

Popcorn



Lights, camera... popcorn! Every time beauty and fragrance editor **Viola Levy** steps inside an Odeon, she's instantly a little girl again...

I remember so clearly the first film I was taken to see. I was about five and it was *Honey I Shrunk The Kids*. I vaguely recall the excitement of being led into the Wood Green multiplex - passing a giant promotional cardboard display for *Look Who's Talking* featuring a giant baby in sunglasses, on the way into the theatre. Huddled in that dark auditorium, I was simply awestruck for the hour and a half that followed. But it was the smell of popcorn that really made the experience that extra bit magical - and even now it brings back pangs of nostalgia. (Even when I'm being begrudgingly dragged along to see *Transformers: Age of Extinction*...)

As a child - aside from Christmas morning - few things were more exciting than a trip to the cinema. Those were the days where you had to buy the local paper to find out the film times (and how prehistoric that now seems). Then came the butterflies on car journey, as we pulled off the A10 into the ugly grey leisure complex and the majestic UCI logo loomed into sight. Stepping through the automatic doors onto that garish blue carpet, the first whiff of popcorn was the signal that 90 minutes of magic awaited us at the other end of a dimly-lit corridor.

The enveloping sweetness wafting from that ridiculously overpriced snack really cements my love of the cinema - and the wonderfully immersive experience that it is. (Which I presume is why film theatres didn't shut down when the VCR was invented.) It allows us to switch off from the rest of the world for two hours, perhaps cosy up to a loved one in

a dark auditorium and (with any luck) enjoy a life-affirming two hours. Even now, when I go to the cinema and I'm waiting in the ticketing area - with its shiny floors, small TVs playing trailers overhead, wailing toddlers and world-weary staff in baseball caps - it's the warm confectionery fug of the popcorn that takes me back to 1989 and Wayne Szalinski all over again.

Yet those childhood trips were always dented by the fact I was rarely allowed to feast on the snack whose smell so bewitched me. The grown-ups always dismissed it as a 'complete rip-off' (and admittedly they were right; popcorn has one of the highest mark-ups of any food item).

One particular friend's mother would audaciously carry what was practically a picnic hamper into the theatre, showing a flagrant disregard for the 'No Food To Be Brought Onto The Premises' rule. And there was none of that guilty scurrying in, hiding the food beneath our coats nonsense either. Tesco bag in each hand, she boldly strode up to the terrified ticketing steward, drawing herself up to full height like the leader of a pack of gorillas and shooting him an icy glare as if to say 'are you feeling lucky ... punk?' We got in without a hitch.

Once inside, we would be doled out sandwiches wrapped in tinfoil, together with a carton of orange juice and - oh joy of joys - a box of raisins. (I know, what an ungrateful brat.) I don't blame the adults one bit - and understand that shelling out for popcorn for a handful of children would probably have cost them a small fortune, only to have us all bouncing off the walls on a sugar high all afternoon to show for it.

Perhaps because of that 'deprivation' that I now can't go to the cinema without buying popcorn. A whacking great tub of it. The smell just hooks me, and I'm five years old once more. Yes, I certainly do know it's ridiculously overpriced - but for me it's worth every penny to resurrect one of those simple childhood delights we try to hard to recapture as adults. Incidentally, I recently discovered that cinemas rarely make a profit on the films themselves - but mainly on snacks. Which also makes me feel like I'm doing my bit for my local picture house...

But philanthropy aside, part of me still gets a childish kick out of having the freedom to be able to waste money on what are essentially grains and puffs of air, sprinkled with toxic obesity-causing sugar for good measure. Totally worth the 20-minute queue, the lack of change from a £10 note, the bloating and the sugar crash afterwards. 🍿

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