



*By Ian Trussler*

Over 10 years ago in April of 1999 I became aware of the fact that *Episode One - The Phantom Menace* was going to receive its UK Premiere on Wednesday 14th July 1999. Not only was it the premiere but a Royal one to boot, being attended by HRH Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales.

Soon after, it was announced in the press that as a charity Royal film performance, tickets would be available to the public, at a price of course but this was still a once in a lifetime opportunity.

By April 1999 I had already made arrangements to travel to Los Angeles to see the movie on it's US opening in May, whilst incorporating a visit to my family there.

Despite knowing I would have already seen the movie numerous times before its July UK premiere I decided to attempt to gain tickets to the Royal Performance, after all, how cool would it be to mingle with all the stars of the movie and other celebrities in what would surely be a night to remember.

Tickets to the event were not cheap or easy to come by. I had to complete an application form and commit to paying for a ticket without a guarantee of receiving one. The prices were either £100, £200 or £300 pounds dependant on seat placing.

Not really being able to afford or justify £300, I went for the cheapest option of £100 and sent off my application in hope.

Tickets were in huge demand, obviously and were allocated on a lottery basis and after returning from Los Angeles I ultimately received a letter saying I had not been successful in being selected for a ticket and my cheque was returned.

Although disappointed, I had seen the film numerous times already and knew it was a long shot, so moved on and just expected to watch TV coverage on the day.

The weeks passed and the date grew nearer when completely out of the blue, the day before the premiere I received a phone call from the organizers saying they had had a single ticket returned and had

THE 1999 ROYAL FILM PERFORMANCE

TO AID THE CINEMA AND TELEVISION BENEVOLENT FUND

IN THE GRACIOUS PRESENCE OF

HRH THE PRINCE OF WALES

STAR WARS  
EPISODE I  
THE PHANTOM MENACE



ON WEDNESDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> JULY 1999

AT THE

ODEON

LEICESTER SQUARE, LONDON WC2

DOORS OPEN 6.30PM

PLEASE BE SEATED BY 7.15PM

ADMITTANCE TO CINEMA WILL CEASE AT 7.30PM

FILM ENDS APPROXIMATELY 10.30PM

TRAFFIC

ACCESS TO LEICESTER SQUARE WILL BE ON FOOT ONLY.

SECURITY

DUE TO STRICT SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE EVENING, GUESTS ARE ASKED TO PROCEED TO THEIR SEATS IN THE AUDITORIUM IMMEDIATELY ON ARRIVAL AT THE CINEMA. GUESTS SHOULD NOT CONGREGATE IN THE FOYER OR ON THE STAIRS.

CLOAKROOM

OWING TO SECURITY REASONS THERE WILL BE NO CLOAKROOM FACILITIES.

PLEASE ENTER STALLS BY RIGHT HAND ENTRANCE

DRESS : BLACK TIE

THIS TICKET IS NON TRANSFERABLE NOT FOR RE-SALE

STALLS

X 15

NO SMOKING



Above: THE WAIT IS OVER!! The amazing Darth Maul display at the front of the ODEON LEICESTER SQUARE in London's glittering West End heralds the amazing return of STAR WARS with EPISODE ONE: THE PHANTOM MENACE. Opposite left: the logo-less poster for the movie by Drew Struzan. Opposite right: at home in my best tux and dickie bow, proudly displaying my Premiere ticket- "Yippee!!"



Above: the back of the lovely ticket for the 1999 Royal Film Premiere-with a hologram Darth Maul face no less!! Opposite left: six of the brilliantly conceived character marketing campaign posters displayed outside the ODEON, developed for use world wide by LUCASFILM to promote the long awaited return of the STAR WARS SAGA with THE PHANTOM MENACE. Which one is your favourite?



placed previous unsuccessful names into a lottery and my name had come up and did I want the ticket. Well you can guess my answer and they arranged to courier the ticket to me for the next morning so I could attend the evening event.

After putting the phone down and calming down from the excitement I began to panic about getting the appropriate attire for the Black Tie event.

So the day arrived and I headed off to the Odeon Leicester Square in my borrowed black dinner jacket and bow tie courtesy of *Marks and Spencer*.

It was a warm and sunny July evening in London and as I approached the square I could see that all entrances to the square were blocked off and security were posted at each point. A quick flash of my ticket and I was let through. There were thousands of people lining the square and the approach to the cinema. I remember feeling really weird and isolated as I walked the seemingly endless crowded corridor, with what felt like everyone's eyes on me thinking "who the hell is that" as numerous C list celebrities walked around me.



The Premiere was attended by almost every major actor and crew member from *Episode One* with the only exception being Liam Neeson who had chosen to attend the Premiere in his native Northern Ireland. George Lucas and Rick McCallum were there along with Rob Coleman, Trisha Biggar and Gavin Bocquet. Cast members included, Ewan, Natalie, Jake, Ahmed Best, Ray Park, Ian McDiarmid, Anthony Daniels, Kenny Baker, Brian Blessed, Pernilla August and Samuel L Jackson. Most of the cast and even George himself had been appearing on Channel Four's breakfast TV show *The Big Breakfast* over the preceding fortnight helping to build the excitement. Hell, even Peter Mayhew was there despite having nothing to do with the film, no sign of Dave Prowse though.

All the regular British TV and soap stars were in attendance and I remember thinking what a mess Frank Skinner and David Baddiel looked when they turned up in scruffy jeans and casual shirts. So much for the strict Black Tie dress code I stressed over.

Unfortunately I had a seat in the stalls and the main players were seated upstairs in the circle so I only caught a few glimpses of them upon arrival. However I did have my lovely souvenir Premiere Brochure to look through while we all waited in our seats for the Royal party to arrive and the movie to begin.

The highlight of the evening for me was that before the movie began, the cast and crew were introduced on stage to chat and introduce the movie. George himself came out along with Rick McCallum and bought out Ewan in his fetching kilt, Natalie looking beautiful, Jake, Ahmed, Pernilla, Ian McDiarmid, Anthony Daniels, Sam the Man and Kenny if memory serves. I don't recall Brian Blessed coming on or Ray Park but after 10 years I could be wrong.

Cast and Crew done, the movie began and it was a very different experience to the whooping and cheering I had found in the US cinemas back in May. The audience was clearly made up of mostly wealthy charity patrons or industry insiders there mainly for the kudos of a Royal Premiere rather than the movie itself. I thoroughly enjoyed the movie despite many disinterested people around me, much of whom were well into their sixties and beyond, talking persistently. The presentation in the Odeon was superb with amazing sound and picture quality. The atmosphere remained fairly subdued throughout and although when over there was a fair amount of applause it wasn't what a purely fan attended event would have been like.

Two people who did try to get the frenzy going were Jonathan Ross and Phil Jupitus, who were sitting close by to me and gave the film an enthusiastic standing ovation. Strange that, as later that very week Ross gave the film a slugging when he reviewed it on his movie show *Film 99* for the BBC. He sure seemed to like it the night I was there.

After the movie ended we had to remain seated and nobody could leave until the Royal party had gone. During this wait I had the misfortune to witness two female "stars" of a popular UK BBC TV medical drama throw a diva fit when security refused to let them leave before everyone else. Those clichéd words of "don't you know who we are" passed their lips and the face of the security guard was priceless as he told them to go away and sit back down like everyone else.

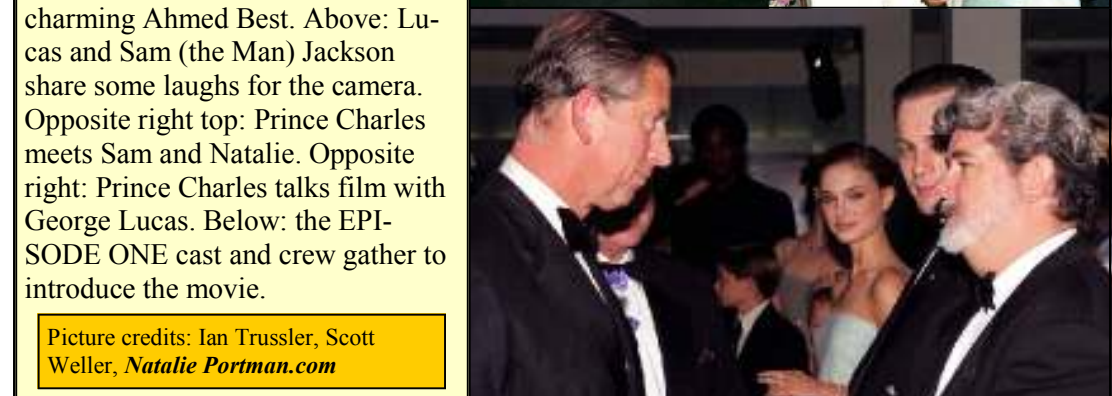
As I eventually filed out of the cinema with hundreds of others I remember seeing the coaches waiting to take the lucky ones to the after party at London Bridge. Sadly my ticket didn't get me into that, but as I walked back to Waterloo Station I felt truly blessed to have witnessed and been a tiny part of an historical moment, as the UK welcomed back the worlds greatest cinematic saga.

Nothing to do now but see the film several more times and wait for *Episode Two*.



Above top: left to right- a kilt wearing Ewan McGregor and wife Eve, the beautiful Natalie Portman, the charming Ahmed Best. Above: Lucas and Sam (the Man) Jackson share some laughs for the camera. Opposite right top: Prince Charles meets Sam and Natalie. Opposite right: Prince Charles talks film with George Lucas. Below: the EPISODE ONE cast and crew gather to introduce the movie.

Picture credits: Ian Trussler, Scott Weller, [Natalie Portman.com](http://NataliePortman.com)



Above far top: fans enthusiastically cheer the Premiere arrivals. Above top: Ray Park, with his gorgeous partner, in line to enter the cinema says hello to the fans. Top left: Peter Mayhew joins Mr and Mrs Kenny Baker for a photo opportunity. Above: Anthony Daniels (with two Threepio HASBRO figures in his tuxedo front pocket!!) meets the fans. Opposite left: two cinema-goers indulge themselves in a little STAR WARS fancy dress for the occasion.

