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Aaah, they all look the same  
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Doctor tries contacting dead wife  
**THUNDERPANTS (PG) W/A** Fri: 11.00, 1.45 Sat & Sun: 12.30  
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**ABOUT A BOY (12) W/A** Fri: 4.00, 6.45, 10.00  
Mon-Wed: 12.15 (not Wed) 3.00, 5.45, 9.00  
Shock - Hugh Grant not being foppish  
**SNOW DOWNS (PG)** Fri-Sun: 10.45, 1.30, 4.15, 7.00  
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Oscar winner set around racism in deep South  
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See review, right.  
**HOW TO BE AN ALIEN** Tue 11th - Sat 15th  
An outsider's view of the English Daily: 9.30pm  
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By the author of Captain Corelli.

**Oxford Playhouse 305305**  
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Fri: 8pm Sat: 2.30pm (audio described), 7.30pm  
Notorious political career of Johnny Silvester, father of the Irish Nation. £6.50(concs)-£19.50. See review at www.dailyinfo.co.uk  
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Neil Pearson stars in Michael Frayn's tale of two couples. £12.50-£24

**Pegasus Theatre 722851**  
**PILLARS OF THE COMMUNITY** Fri 7th - Sat 8th  
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Oxford School of Drama present Ibsen See review, right  
**Old Fire Station Theatre 297170**  
**INTO THE WOODS** Fri 7th - Sat 8th  
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Fairy tales become musical See review at www.dailyinfo.co.uk  
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**PREVIEW : FILM**  
**SPIDERMAN**  
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Well, it's been hyped and hyped and then just to make sure, a little more hype has been thrown in that little machine known as the Hollywood film release: Another year and another comic comes to celluloid and by the looks of things this one here's for the staying. While it was Batman in the late 80s and 90s, the man with webs he can ping out of his wrists and wall crawling abilities may well be the hero for the 2000s.

In some ways this is really two films, one building up the character of Peter Parker (is there a general predilection amongst superhero creators for alliteration: Clark Kent?) a.k.a. Spiderman and the other getting down to the beating of those evil people, with lots of leaping about, dangling from drainpipes and building swinging. Before the film I wasn't entirely convinced by the casting of Tobey Maguire as our main do-gooder, partly because he's been in some solid dramas where character acting is of the essence, or to put it another way, films where the scripts are more important than effects. But in a true 'reviewer sees the light' moment I was proved wrong. The fact that he is such a good actor makes him all the more believable, which isn't something I expect from blockbusterers. Consequently there weren't nearly as many 'stop talking and get on with the kicking' feelings as I was prepared for. The only moments these feelings did creep to the surface they were a result of the sometimes beyond cringe-worthy script. Screenwriters still seem to have problems addressing the many aspects of relationships in a relatively quick fire way (so the kicking can be resumed) without making you sink so low in your seat you have actually slipped in to the row in front.

The film does take its character building quite seriously with our hero, but there seems to be a rule that baddies should never be sympathised with that greatly. Willem Dafoe is a deft baddie, as he always is, complete with schizophrenic mirror scenes, which have to be seen. I'm not entirely sure if they were meant to be the funniest in the film, but great they are. Baddies often seem to have the best costumes and much more advanced gadgets (not that I'm influenced by appearances) and the Green Goblin is a visual joy: a green muscle outfit with aerodynamic head gear and a missile shooting glider, which put down our Spidy's mere web building abilities a rung or two. There were even moments when I wondered if Spider would triumph with all his limbs intact, but then, being a hardened cynic, I realised that the film producers are probably not yet ready for an armless superhero to appear in the sequels.

Blockbusters still have a few advancements to make in terms of their 'real-life' characters, such as how Kirsten Dunst's boyfriend can possibly have enough money to finance a flash new car that he parades to Ms Dunst's glee (though being the Spider's love interest she can't really be that impressed by material goods. Obviously.) when he appears not to have a trust fund and only be 17? But small matter - films like this one should not be viewed for their continuity and accuracy.

So, in terms of fights, effects and all things gadgety, don't expect 'The Matrix' with a superhero, though, as with so many action films made afterwards, there are many nods to the technology it used. Do expect a great deal of humour and sheer joy - a superhero who has fun after waking up one morning with plentiful pecs and the ability to climb walls and jump rooftops. And so he should. Being Hollywood the morals are reiterated a touch too frequently, but if you can live with that and a few soppy moments (but would it be the same without them?) you should leave smiling. Maybe I'm not that hardened a cynic after all.

Liz Buckle 06.06.02

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**Stronger - 'Battles of Will'**  
Burton Taylor Theatre until Saturday 8th June

Stronger, a selection of monologues from OUDS's finest, features many competent and thoughtful actors who have obviously reflected at great length about their performances. Nevertheless, something of each performance fails to satisfy. Signs of unpreparedness showed through, not only in the occasional missed line (forgivable) but also in a tendency to act without sympathy for the other characters on stage, and to fail (in some cases utterly) to achieve the necessary variations in tone and pace which are the bread and butter of characterisation, and thus of gripping an audience. Whilst sporadically effective, characters largely failed to convince - moments of humour fell flat or were met with confusion.

Tom Green's Kafka was thus a bold attempt at the telling of an African folktale, but his unconvincing 'rags' costume (a young white Oxford undergraduate playing an old African tribesman - errr... hello!) and persistent declaratory tone robbed a fascinating story of its ability to move.

In Nicole Scott and Gwyneth Evans' performance of Strindberg's 'The Stronger', two decent performers failed to do themselves justice. A monotomy of tone in the speaker and a tendency of the actresses to act opposite one another, rather than with one another, rendered the combination of fine performers and a fine script ineffective. Comic and tragic moments rolled into one undifferentiated statement, on the part of the speaker, of anxious self-pity, whilst the second character's laughter seemed less to be a reaction to the words of the first than an upstaging.

Leander Deeny, if anyone, redeemed the evening both in monologue and duologue with some excellent timing and a fine sense of depth in his characterisation in both of his performances.

The final piece, Lunch by Steven Berkoff as performed by Lucy Foster and Mike Tweedle, too, was an eminently difficult piece, the complications of which were bravely overcome with conviction and competence.

In an evening of monologues, however, we are entitled to expect a lot. Where actors propose to entertain us single-handedly, and to charge us for the privilege, they need to be worth it. To the man in the audience whose protestation that my involuntary laughter during a sensitive moment had distracted the actor to whom I had 'a responsibility' - well, I disagree. It was he who was responsible for entertaining me, and if his performance was sufficiently mediocre to render me helpless with laughter, then it was he that failed and not me.

A brief word to the wise - fans of Ibsen and Brecht will be disappointed to hear that this performance features works by neither, contrary to the claims of the poster.

Munzar Sharif and Andy Davies  
4/6/02

**The Pillars of the Community**  
Oxford School of Drama Pegasus Theatre until Saturday 8th  
The prospect of sitting through Ibsen on the last evening of a leisurely jubilee holiday wasn't too inspiring, but once again the Pegasus Theatre in east Oxford surprised me, this time with a production by the visiting Oxford School of Drama.  
The Pillars of the Community, is a story of clashing cultures and half-buried vengeance, and this alone would be an absorbing scenario. Ibsen's characters are surprisingly 21st century: there is a corrupt businessman desperate to hide a huge cover-up, a neglected teenager who longs to be himself, labourers threatened by industrial progress and corporate power. Set in an isolated community founded on principles of public morality and respectability, it's inevitable that the return of two former inhabitants will stir up old tensions, and the Oxford School of Drama bring these ever-present conflicts to life with clarity and depth.  
It's a powerful if rather ponderous plot, but it's made into easy but stimulating viewing by some outstanding actors and a simple set that evokes a plain, God-fearing community very effectively. Director Katie Goodwin has ensured that none of the characters becomes clichéd by applying this understatement to the production as a whole. Adso Brown is certainly a most supercilious Mr Bernick - one of the so-called 'pillars' who turns out to be rotten to the core but he is still credible. The cast is of a uniformly high standard, with Jemma Powell standing out as Lona, who's returned from the Land of the Free to inspire some freedom of thought in the Old World.  
The energy is maintained throughout the production, and I found myself wondering right up to the last scene how the web of lies and rumour would be untangled, and whether revenge or redemption would out. This is an inspiring and thought-provoking production from a company who seemed to relish the challenge.  
Olivia Rowland 04.06.02

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