in performance, but what happens when the applause stops and the curtain falls for the last time?

The quartet, Tom Courtney, Billy Connolly, Maggie Smith, and Pauline Collins, are retired opera singers, all residents of Beecham's Residence for Retired Musicians. Once famous for their Rigoletto, they are now called upon to save their luxury residence from a looming financial crisis by singing at its annual gala concert. None of them looks old or decrepit enough to be quite believable but their interactions are touching and hilarious. Connolly can't keep the twinkle



Pauline Collins and Maggie Smith in *Quartet*.

from his eye as he overacts a lecherous old man and Maggie Smith does acid-tongued grumpy old woman extremely well.

Thankfully, we're spared the sight of any of them miming to a real quartet but the soundtrack is beautifully played by an orchestra of residents all of whom were significant figures in their day.

Wait on for the closing credits, where members of the cast are listed alongside photographic evidence that they were once successful, young, and beautiful. This was the take home message for me, all old people have had a life before decrepitude and senility took over. It is not a reality movie and there is a little too much caricature but you will leave happier than you were before you went in.

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Billy Connolly, Tom Courtenay, Andrew Sachs, Pauline Collins in Quartet.

