

**Title: Suzy McKee Charnas's review of the JS/ALW POTO Movie**

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Author and fan [Suzy McKee Charnas' review of the Phantom movie](#) is now online.

Charnas is a professional writer who has written a number of Phantom pieces, and was also one of the most thought-provoking and interesting posters on Usenet, and the POTO mailing list in its early days ('95, '96, etc). Her review is a typically insightful analysis of the story and stage show version of the musical, including its under-story, character dynamics, and staging.

**My comments on Suzy's review:**

As always I don't agree with every word she says, but her description of just what the movie version lacks, and why it matters so much to the story, is perfect.

I commented in response to other comments on dracschick's journal, where I found the link - but I'm going to post it here, too.

This fan agrees [with Charnas, and comment] - the conception of the character meant that I simply couldn't care too deeply about him. It wasn't Butler (although I think I disliked him more than Suzy did, whilst liking Patrick Wilson much more), it was Schumacher (and Lloyd Webber).

As Suzy says, the Phantom should be "an intense and masterful man who has earned his authority by a lifetime of adventure, struggle, and survival against great odds." Those things are vital parts of the character to me, and it wasn't Butler's fault that they simply weren't present in the script presented to him. Similarly, the key to what gives the story its tremendous emotional power is that it ends with "a cruelly maimed adult's large-spirited sacrifice of the one miraculous hope in a frightful life," and if he hasn't been that cruelly maimed or suffered from that much of a frightful life (compared with so many), and if he is both so young and so mildly disfigured that it is not his one miraculous hope, there's just no point.

Obviously many fans are able to enjoy the movie for what it does have, the music and outline of the story, lush sets, etc; but to me it's just stripped of its soul.

There's much more of what Suzy says that I think is perfect, such as (Charnas in quotes, me in italics):

*"The major problem is much worse: the core of the story, that fiery blend of passion, hope, unbridled rage and deepest despair, is gone. The stage Phantom's howls of anguish and jagged screams of*

*mad laughter are banished from the film. His deformities become minor, his madness a Heathcliffian brooding and bad temper."*

The stage Phantom is *"a mature man with a horrible face and a hard, cruel past. Like Leroux' original character, he was a grotesque, murderous genius shaped by at least four decades of cruel deprivation, delusion and despair."*

*"I put it to you that the intensity of the Phantom's obsession with pretty, pliable Christine grows from his awareness of his own age, of this talented young singer as his one and only, his last chance at love, sex, and the simple warmth of human companionship before his own approaching, inevitable decline."*

He is *"an intense and masterful man who has earned his authority by a lifetime of adventure, struggle, and survival against great odds."*

Instead of this, *"According to an article in a pop culture magazine the director of the movie, Joel Schumacher, decided to turn the rivals into a rich, handsome, and vacuous young man vs. a smart, self-made young man soured by bad treatment because he's appearance-challenged, as it were (but not much)."*

The end of the story is perhaps the most important part - but without the character as he exists on stage (as in the book), it loses its power.

*"This resolution (in more than one sense of the word) isn't just about how breaking up is hard to do, like an episode of "Orange County". It's a cruelly maimed adult's large-spirited sacrifice of the one miraculous hope in a frightful life.*

*"The movie cynically betrays the power of this story, and of the stage musical built upon it, by choosing instead to be an action-packed costume drama of virile young rivals in love, dueling (literally) for the heart of a brainless ingenue."*

(end quotations)

This is why I find the movie a travesty and a bastardization of the original story, and the show.

Fans who like it might say it's just different, just a different interpretation, but the point is that it is an interpretation which is entirely lacking in the very core points which give the story and characters their power. Without Andrew Lloyd Webber's music, and the show's lyrics, it would have no emotional power whatsoever.

Note: this was originally published in our [news section](#).