

Blu-ray Review: 'Love Never Dies' Fails to Conjure Power of Original 'Phantom'

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on June 5, 2012 - 4:47am

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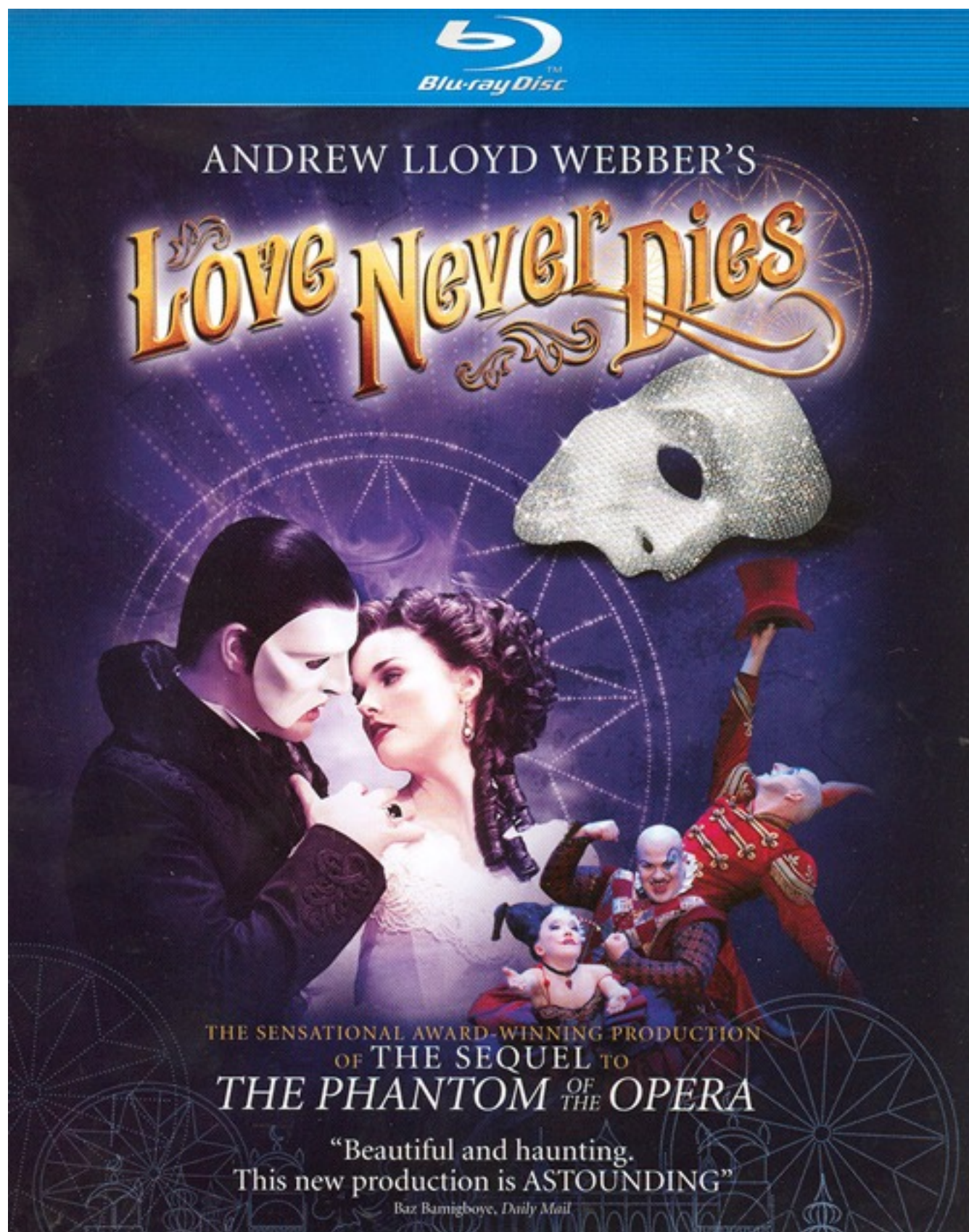
CHICAGO – The astonishing financial success of Andrew Lloyd Webber's "The Phantom of the Opera" is a testament to the enduring power of spectacle. Sure, Charles Hart and Robert Stilgoe's pedestrian lyrics may have all the charm of plywood, but audiences couldn't care less with an unstable chandelier dangling over their heads and a wealth of atmospheric scenery filling their field of vision.

What made "Opera" so memorable wasn't the lyrics or even the love triangle between the beautiful Christine Daaé, the prissy Raoul and the mysterious Phantom. It was Webber's melodies, particularly the iconic half-tone chords that open the show (which Roger Waters alleges was plagiarized from his song "Echoes") that truly linger in audience's memories. "Phantom" may not be a great show, but it certainly makes for a great night of live theatre.



Blu-ray Rating: **1.5/5.0**

Webber's inexplicable sequel, "Love Never Dies," feels like a cynical attempt at cashing in on the original musical's spectacular success. I can't imagine why any theatre company would desire to perform it. If the choice between performing a "Phantom" revival and its inferior sequel was to be made, the former would always prevail. Imagine audiences paying full-priced theatre tickets to see titles like, "More Sounds of Music," "Oklahoma 2: Poor Jud's Alive!" and "The King and I and You and Everyone We Know." The ironic thing about "Love Never Dies" is that it's set in New York's Coney Island (a huge departure from "Phantom"'s Parisian opera hall), and yet the show itself failed to open on Broadway. Simon Phillips' stage production at Melbourne's Regent Theatre has been celebrated as the best version yet made of "Love," yet that isn't saying very much. Glenn Slater and Charles Hart's lyrics are so generic that they rarely rise above the level of pedantic exposition (the play's uninspired title is its first red flag). The actors' voices are all excellent, but hearing them sing these lyrics is sort of like listening to Luciano Pavarotti perform a series of Hallmark cards. The show is phony, derivative melodrama consisting entirely of excess, and to make matters worse, it's deadly dull.



Love Never Dies was released on Blu-ray and DVD on May 29, 2012.

Photo credit: Universal Studios Home Entertainment

The plot takes place ten years after the events of "Phantom," and audiences who missed this detail at the beginning of the play can rest assured that the lyrics will remind them of the time gap at countless points over the next two hours. Christine and Raoul are now married with a child, and arrive at Coney Island after receiving an invitation from Oscar Hammerstein, only to find that the invite was sent by—surprise!—the Phantom. He's spent the past "Ten Long Years" moping about Christine and has finally decided to win her back. It's disconcerting to see the Phantom stripped of his fearsome wickedness and reduced to a sentimental softie. Though the good-hearted Raoul previously functioned as a worthy rival of the Phantom, he's now as arrogant and monstrously unpleasant as Gaston in "Beauty and the Beast." I suppose female audiences enjoy watching a woman get fought over by two hunky guys, but I don't believe any Twihards will want to join Team Phantom or Team Raoul.

The entire dramatic arc of the play is a fallacy because it seems to have forgotten the ending of "Phantom." Christine is angry at the Phantom for abandoning her "Ten Long Years" ago, but if she had a better memory, she would be thanking the Phantom for letting her go. After all, he is the homicidal maniac who tried to kill her fiancé. I never felt like there was much love between the Phantom and Christine anyway. He was obsessed and she was grateful for his guidance, and that's about it. But Webber wants us to believe that the pair got busier than one may have expected during the "Music of the Night" number. Picture Alfred Hitchcock and Tippi Hedren as literal lovebirds, and you'll get an idea of just how wince-inducing this play's big plot twist truly is.

Unlike the recent recording of Cameron Mackintosh's magnificent 25th anniversary production of "Phantom" at the Royal Albert Hall, Brett Sullivan's filmed version of "Love" spares the viewer of any real sense of being in a theater. There are so pauses between acts, scenes are joined together by dissolves, the camera is often placed onstage, the rapid editing obscures the choreography and (perhaps in anticipation of a lukewarm response) the theater appears to be utterly empty, save for a couple canned rounds of applause. Luckily, a live audience conveniently materializes for the curtain call.

"Love Never Dies" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 2.35:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English, Spanish and French Canadian subtitles, and includes a standard behind-the-scenes featurette where Webber shares one of his favorite rules of thumb: "If you can't look at it, you can't listen to it." Sadly, in the case of this play, audiences can't do either.

'Love Never Dies' is released by Universal Studios Home Entertainment and stars Ben Lewis, Anna O'Byrne, Maria Mercedes, Simon Gleeson and Sharon Millerchip. It was written by Andrew Lloyd Webber, Ben Elton, Glenn Slater and Frederick Forsyth, with lyrics by Glenn Slater and Charles Hart. The stage production was directed by Simon Phillips and the film was directed by Brett Sullivan. It was released on May 29, 2012. It is not rated.



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