

Some thoughts on watching films

Stories are the stuff of life. They allow us to reflect on all sorts of issues at a safe distance as we engage with the characters, cry with them, laugh with them, get cross with them and generally share their experience. How they deal with the issues they come across may frustrate us, or give us new insights; cause us to laugh or cry; result in us hurling abuse at the screen or willing there to be a happy ending. And through it all we can encounter God in all sorts of unexpected places if we only take time to look.

Questions to ask yourself

What did you think of the film? What do you like most? Least?

Which incidents made you *think* or *feel* most strongly? How well did you think the film treated those incidents?

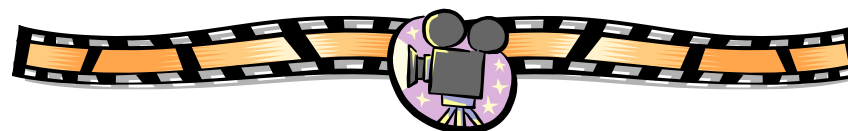
What issues did the film raise for you?

What character(s) do you most identify with and why?

Does the film have any echoes of Christian beliefs or stories from the Bible? Does it support or challenge Christian values?

Some facts about the film

- The screenplay was written by Susannah Grant who based her script on a series of articles about Nathaniel Ayers written by Steve Lopez and published in the LA Times between April and November 2005. Lopez has since written a book (*The Soloist: A Lost Dream, An Unlikely Friendship, And The Redemptive Power of Music*), which was published in 2008 and from which Grant also drew material.
- Most of the homeless people in the film are actually homeless.
- The real Nathaniel Ayers can be seen in the front row of the concert at the end of the film.
- As of April 2009, Nathaniel “has a girlfriend and is doing reasonably well” according to Steve Lopez. He has also taught himself to play the flute.
- In the scene in which Nathaniel and Steve attend a rehearsal concert, all the seats are covered with canvas. This is actually done in some concert halls during rehearsals to reflect a more accurate sound as if the seats were occupied.
- While Jamie Foxx is a talented pianist, he is not a string player. Although he did take lessons on proper technique from Ben Hong, the assistant principal cellist for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, it is Hong you actually hear playing in the film.
- The LAMP Community (originally the Los Angeles Men’s Place) is a non-profit organisation located in Skid Row (an area of LA which currently contains one of the largest populations of homeless people in the US) that seeks to permanently end homelessness, improve health, and build self-sufficiency among men and women living with severe mental illness.
- October 10th is World Mental Health Day. First celebrated in 1992, its aim is to raise public awareness about mental health issues.



**A chance to watch films together.
An opportunity to discuss the issues raised.
A time of friendship, food and fun.**

5th Sep Doubt
10th Oct The Soloist
7th Nov The Reader
5th Dec Heaven
9th Jan Inception (with FEATURES @ Tackley)
6th Feb Departures

**Films start at 5:30pm
Followed by food, coffee and conversation**

**10 Bletchington Road
Islip**

**Further details from Jonathan (Ox 842214)
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The Soloist

When newspaper columnist Steve Lopez (Robert Downey Jr.) meets homeless schizophrenic and Juilliard-dropout Nathaniel Anthony Ayers Jr. (Jamie Foxx), it is the beginning of a friendship that changes both their lives. The film, based on real-life events, was made in 2009 and is directed by Joe Wright, whose previous films include *Atonement* and *Pride and Prejudice*.

The need to give something a name

With physical illness, people are often happier if they know what is wrong with them and they can give it a name. But that is not necessarily true with mental illness. It may make onlookers happier, but there is a danger that people are then pigeon-holed and stereotyped, rather than being seen as individuals. What do you think? Is David right not to get too hung up about diagnosis?

Forcing someone to change

Throughout the film, Steve agonises as to how to best help Nathaniel. He is convinced that the right drugs could cure him. But David reminds him that Nathaniel doesn't want to see a psychiatrist or take medication—and that is his choice. Is it ever right to go against someone's wishes "for their own good"? And if so, who decides? Does God ever force us onto a particular path? What does that say about God? And what does that say about how we should treat others?

Friendship

The film has a lot to say about friendship. What do you think makes a good friend? What, for you, is friendship all about? Who have been good friends to you? Give thanks to God for them? Then reflect on who needs your friendship?

One person's possessions is another person's rubbish

At one point, Steve wants to throw everything in Nathaniel's cart away. He thinks it is all rubbish. But to Nathaniel, it is all precious. Do we sometimes dismiss things too easily, not taking time to understand what others see in them?

The effect of music

Some people see coloured shapes when they hear music. It is a form of synesthesia. It is not stated whether Nathaniel has this condition or not, but he is certainly deeply affected by music, whether he is listening or playing. Music has that ability to touch the depths and reach places that are beyond our reach in any other way. How does music affect you? Can it take you to a different plane? Does it help you come closer to God? If so, what music works best for you? Or are you someone for whom music has no effect at all? If so, what is it that perhaps takes its place in your life?

What are you passionate about?

Nathaniel has a passion for music. But what about you? Is there anything in your life that you are passionate about in the same way; something that permeates every aspect of your life, such that you would go to any extremes because of it? And can people detect your passion when they look at you? There is something refreshing about those who are passionate about what they do. We often see it in young people; and it so often gets lost as we get older and we get overtaken by all the mundane everyday tasks we feel we must do. If that is the case with you, if your passion has been squeezed out, what can you do to rekindle it?

Memorable Quotes

- Nathaniel** I apologise for my appearance. I've had a few setbacks.
- Steve** So have I.
- Mum** You know what I hear when you play your music? I hear the voice of God coming ... (*Nathaniel giggles*) ... I'm serious. You've got something special here, babe. A way out. There is a whole world waiting for you.
- Nathaniel** A bow needs rosin just as a police car needs prisoners.
- Steve** What does he have? Schizophrenia?
- David** Yeah, I don't get too hung up on diagnosis.
- Steve** But how do you help somebody if you don't know what they have?
- David** Look at these people. Every one of them's been diagnosed more than you can imagine. And as far as I can tell, it hasn't done them any good.
- Steve** I tell him this is no place for him. He says he wants to be here. He says this is his choice. Should I take him at his word, or should I try to force him inside? Wouldn't a little arm-twisting be more humane than leaving him here on the streets in this lost colony of broken, helpless souls?
- Steve** I'm telling you, it was such an unbelievable experience. If you had seen him, if you could have felt him ... I mean it's the same hall, we're listening to the same music, but, no ... you see him, it's one thing, but you feel him ... I'm watching him. He's watching the music. And while they're playing, I say, "My God, there is something higher out there. Something higher out there and he lives in it, and he's with it. I've never even experienced it, but I can tell ... I don't even know what you call it.
- Mary** Grace.
- Steve** I've never loved anything the way he loves music.
- Steve** What if he was a danger to someone else.
- David** But he's not.
- Steve** What if someone said he was? They'd put him in a psychiatric hospital. He'd been in a 14 day psychiatric hold and they'd put him on meds straight away. What if that's all it took for him to be well? What if two weeks of meds, a two-week window into what his life could be changed his life? Saved his life? Why wouldn't you want to be part of that?
- David** Nathaniel has one thing going for him right now. A friend. If you betray that friendship, you destroy the only thing he has in this world.
- Steve** I don't want to be his only thing.
- Mary** You can't fix LA. You're never going to cure Nathaniel. Just be his friend and show up.
- Steve** I can tell you that by witnessing Mr Ayer's courage, his humility, his faith in the power of his art, I've learned the dignity of being loyal to something you believe in. Of holding onto it, above all else. Of believing, without question, that it will carry you home.