

NICK DENT'S TOP PICKS



1 THE LITTLE DEATH (MA15+)

★★★★☆

TV funnyman turned making-it-in-America actor Josh Lawson tries directing on for size. The result is a quirky, episodic sex comedy which explores the bedroom fetishes of a number of couples in the same neighbourhood.

2 BOYHOOD (M)

★★★★★

Richard Linklater's long-secret, 12 years in the making, coming-of-age drama was finally revealed last month and seemed to open the dam of Oscar-season hype. It's fair to say watching young actor Ellar Coltrane grow from ages seven to 18 in this unique and moving drama is an awards-worthy experience. Co-stars Ethan Hawke, Patricia Arquette.

3 THE BOXTROLLS (PG)

★★★★☆

The pick of the school holiday films is equal parts scary and delightful. The Boxtrolls are kindly subterranean creatures who only come out at night to rummage through the trash of the townspeople above. Lending their voices to this marvellous old-school stop-motion animation are Sir Ben Kingsley and *Maleficent*'s Elle Fanning.

Gypsy finds his way

Neil Patrick Harris, former child star, has found career success and love, writes Tiffany Bakker



Neil Patrick Harris (above) and (right) in *Gone Girl*.

ASK Neil Patrick Harris how a lifetime spent in the entertainment business has affected him and he laughs, ruefully.

"It's made me a little steely and a little bit robotic in certain ways," he says down the line from Los Angeles. "It's a gypsy's life. I try not to get too emotionally invested in something because I know eventually it will end. You're always saying goodbye to somebody."

Harris, of course, recently said goodbye to roles that affected his life greatly: he spent close to a decade playing serial womaniser Barney Stinson on popular sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* (a role he thinks changed audience

perceptions of his capabilities). And right after *HIMYM* shut up shop, he threw himself into a three-month run on Broadway as a German transgender rock star in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (which changed his own perception of what he was capable of, and for which he won a Tony).

Indeed, the 41-year-old has comprehensively conquered theatre and television (including becoming the go-to awards show host).

This year, he's scored parts in two very big, very different films: Seth MacFarlane's *A Million Ways to Die in the West* and David Fincher's adaptation of Gillian Flynn's novel *Gone Girl*, the latter also starring Ben Affleck and Rosamund Pike.

Harris is a huge Fincher fan, so when he heard he was on the director's radar for the role of Desi — the pitiful former flame of the missing Amy, whose husband Nick is prime suspect in the crime — he quickly read Flynn's novel in one sitting.

"I fell deeply in love with it," he says. "I quickly understood why it was such a massive success, but then I immediately worried I wasn't going to get the job because I got too excited about it."

Desperate to get into more dramatic fare, Harris met with Fincher "before he could go off me" and was cast soon after. "It was one of the better weeks of my life."

Harris says Fincher is so good because he has a knack of making every actor better.

"He makes everyone get to the top of their game," he says.



"Getting to work on a film where everyone is super-talented and working hard to be the best they can possibly be, that's a rare thing on a movie set."

A former child star, Harris has achieved the rare feat of parlaying that success into a bona fide adult career. He puts that down to the fact he was always more interested in work than celebrity.

"I've always been a real fan of the process of making things as opposed to what is achieved once it's made," he says. "In many ways, I like watching cooking shows more than eating a meal. I enjoy being in the trenches, I enjoy being on location, I enjoy being in a rehearsal room ... I enjoy filming things."

He says fame at a young age "tends to spin people".

"When they get a modicum of success they're quick to wonder what's next. They start to think more about how they maintain a level of fame and less about the job at hand. For me, it was more trying to maintain it as a career."

Dad to four-year-old twins

Gideon and Harper with his husband, actor-turned-chef David Burtka, Harris would support his kids if they showed any interest in the entertainment business.

"I'm a firm believer that people should follow their passions and I'm the lucky recipient of two parents who felt the same way."

"They might have wanted me to be a football player in the small town that I come from," says Harris, who grew up in rural New Mexico, "but I was much more interested in being in the school band and playing the French horn. My parents were 100 per cent OK with that."

"Anyway, David and I are both in the position of having some experience and wisdom in it, and we'd hopefully steer them away from the pitfalls."

After marrying Burtka in Italy last month after a decade together, Harris takes great pride in his family unit.

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