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THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

JAVIER MUNOZ AND PAZ PASTOR/NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SCULPTURE, VALLADOLID, SPAIN

Detail of “St. Christopher,” 1526–1533, by Alonso Berruguete. Polychromed wood with gilding. National Museum of Sculpture, Valladolid, Spain.

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TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Back to the Past and Into the Future:

Teaching History *at* Home

JEFF MINICK

In her online article "Nation's Report Card: Only 15% of Eighth Graders Know Much About U.S. History," Susan Berry analyzes the recently released National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) on the subjects of history, geography, and civics. Known as the Nation's Report Card, these NAEP assessments reveal that between 2014 and 2018 the test scores of eighth graders in history and geography once again declined, and in the case of civics remained stagnant. The vast majority of students failed to reach even proficiency levels in these three subjects.

As Berry reports, U.S. Department of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos pronounced these results "inexcusable," stating that "America's antiquated approach to education is creating a generation of future leaders who will not have a foundational understanding of what makes this country exceptional."

Depressing, yes? But like so many dark clouds, this one has a silver lining.

Cyber History

With our schools shut down until at least the fall, we parents and grandparents have the opportunity this spring and summer to introduce our young people to times gone by. Our libraries may be closed, but we have at our fingertips the means to time travel into the American past.

If we go to YouTube on our computers and Google "American History," scores of sites pop up awaiting exploration. The one that caught my eye was "The Story of America," a Reader's Digest production suitable for students from late elementary school through high school and beyond. This narrative includes hundreds of film clips, photographs, and paintings, takes a balanced approach, and frequently brings original sources into the story. It was particularly moving to read the "Comments" on this post from today's immigrants expressing their love for America.

For the younger crew, Google "American History For Kids," and once again you'll find dozens of engaging sites. My grandkids really enjoy "Liberty's Kids," a series of animated films centered on the American Revolution. "U.S. History For Homeschoolers" features a variety of learning tools about everything from the Pilgrims to the presidents.

For older students, Google "Hillsdale College Lectures," and you'll find scores of talks on subjects ranging from the Constitution to the Victor Davis Hanson series on World War II.

Kitchen Table Classroom

Compose a list of topics for the kids. What was the Battle of Okinawa and why was it important? Why did the North have more factories than the South in 1860? Who was Sequoia? What was the significance of the Lewis and Clark expedition? The younger ones can tackle simpler subjects: What happened at the Alamo? Who was Thomas Edison? Clara Barton? Why is Patrick Henry still remembered today?

Have your students make some notes from this research and deliver mini-lectures once or twice a week after supper. By researching, writing, and reporting aloud what they have discovered, that information will stick with them much better than having merely watched a video. Siblings can learn as well from these brief presentations.

When we explore the past, we enter into a grand and exciting laboratory of the human heart and mind.

You can also use this kitchen table classroom to teach critical thinking. Read aloud, for example, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and then dissect his words. What does "Four score and seven years ago" mean? To what event is Lincoln referring? What is the "great civil war?" For what purpose are he and his audience gathered in this little Pennsylvania town? What does he mean by "government of the people, by the people, for the people?"

Popcorn and the Past

Hollywood has made hundreds of movies centered on historical events, many of which can be watched by the whole family.

Here are just a few films for your consideration: the excellent television series "John Adams"; "Gettysburg," a solid movie based on Michael Shaara's novel "The Killer Angels"; "The Longest Day," which gives us the invasion of Normandy without the gore and obscenities of another fine movie, "Saving Private Ryan"; the old Disney classic "Johnny Tremain," about Boston and the beginnings of the American Revolution; "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," with Jimmy Stewart imparting a lesson in civics; the hardships of the immigrant life in "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn"; the Civil War movie "Shenandoah," with another fine performance by Stewart; the classic "Drums Along the Mohawk," which tells of frontier life during the Revolution; "Apollo 13," which might kick off a discussion of the U.S. space program; and "Gone With the Wind," another classic offering viewers any number of subjects for discussion.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

"The Lincoln Address Memorial," designed by Louis Henrick, with bust of Lincoln by Henry Kirke Bush-Brown, erected at the Gettysburg National Cemetery in 1912.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

"Washington Crossing the Delaware," 1851, by Emanuel Leutze. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

And these discussions are vital if we are to impart the history behind the movie. If, for example, you and the gang watch "Gettysburg," read a review or two of the film before turning on the television. Usually these reviews offer insight and background into the historical events depicted in the movie, and this preview will enhance your understanding of what is taking place on the screen. Afterward, again go online, read together some history of this battle, and discuss its significance.

Vacations on the Sofa

The internet offers a glittering array of virtual tours of museums, famous homes, and battlefields. Start with Missy Sullivan's "10 Virtual History Museums and Experiences to Explore From Home," which includes visits to such places as the Smithsonian Museum of American History, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

From there, you can move on to tours of Mount Vernon, Colonial Williamsburg, and a host of other historical sites.

Our Future Depends on Our Past

When we explore the past, we enter into a grand and exciting laboratory of the human heart and mind. After all, what is history if not the story of people and events, courage and ingenuity, wisdom and folly, triumph and disaster? By such expeditions, our children will not only broaden their knowledge of America's past, but they will also become citizens able to use that past as a ruler to measure the present and as a compass to guide them into the future.

Science fiction writer Robert Heinlein once said, "A generation which ignores history has no past—and no future."

By giving our young people the past, we are giving them a future.

COLUMBIA PICTURES/MPTVIMAGES.COM

(Left) James Stewart in "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington."

(Below) An aerial view of the National Museum of American History, located on the National Mall in Washington.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C., Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

PD-US

"Lewis and Clark on the Lower Columbia," 1905, by Charles Marion Russell. Opaque and transparent watercolor over graphite underdrawing on paper.

SACRED ART

From Torment to Ecstasy:
The Sculpture of Alonso Berruguete

The first sculptor of Renaissance Spain

LORRAINE FERRIER

St. Christopher stares directly at me, and in a heartbeat I feel what he feels—even my mouth mirrors his. This realization, and level of intimate communion, makes me feel more than a little self-conscious as my gaping mouth brings me sharply back to reality. So palpable is St. Christopher's conviction as he carries the Christ child on his shoulders across a river that I forget this St. Christopher is a polychromed wooden figure carved by Spanish Renaissance sculptor Alonso Berruguete.

Many times, I've looked at similar art and felt sympathy for the subject's predicament; yet here, empathy grabbed hold of me and pulled me into St. Christopher's experience. It's an important distinction to make: Put simply, sympathy brings us to the conclusion of "I see," whereas empathy offers us a greater depth of understanding as it moves us beyond "I see" and connects us to "I feel," making any experience tangible and convincing.

Berruguete's dramatic sculptures effectively communicate their inner meanings because in each he carves emotion—from the depths of despair to the heights of the sublime—not for the sake of sensationalism, but to convey a specific message.

My close encounter with St. Christopher was artificial—viewing a photo through a computer screen—yet, it gripped me entirely. I could only imagine the power of seeing it in situ.

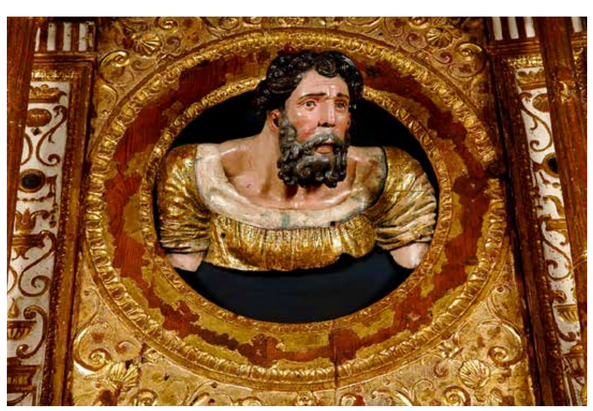
But a face-to-face encounter with such a work would have been impossible as this St. Christopher by Berruguete (circa 1488–1561) was originally part of a high altarpiece, or "retablo mayor" in Spanish: in this case, a three-story-high altarpiece topped with a carving of the Crucifixion, at the monastery of St. Benedict the Royal in Valladolid.

Sadly, the retablo has long been dismantled; in the late-19th century, it was taken down and put on display at the National Museum of Sculpture in Valladolid. Some parts were lost or destroyed as part of the Spanish confiscation, when the government sold off the property of churches and religious orders to pay off public debt.

(Above) "Old Testament Prophet" (Isaiah?), 1526–1533, by Alonso Berruguete. Polychromed wood with gilding. National Museum of Sculpture, Valladolid, Spain.

(Below) The entire sculpture of "St. Christopher," 1526–1533, by Alonso Berruguete. Polychromed wood with gilding. National Museum of Sculpture, Valladolid, Spain.

(Bottom) Roundel with male head, 1526–1533, by Alonso Berruguete. Polychromed wood with gilding. National Museum of Sculpture, Valladolid, Spain.



Introducing Berruguete

St. Benedict's high altarpiece, Berruguete's first major commission, is considered one of his masterpieces. But who was Alonso Berruguete? And why is he considered the first sculptor of the Spanish Renaissance?

The exhibition "Alonso Berruguete: First Sculptor of Renaissance Spain" introduces Americans to Berruguete, whose iconic status in Spain hasn't quite reached the rest of the world. Indeed, this is the first exhibition of Berruguete's works to take place outside of Spain. Seeing Berruguete's works beyond Spain's borders is problematic, as many are the fixtures and fittings in churches or monasteries, such as vast retablos or his masterpieces: the choir stalls and the archbishop's throne in the Toledo Cathedral, and the marble tomb of Cardinal Juan Pardo de Tavera in the Hospital de San Juan Bautista.

The exhibition is the culmination of three years of hard work. Curator and head of sculpture and decorative arts at Washington's National Gallery of Art (NGA), C.D. Dickerson III co-curated the exhibition with Mark McDonald, The Metropolitan Museum of Art's curator of prints and drawings. Berruguete expert Manuel Arias Martínez, head of collections and deputy director of the National Museum of Sculpture in Valladolid, was instrumental in helping to organize the exhibition.

Many of the exhibits are loans from the largest collection of Berruguete's art at the National Museum of Sculpture in Valladolid. Valladolid and Toledo are the best places to see Berruguete's work in Spain, according to the exhibition catalog "Alonso Berruguete: First Sculptor of Renaissance Spain." Edited by Dickerson and McDonald, the catalog is the first comprehensive publication on Berruguete in English.

In Washington, the NGA ran the exhibition from Oct. 13, 2019, through Feb. 17, 2020. The exhibition was due to open next at the Meadows Museum in Dallas. However, at the time of this printing, it has been postponed due to COVID-19; the curators hope to hold the exhibition later this year. Mellon Curatorial Fellow, Wendy Sepponen curated the Meadows exhibition.

"I hope our audiences are inspired by the beauty of Berruguete's work in a way that encourages them to reflect on what unites us as a people regardless of time, creed, or country. Art made over 500 years ago can speak profound truths to us today," said Meadows Museum curator Amanda W. Dotseth in an email.

The Making of a Master Sculptor

Little is known of Berruguete's early life. His father, Pedro, was an accomplished painter, painting in the Hispano-Flemish style popular in the Castile region of Spain, and it's assumed that Pedro taught his son all he knew. Pedro's paintings had a definite Italian influence, although scholars are divided as to whether he actually traveled to Italy.

A few years after his father died, Berruguete traveled to Italy (circa 1506), where he spent around a decade studying and honing his art, first in Rome and then Florence.

Italy must have been an artistic idyll for Berruguete. He studied the art of his contemporaries such as Michelangelo and those of the recent past, the early Renaissance masters: Masaccio and Donatello. He also studied the art of ancient Rome, which was continually being excavated. He also learned disegno, the Italian way of drawing by fully envisioning a concept and realizing it on paper.

In Florence, like many great artists, Berruguete traveled to the Brancacci Chapel to study Masaccio's fresco cycle. It was on those chapel walls that Masaccio moved away from the predominant international Gothic style of elegant, almost two-dimensional figures to paint solid figures that were full of dynamism, movement, and expressive gestures. In the fresco cycle, Masaccio used single-point perspective with mathematical precision and created a depth of field with atmospheric perspective, making the foreground darker than the distance.

Michelangelo, known for fiercely protecting his designs, allowed Berruguete to study his highly lauded (but now lost) preparatory drawing for the "Battle of Cascina." We know from copies that the drawing depicted a number of Michelangelo's characteristically muscular figures bathing in a river and caught in a surprise attack. Some men are grabbing armor, others scramble up the bank, and others are getting ready to attack.

Art historian Giorgio Vasari recounts that Berruguete took part in a competition, judged by Raphael, held by the pope's architect Donato Bramante around 1510. Sculptors were tasked with using clay or wax to sculpt the missing arms of the ancient Roman marble sculpture "Laocoön and His Sons." The marble sculpture, excavated in Rome in 1506, was thought to have been highly praised by the ancient writer Pliny the Elder. The sculpture presents three tortuous figures firmly in the battle of life and death as snakes wrestle with them.

Over the decade when Berruguete was in Italy, he made his mark as a painter, receiving commissions. "Salome" (circa 1514–1517) is one of those paintings, which is now in Florence's Uffizi Galleries. "The several paintings that survive from his years in Italy, such as 'Salome,' show that—together with Andrea del Sarto, Jacopo Pontormo, and other leading painters—he was at the vanguard of the artistic movement called mannerism," Dickerson notes in the exhibition catalog. The mannerist movement is defined from circa 1520 to circa 1610. But for Berruguete, painting was just the beginning of his artistic brilliance.

Spanish Homecoming

"During Berruguete's lifetime, much of Northern Europe and parts of Italy were under the Spanish crown," Meadows Museum curator Amanda W. Dotseth said.

Berruguete returned to Spain in 1518—just two years after Charles I became king of Spain and a year before he became Holy Roman Emperor Charles V—and was appointed painter to the king.

Although Berruguete was known as an accomplished painter and draftsman (he was the first Spanish artist to create a recognizable collection of drawings), it is his sculpture he's most famous for.

Before Berruguete, the overriding style of Spanish sculpture was of staid, fixed figures full of spiritual meaning yet lacking any movement or dramatic emotion. Berruguete brought together all he'd learned in Italy, imbuing the spirit of the Italian Renaissance into a new style of art.

"Berruguete's brilliance lay in his understanding that no matter how strongly he admired Michelangelo or the other great masters of the Italian Renaissance, he still had to forge a style of art that accommodated local tastes and local traditions. In other words: to create an art that was distinctly Spanish," said Dickerson on the audio recording of the NGA press preview of the exhibition.

Berruguete moved from painting as his main medium to the traditional Spanish retablo, which combined painting, sculpture, and architecture in each piece, often requiring complex draftsmanship. And altarpiece commissions were more lucrative.

In the Workshop

Berruguete would have worked on an altarpiece such as the retablo for St. Benedict the Royal in his workshop, with many assistants carrying out the work. It is assumed that he designed and oversaw all the work, but it's hard to determine which works were carved or painted by his hand.

In Spain, wood was the main material for sculpture. Alabaster, although available, was normally only affordable by the queen. Block carving was traditionally used, where the artist carved from one piece of wood. The woodcarver may have thought of wood as Michelangelo felt about marble: "The sculpture is already complete within the marble block, before I start my work. It is already there, I just have to chisel away the superfluous material."

Yet Berruguete's finished sculptures were not carved from a single block. He would shape whatever form he required and attach it onto the carving using a dowel and glue—a popular technique in Florence.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah with his fabulous locks of hair that look like the stylized clouds in Chinese paintings is one example. Isaiah's beard that seems to billow in the wind coherently follows the cloud theme but is a completely separate carving.

Abraham's robes in "The Sacrifice of Isaac" is another example of a carving that has been added on. Here, Abraham's drapery is a stunning example of the special technique known as "estofado," whereby the carved drapery fabric is gilded and then painted with a thin layer of tempera. When dry, the artist scrapes away areas of tempera to a set design revealing the gold underneath (a technique called "sgraffito" in Italian.) The overall effect imitates brocade.

Sometimes we can clearly see where these add-ons are joined, although Berruguete knew these details wouldn't be closely scrutinized because the altarpiece was hung up so high. Cleverly, he sometimes used fabric saturated with glue to shortcut drapery carving that seamlessly covered the joints of these carving additions.

On finishing the high altarpiece, Berruguete wrote to a colleague on Nov. 27, 1532: "It is of such perfection that I am enormously content."

Berruguete was satisfied with these works, but today we can only imagine seeing them in situ, hung up high in the monastery, gently lit by dim but dancing candlelight. Each polychromed wooden figure would've glistened and shimmered from its niche, inviting quiet contemplation of the biblical legends they portrayed to all who visited and looked up to God.

To find out more about "Alonso Berruguete: First Sculptor of Renaissance Spain," at the Meadows Museum, Dallas, visit MeadowsMuseumDallas.org

ALL PHOTOS BY JAVIER MUNOZ AND PAZ PASTOR/NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SCULPTURE, VALLADOLID, SPAIN

(Top) The entire sculpture, **(bottom left)** a detail of Abraham's face, and **(bottom right)**, a detail showing brocade-like "fabric" in "The Sacrifice of Isaac," 1526–1533, by Alonso Berruguete. Polychromed wood with gilding. National Museum of Sculpture, Valladolid, Spain.

RECORDINGS OF DISTINCTION

The Undisputed Master on the Violin

DIANA BARTH

KEYSTONE/GETTY IMAGES

Jascha Heifetz accompanied by the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra conducted by Fritz Reiner, from the film "Carnegie Hall."

The title "Jascha Heifetz: The Supreme" of Arkiv's two-disc Artists of the Century collection, which ranges from Bach to Tchaikovsky to Gershwin, is absolutely accurate: Jascha Heifetz is often regarded as the greatest violinist who ever lived, but certainly of the 20th century—and beyond.

Comprising seven representative performances, the set from the RCA Victor Red Seal label includes five concertos in their finest renditions.

No one can surpass Heifetz for tone, accuracy of intonation, technical agility—and, yes—heart. Perhaps his greatest attributes are his multicolorations and his unique phrasing. At times, he appears to be behind the beat, but this serves to increase tension—and interest.

His rendition of the solo Bach Chaconne alternates power with lyricism, varying intensity with quicksilver ease. His playing is full of sentiment but is never sentimental.

Several major violinists have recorded this work. Itzhak Perlman's version is powerful, but lacks variety and is a bit heavy-handed, seeming more suitable for an organ rather than a stringed instrument.

Heifetz's gifts are potently and economically displayed in Max Bruch's "Scottish Fantasy." Here is the master's exquisite tone: by turns lyrical, unbearably sweet, passionate, a slow pace leaping to swift and crystal-clear trills, vibrato like the brushing together of a hummingbird's wings. Sir Malcolm Sargent conducts the New Symphony Orchestra.

The Brahms and Tchaikovsky concertos have interesting connections. They're both in D major, were composed in 1878, but the Brahms in Austria and the Tchaikovsky in Russia. In each, Heifetz is accompanied by the superb Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) under the baton of the brilliant Fritz Reiner, sometimes referred to as the Heifetz of conductors.

Both concertos feature Heifetz's fiery attack; each note, including each note of the trills, is crystal clear. The lyrical passages are so moving that I got gooseflesh as I listened. Heifetz's mood changes are so abrupt and defined that they seem wrought by machine. But I mean that as a compliment. There is no one like him.

The CSO, this time conducted by Walter Hendl, accompanies Heifetz in the Sibelius, the only concerto the noted Finnish composer ever wrote. It's in a class of its own.

Heifetz gives a masterful interpretation of this work, which features occasional Asian-like motifs, sometimes a gypsy quality. Some passages are dark, almost tragic in feeling. Heifetz, a master of all genres and styles, of course, rises to the occasion.

Maxim Vengerov also gives a fine interpretation of the Sibelius, available on YouTube: very passionate but lacking variety. Perhaps it is a matter of taste. He is accompanied by the CSO with Daniel Barenboim at the podium.

No one can surpass Heifetz for tone, accuracy of intonation, technical agility—and, yes—heart.

Heifetz's rendition of the Glazunov concerto, conducted by Walter Hendl, this time with the RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra, sweeps from sweetly lyrical to passionate, and rings with nobility at times. Heifetz plucks the strings with aplomb and demonstrates phenomenal speed at the end of the piece.

There had to be a special place in Heifetz's heart for George Gershwin. The two were friends; Heifetz had hoped Gershwin would compose a work especially for him, but fate intervened. Gershwin died, tragically, at age 38, from a brain tumor, leaving such major works as "Rhapsody in Blue" and the opera "Porgy and Bess."

Heifetz himself transcribed for violin Gershwin's three Preludes for Piano, included here. He plays with his usual sensitivity and élan.

Perhaps the following, offered by writers Florine Mark and Maria Scott, explains something of Heifetz's magic. A young boy approached Heifetz after one of his concerts and gushed: "I'd give my life to play violin the way you do."

Heifetz replied, "... I did."

Diana Barth writes for several theater publications, including New Millennium. She may be contacted at diabarth99@gmail.com

The Witty Dynamic Duo of Stage and Screen

JUDD HOLLANDER

With works ranging from those which have long since attained classic status—such as the 1952 MGM musical "Singin' in the Rain"—to those forgotten by all but a few (anyone remember the Broadway musical "A Doll's Life"?), wordsmiths extraordinaire Betty Comden and Adolph Green have a special place in the pantheons of American entertainment.

During an association that spanned more than 60 years, the duo wrote the books and/or lyrics for 18 musical stage works, along with nine musicals for the silver screen. In "They Made Us Happy," author Andy Propst provides the readers with a front row center seat for their many professional efforts.

The book offers a very informative and entertaining read.

Both children of immigrants, Comden (born Basya Cohen, 1917–2006) and Green (1914–2002) each developed a love of performing at an early age. Their first professional engagement together, though they had met sometime earlier, was in 1938, as part of a group called "The Revuers" at The Village Vanguard, a popular club for the bohemian crowd in New York City's Greenwich Village.

There, the performers began using their own material as a way to avoid paying royalties to others. While writing quickly became Comden and Green's main focus, the two never completely gave up performing. They were both members of the opening night cast of the 1944 Broadway musical "On the Town," for which they also wrote the book and lyrics.

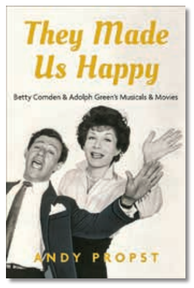
The two would also perform together in their show "A Party With Betty Comden & Adolph Green," where they presented a selection of musical numbers they had created over the years.

As noted in the book's preface, "They Made Us Happy" is not so much a work about who Comden and Green were, but rather, what Comden and Green jointly created. The two met almost every day to work on whatever projects they were involved with at the moment, while always on the lookout for something new that might pique their interest.

While Propst includes a good amount of biographical information, that is, dates of birth, death, and mentions of their respective marriages, children, and involvement in various social causes, more than 90 percent of the work covers their professional collaborations.

When reading about the duo's various projects, one begins to see several genres come up time and again. The first of these is satire, which began during the duo's time with The Revuers. The performers took great pleasure in skewering the various topical issues of the day.

They Made Us Happy' is an overview of the incomparable duo of Comden and Green.



"They Made Us Happy: Betty Comden & Adolph Green's Musicals & Movies"
Andy Propst
Oxford University Press
288 pages; hardcover

Frequent topics that appeared in their work were nostalgia and the world of show business. These motifs, with present-day elements mixed in, are present in such efforts as "Singin' in the Rain," which spoofed the early days of Hollywood; and "The Band Wagon" (1953), which gleefully illustrated the chaos and dueling egos that are often part of the theatrical creation process. Though any biting wit was always thematically folded into a love letter for the world they were depicting. These topics were also visible in the stage works "Fade Out - Fade In" (1964), "Applause" (1970), and "The Will Rogers Follies" (1991).

However, as Propst also shows, there was more than one occasion when Comden and Green's efforts were deemed out of step with the tastes of the moment. An example of this is the Broadway show "Hallelujah, Baby!" (1967). The work had Civil Rights overtones and was regarded by some critics as too much of a token effort in respect to what was currently going on in the world. On the other side of the coin was the response to "Subways Are for Sleeping" (1961), which looks at New Yorkers living on the fringes of society. The piece was regarded in some quarters as too dark.

"Subways" also illustrates another favorite topic used by Comden and Green: New York City. New Yorkers born and bred, the two much preferred East Coast living. They often felt constrained by the Hollywood studio system whenever they had to relocate there to work on films.

How It's Put Together

Propst has clearly done his research, as evidenced by the lengthy listing of source materials at the end of the book. A particularly nice touch is his tendency to reference the sometimes different recollections of people involved in a specific incident, and then offer a theory of which account actually seems more plausible and why.

He also elaborates on some publicity stunts, along with many other asides, trivia, and name dropping. Much of this material is presented through the use of sidebars, which allows the author to maintain the work's narrative flow.

Just about the only thing missing from "They Made Us Happy" is an appendix listing the various projects Comden and Green worked on, for easy reference. Though in all other aspects, the book offers very informative and entertaining read for both the serious musical (and musical theater) aficionado and one with only a passing familiarity with some of the duo's more famous works.

Judd Hollander is a reviewer for stagebuzz.com and a member of the Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle.

FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON

Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

Ode to Boyhood and the Ingredients of Male Bonding

COLUMBIA PICTURES

Four best friends in the late 1950s, played by (L–R) Corey Feldman, Jerry O'Connell, Wil Wheaton, and River Phoenix in "Stand By Me."

MARK JACKSON

Rob Reiner's magical movie "Stand by Me" is an ode to boyhood, a classic Hero's Journey, a rite of passage to manhood, and an exemplary depiction of the key ingredients of true male friendship.

It might be the best thing world-renowned horror novelist Stephen King ever wrote (it's from his novella "The Body") and definitely Reiner's crowning lifetime achievement, "When Harry Met Sally" notwithstanding. King, unsurprisingly, has actually called "Stand by Me" the first successful film adaptation of his writing, not to mention that it launched River Phoenix to superstardom.

I saw "Stand by Me" with my brother when it first came out in 1986. We both walked out of the movie theater completely pole-axed with melancholy. It was Richard Dreyfuss's character's line at the end: "I never really had any friends later on like the ones I had when I was twelve. ... Does anyone?" That destroyed us.

This is a haunting fact and a true wellspring of great sadness for most men: There are generally no friendships for men later in life that can compare with the intense bonds 12-year-old boys are able to forge.

Outer Journey

"Stand by Me" tells the tale of four childhood best-buds who, in the summer of 1959, hang out in a most excellent tree house. They do pinkie swears, engage in debates about whether Mighty Mouse could beat up Superman (also which phylum, genus, and species, exactly, does Goofy belong to?), play cards, and sneak cigarettes. It's that magical boy-time before the awareness of girls hits.

Low man on the totem pole—the chubby, clueless Vern Tessio (Jerry O'Connell) happens to serendipitously eavesdrop on two teens from the local, older gang talking about a dead body they saw, of one of Vern's (et al) classmates who'd gone missing from their town of Castle Rock, Oregon.

'Stand by Me'

Director
Rob Reiner

Starring
Richard Dreyfuss, John Cusack, Wil Wheaton, River Phoenix, Corey Feldman, Jerry O'Connell, Kiefer Sutherland, Casey Siemaszko

Rated
R

Running Time
1 hour, 29 minutes

Release Date
Nov. 26, 1986

★★★★½

Rob Reiner knows boyhood and calls forth, direction-wise, four brilliant boyhood performances.

Vern immediately spills the beans to his buds. His friends are the budding artist-writer Gordie Lachance (Wil Wheaton); Chris Chambers (River Phoenix), the tough-but-golden-hearted kid from the town's bad-reputation (criminals and alcoholics) family; and Teddy Duchamp (Corey Feldman), the slightly unhinged kid whose former-soldier dad once held Teddy's left ear to a red-hot stove.

Well now, if you're a bunch of boys, and you've never seen a dead body (and it's your classmate to boot), that's an absolute must-see. And so off they go with vintage, rolled-up sleeping bags and Boy Scout canteens, over hill and dale, through copses, wheat fields, and along railroad tracks.

The overt plan is to find the body, be heroes, and get their names in the local paper. The implicitly understood, unspoken reason to go on this journey: They can collectively cross the boundary into manhood by supporting each other in overcoming their existential dread. Acknowledging mortality at a young age is an ordeal, especially bearing witness to the violent death and dead body of someone your own age.

Inner Journey

They've all got struggles to overcome at home. In addition to the two bad homes just mentioned, the sensitive Gordie fears he can never live up to his football-hero older brother's (John Cusack) reputation, deeply mourns his brother's recent death, and aches at his father's indifference to his existence.

This is a story set in the American 1950s, a boy-world of white T-shirts, Converse Chucks, and faded dungarees, where the inner-warrior quadrant still meant something to men. And, like tiger cubs wrestling, the boy-games of two punches in the shoulder for flinching, and "chicken"—while definitely play—were also practice for the manhood warrior traits of fearlessness and indifference to pain.

Speaking of which, they're not the only ones looking for the body; the older boys square off with the little boys. But the older boys are bullies, whereas the little boys cross over into manhood and discover that in facing their fears, they're suddenly not afraid of wielding the .44 Magnum they originally toted along just for pure awesomeness.

"OMG! That's toxic masculinity in the making!" No it's not. It's the inner warrior being born. The males of all species, human and animal, traditionally stand guard on the boundaries and territories, and most females are happy with that arrangement. It's what testosterone was made for.

Rob Reiner knows boyhood and calls forth, direction-wise, four brilliant boyhood performances to rival anything adults can do. River Phoenix's performance shone brightest; his star was hereby launched.

The Eternal Ingredients to Male Bonding

Here's the connection boys unknowingly have, and what men often wish for, for the rest of their lives: 1) Boys know each other's deepest, darkest secrets. 2) Boys have the opportunity to get physically naked in front of each other. 3) Boys cry unashamedly in front of each other. (Ever seen a Little League game?)

Men eventually find all of that threatening in our current society. Ironically, it's the world's toughest men, in times of war, who know each other's deepest and darkest secrets, are often naked in front of each other, and mourn together fellow warriors killed in battle. They have no secrets from each other. The only thing more powerful than all these ingredients is saving another man's life in battle.

Fortunately, men have, for the last 20 years, figured out how to do this outside of war; they have legitimately figured out how to retrieve those magical friendships in the here and now. All it takes to find it is curiosity and a Google search. Hint: MKP-NWTA.

WARNER BROS. PICTURES

Edward Cole (Jack Nicholson, L) and Carter Chambers (Morgan Freeman) take a selfie on their last trip, in "The Bucket List."

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

A Touching Tale of Friendship and Last Wishes

IAN KANE

Before seeing director Rob Reiner's 2008 dramedy "The Bucket List," the critic in me worried that it might not live up to my expectations. The plot certainly sounded inspiring, but I was concerned that it would be a little too saccharine for my taste, or simply ring false. Boy, was I wrong.

The first act of the film shows us background info on two men from completely different walks of life. Carter Chambers (Morgan Freeman) is a working-class auto mechanic. He's a brilliant and wise man who has an unwavering faith in God, but he happens to be at odds with his wife, Virginia (Beverly Todd). Meanwhile, Edward Cole (Jack Nicholson) is a loud and obnoxious corporate mogul with money to burn.

The one thing that the men have in common is the fact that they both have terminal cancer: The two end up sharing a hospital room together. At first, the pair seem to be at odds with each other. Edward's rudeness doesn't mix well with Carter's intellectualism, which sometimes comes off as condescending.

However, the two begin to thaw out one another's icy façade; they even begin playing cards together on a regular basis. Carter's family drops in on him throughout his hospital stay, but the only person to visit Edward is his assistant, Thomas (Sean Hayes). One day, Carter begins to write a list of things that he'd like to do before he dies, the titular "Bucket List."

The men are eventually informed by the medical staff that they have only six months to a year to live. Because of the crushing news, one of Carter's first reactions is to throw away his list. Edward later stumbles across it and scribbles his own items on it as well.

Edward tells Carter that they can actualize the list together since he has the financial means to make it possible.

Carter, a proud man, initially refuses. But the shrewd businessman within Edward convinces Carter to take a globe-trotting trip around the world with him to places such as Egypt, India, and France so that they can realize their last wishes. Their sudden departure causes a further rift between Carter and Virginia.

Their Journey

Edward and Carter's journey starts off on a whimsical note as they engage in skydiving and muscle car racing, to name a few activities. The comedy between this odd couple feels natural as the men bond. Throughout the trip, however, they begin to share deeper things about their pasts, as well as what made them who they are. They discuss faith, family, their philosophies, and childhoods.

At a certain point, it dawns on them both that although they come from different walks of life, they are grappling with similar things. Carter is running away from his family in order to do things he never got to do because of the sacrifices he made as a hard-working family man. Edward's never found true love and has been avoiding contact with his estranged daughter for years.

For the most part, Nicholson doesn't fall too much into his Nicholson-mode (with flailing eyebrows and all), and we can see his character: a rich man afraid to die, with no one to love or to be loved by.

Meanwhile, Freeman completely disappears into his role as a somewhat bitter man who never actualized his dreams because of family obligations. The two brilliant actors effectively portray two individuals who are trying to figure out what their lives mean, as well as what their limited futures might hold.

"The Bucket List" may initially resemble a buddy-road-trip film, but it manages to escape the trivial trappings of the genre. The result, under Reiner's assured directing hand, is a phenomenal cinematic experience that blends deeply moving drama with some lighter comedic bits spliced in. It will cause many a tear to be shed, as well as bouts of laughter.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com

'The Bucket List'

Director
Rob Reiner

Starring
Jack Nicholson, Morgan Freeman, Sean Hayes

Rated
PG-13

Running Time
1 hour, 37 minutes

Release Date
Jan. 11, 2008 (USA)

★★★★½

REACHING WITHIN:
WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

The Sin of Narcissism:
Meeting One's Own Worst Enemy

ERIC BESS

I am guilty of being narcissistic. I'm an artist, and I want people to see my work. I not only want people to see my work, I want them to like it. I post pictures of my work on social media and hope people will give me the coveted "like." If I'm being honest, the more likes I get on a post, the more satisfied I am with myself. But what do these likes and my desire for them really mean?

Narcissus Discovered Himself

The tale of Narcissus might prove insightful in unpacking my desire to be liked. According to Ovid's "Metamorphoses," Narcissus was born of a river god and a nymph. His beauty inspired love in everyone who met him. Upon Narcissus's birth, an oracle was asked if he would live a long life, and the seer replied, "If he does not discover himself."

Indeed, everyone fell in love with Narcissus and admired him, and Narcissus, with distant pride, refused their admiration and even scorned them all. One of his admirers didn't appreciate this treatment and prayed to the gods: "So may he himself love, and so may he fail to command what he loves." Nemesis, the goddess of divine retribution, heard this prayer.

One day, Narcissus came upon a secluded fountain of water where he decided to rest. The water was still and clear. He lay down next to the water to rest and quench his thirst. And there, seeing his reflection in the water, he fell in love with himself.

So enamored with himself was Narcissus that he refused to eat or drink. He only wanted to grasp hold of his own reflection and was frustrated by his inability to do so. He gazed at himself until he wasted away, with the last words, "Alas, in vain, beloved boy! ... Goodbye!"

Caravaggio's 'Narcissus'

According to Caravaggio.org, Caravaggio interpreted Ovid's version of Narcissus's story for his painting titled "Narcissus." The Italian Baroque painter depicted Narcissus tenebristically, that is, with extreme lights and darks. The lightness of the figure stands out against the darkness of the background.

The edge of the body of water divides the composition in half. Narcissus sits at the edge of the water and looks longingly at his reflection. He supports his weight with his right arm on the ground, but his left arm reaches into the water as if he wants to hold his reflection's hand. The hands of Narcissus and the hands of his reflection meet and help create an oval within the composition.

Does the darkness of the background represent Narcissus's attitude toward the rest of the world? Has he forgotten the world because of his intense desire for himself? Or is the darkness of the background indicative of the darkness that closes in on him because of his desires?

To me, the darkness of the background represents both. Narcissus forgets the world around him because of his desire for his own image. He forgets the people who once loved him, his family, and the animals and plants around him. His desire for himself causes him to forget that other beings exist, that they suffer, endure, live, love, and laugh. His desire for himself is incompatible with compassion.

So enamored with himself was Narcissus that he refused to eat or drink.

What's darker than the absence of compassion? This darkness closes in on him because darkness is compatible with the nature of his desire, a desire for himself alone. His lack of compassion and his desire for himself eventually lead to a darkness that consumes his life—death.

His last words suggest that his efforts to love his own image were "in vain" because they were unsuccessful. There is a pun here too: His efforts to love his own image were in vain not only because he was ultimately unsuccessful, but also because desiring his own reflection represents his vanity.

But why does Caravaggio use an oval as a compositional element? Narcissus's arms join with the arms in his reflection to create a compositional oval that leads our eyes around the composition again and again.

To me, this oval represents the divine retribution inflicted by the goddess Nemesis. Narcissus becomes for himself what he was for everyone else: He was admired and loved but was distant, cold, and even scornful and prideful toward those who admired him. Nemesis's punishment of Narcissus made him suffer from his own inconsolable admiration of himself. Divine retribution: What goes around comes around.

My Own Worst Enemy

What does the story of Narcissus and Caravaggio's painting mean for me, today? Is my desire for "likes" narcissistic? I often tell myself, "I'm just sharing my art on social media to market myself, sell paintings, and provide for my family." This is certainly true, but it also is not the whole truth.

For the traditional artist, the work of art reflects both the artist's values and the visual world depicted: It reveals what the artist admires, desires, and values by way of communicable symbols and signs. The artist has the potential to discover aspects of himself in each of his creations. When people like a work of art, they are also liking the artist and what the artist values.

I, as an artist, must always confront the danger of falling in love with my reflection in my work. Where is there compassion in sharing artwork for the purpose of generating likes? To merely be admired as an artist? Does this narcissistic approach to sharing art neglect that those for whom the artwork is shared are human beings? Does it merely use other human beings as a means to the end of self-satisfaction? What might the divine retribution be for this narcissism? How will I be made to suffer?

Artists either show their creations to be admired, or they show their creations to provoke a potential internal conversation about what they value. Caravaggio's painting made me reflect on my own values as an artist and as a human being. So, today I ask: "Am I sharing artwork for others or for myself?"

Art has an incredible ability to point to what can't be seen so that we may ask "What does this mean for me and for everyone who sees it?" "How has it influenced the past and how might it influence the future?" "What does it suggest about the human experience?" These are some of the questions we explore in our series Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart.

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist. He is currently a doctoral student at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).

PUBLIC DOMAIN

"Narcissus" 1598–1599, by Caravaggio. Oil on canvas; 43.3 inches by 36.2 inches. National Gallery of Ancient Art, Rome.

ESSENCE OF CHINA

Song Dynasty Emperor Puts the People First Amid the Plague

CINDY CHAN

Emperor Renzong reveres Heaven and cherishes his subjects much more than his prized possessions.

The rhinoceros horn was an imperial treasure, yet it might just be exactly the ingredient needed to cure the plague. So, amid the fearful disease raging across the capital city, Emperor Renzong didn't give a second thought to ordering that his prized possession be crushed and made into medicine in hopes of saving his people.

This event occurred about 1,000 years ago in the Song Dynasty (960–1279) in ancient China. In the middle of the 11th century, the country was hit by epidemics one after another over a period of many years.

Emperor Renzong, known for his benevolence and generosity, put his highest priority on caring for the people whenever an outbreak occurred.

The People Are More Important

The year 1054 saw the capital not only struck by deadly disease but also hit by frigid cold. Many people died either from infection or from the freezing chill.

Renzong ordered the imperial doctors to develop a prescription that could counter the plague. He also commanded that precious medicinal materials be taken from imperial storage to be used in preparing the medication that was so badly needed.

Two exotic rhinoceros horns were among the materials that were brought out. A court official noticed that one of them was the rare Tongtian rhino horn that had been treasured for generations in the imperial court. It was a gift from a foreign envoy passed down from a Song Dynasty era.

The official quickly informed Renzong and advised him to keep it for his own use. However, Renzong had a different priority.

"How can I cherish an object, however rare, more than I cherish my own people?" he said.

He promptly ordered that the Tongtian rhino horn be donated for use in making medicine for the afflicted.

Renzong also ordered the imperial doctors to look for people proficient at pulse diagnosis, an important traditional Chinese medicine technique for identifying certain disorders in the body. He then sent these people to clinics established at local government offices to provide free consultation and medicine for the poor.

In the middle of the 11th century, the country was hit by epidemics one after another over a period of many years.

Mandate of Heaven

Renzong's decision to put his people first was in keeping with his character and his record as an emperor who followed the examples of the ancient sage kings of China.

Like those virtuous monarchs before him, Renzong revered Heaven and believed that his right to rule was a divine right granted to him as the Son of Heaven, and that his mandate was to cherish the people and protect them from harm. Whenever a natural disaster struck, Renzong saw it as a warning from above that he had deviated from the Way of Heaven, or the Dao, and was not fulfilling his solemn responsibility.

Renzong always looked first at himself to try and find faults and wrongdoings that might have led to the calamity befalling the country.

While sincerely reflecting on his own thoughts and behavior, he would temporarily not wear his dragon robe or receive greetings from officials in the imperial hall. He would also cut back on his meals and delicacies and cancel all entertainment.

At the same time, Renzong provided other kinds of help to support his people.

His various charitable measures included buying medicine for the poor, purchasing coffins for the deceased of needy families, and exempting people from taxes or waiving rent for a period of time. He also took care of the family members of soldiers who had sacrificed their lives while working in plague areas.

The Magic Cure

Emperor Renzong's biography is found in a historical text on the Song Dynasty called "History of Song," or "Song Shi." "Song Shi" in turn is one book in a set owf official Chinese historical texts known as the "Twenty-Four Histories," which covers the period from about 3,000 B.C. to the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644).

The Ming Dynasty literary classic "Water Margin," also translated as "Outlaws of the Marsh," tells a story of how Emperor Renzong quelled a great plague during his reign.

He ordered benevolent measures that included remitting prison sentences and abolishing taxes. He also ordered that the proper rites be performed in prayer to the gods for relief from disaster.

The fictional account closely reflects the actions of wise emperors throughout Chinese history in the face of natural calamities. They regarded these catastrophes as rebukes from Heaven that were not to be ignored, or else stronger warnings would follow and they might even be overthrown, having lost the Mandate of Heaven.

By praying to the gods with a pure heart, they hoped to be granted a second chance to improve themselves and rectify their mistakes.

Things changed for the better once they sincerely admitted their wrongs and led the people in turning their hearts toward goodness. This was their magic cure.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Artwork by Chen Shiguan, Qing Dynasty, in the volume titled "Song Renzong 1" in the publication "Benevolent Records of Holy Emperors and Wise Kings (Covering the Song, Yuan, and Ming Dynasties)." Emperor Renzong of the Song Dynasty cherished the people like they were his own children. When the country suffered from disasters and epidemics, he always sincerely reflected upon himself in order to find the cause.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

Music, Patriotism, and Helping Others
'Anchors Aweigh' from 1945

A great first classic film for lovers of musicals is "Anchors Aweigh" from 1945. With an all-star cast, many types of music, and a patriotic story, this movie has something for every music lover. In addition, it is inspiring, since it shows that helping others makes you happy.

After being decorated, two sailors are given four days' leave in Hollywood. "Sea Wolf" Joe Brady (Gene Kelly) is looking forward to seeing his casual girlfriend Lola, but his shy shipmate Clarence Doolittle (Frank Sinatra) insists that when Joe saved Clarence's life, he also took responsibility for it; so Clarence wants Joe's help finding a girlfriend. They are sidetracked when the police recruit them to get 7-year-old Donald Martin (Dean Stockwell) to go home instead of joining the Navy.

Donald insists on the sailors coming home with him to ask his aunt for a letter of permission for him to become a sailor. When Aunt Susie (Kathryn Grayson) finally gets home, Joe tries to leave as quickly as possible, but Donald makes him promise future visits. Meanwhile, Clarence decides that the beautiful young woman, who is her orphaned nephew's sole guardian, is the girl for him, much to Joe's chagrin.

The next day, Joe accompanies Clarence to Susie's house, bearing gifts for Donald. They learn that she is a film extra and aspiring singer. She happily agrees to date Clarence sometime, but she is busy that evening. When they see her wealthy but unattractive date, Bertram (Grady Sutton), Joe thinks Susie won't like any place they can take her. He persuades Clarence to help him convince Bertram that Susie is the sweetheart of the whole Navy.

Jerry Mouse joins Gene Kelly in a whimsical dance.

After Bertram leaves, the heartbroken Susie explains that he is a business contact, not a beau; Bertram's mother knows famous musicians. Desperate to redeem his pal, Joe lies that Clarence is good friends with José Iturbi, an important pianist and conductor. Susie is so pleased with the fib that Clarence has scheduled an audition with Mr. Iturbi for her on Saturday that she invites them to dinner to celebrate.

The sailors have three days to find Mr. Iturbi and explain the situation before breaking Susie's heart.

Happiness Through Helping Others

This film shows people helping others. In Los Angeles, the last thing Joe wants to do is teach Clarence how to enjoy a leave. However, even though he has his own date, he agrees to help Clarence find a girlfriend. Joe wants to escape his police assignment quickly, but Donald charms him. They take him home and wait for his aunt for most of the evening. And after Clarence decides that Susie is the girl for him, Joe energetically assists in his wooing her.

Joe and Clarence have only four days' leave, which they spend going out with Susie, playing with Donald, and pursuing José Iturbi. Although they enjoy Susie's company, locating Mr. Iturbi is an ordeal. Joe and Clarence search the studio lot where he works, race toward the Hollywood Bowl's stage where he is rehearsing, and camp in front of his house overnight. Though frustrating, it is worth their efforts because they know how happy Susie will be if she gets to audition.

Susie happily welcomes Joe and Clarence, who risk their lives in the Navy yet befriended her nephew during their leave. She appreciates that they care enough about Donald and her to spend their short leave helping them. Susie doesn't love Clarence but gladly dates him because he likes her. She's kind to Clarence and Joe, not because she believes they have arranged an audition for her; she befriends them because she genuinely wants them to enjoy their leave, knowing how kind and generous they are.

Musical Merriment

This film showcases many styles of music. Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra provide big musical numbers: a funny tune when leaving their ship, another comical song and dance at the servicemen's lodging, and a hilarious ditty when scaring Bertram. Individually, Frank Sinatra croons three popular tunes, tenderly sings Brahms's "Lullaby" to Donald, and even sings lyrics to Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1. Gene Kelly shows his terpsichorean technique during a fairytale sequence in which he sings and dances with the cartoon character Jerry Mouse, in a cute routine with a little Mexican girl (Sharon McManus), and in a dream sequence about a Latin bandit.

The movie also features classical singing. Kathryn Grayson, known for her operatic soprano, displays her brilliant vocalizing in an original love song and in a Spanish-themed number performed at a Mexican restaurant. Her most classical selection is a lyricized adaption of Tchaikovsky's instrumental waltz from "Serenade for Strings." There is even an opera excerpt, an aria from Rossini's "The Barber of Seville," which is performed by Colombian baritone Carlos Ramirez.

This movie's musical merriment is completed by José Iturbi. Playing himself, this Spanish musician conducts a Navy band playing "Anchors Aweigh" and an orchestra when Carlos Ramirez sings and during Susie's vocal rendition of "Serenade for Strings." Mr. Iturbi's greatest musicianship is demonstrated at the keyboard. He plays Liszt's "Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2" with youthful pianists at the Hollywood Bowl and Tchaikovsky's "Piano Concerto No. 1" on an empty soundstage. He demonstrates both his piano expertise and conducting skills in "The Donkey Serenade," an orchestral piece he conducts from the piano.

The Music Plays On

"Anchors Aweigh" is now 75 years old but is still very enjoyable, with many features that recommend it for modern viewers. The cast stars Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra, whose legacies have endured beyond their lifespans. The film includes a plethora of beautiful songs and iconic numbers that music fans will love. Even Jerry Mouse of MGM's timeless "Tom and Jerry" animated series is featured in this movie. Younger viewers may not recognize the actors or music, but this movie could make them new favorites.

This movie's World War II setting, which was current at its release, is now a window into this era. The patriotic message of support for servicemen is as inspiring in peacetime as in wartime. "Anchors Aweigh" depicts two sailors who are torn between personal desires and helping new friends during their leave. It gives viewers a deeper understanding of the Greatest Generation by showing how ingrained patriotism was in Golden Era movies. When paired with excellent acting, marvelous music, and totally decent content, it created entertaining films that still inspire today.

Tiffany Brannan is an 18-year-old opera singer, Hollywood historian, travel writer, film blogger, vintage fashion expert, and ballet writer. In 2016, she and her sister founded the Pure Entertainment Preservation Society, an organization dedicated to reforming the arts by reinstating the Motion Picture Production Code.

ALL PHOTOS BY MGM

(L–R, front) Adm. Hammond (Henry O'Neill) commends and gives a four-day pass to sailors Joe Brady (Gene Kelly) and Clarence Doolittle (Frank Sinatra) in "Anchors Aweigh."

'Anchors Aweigh'

Director
George Sidney

Starring
Frank Sinatra, Kathryn Grayson, Gene Kelly, José Iturbi, Dean Stockwell

Running Time
2 hours, 20 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date
August 1945 (USA)

★★★★★

The film includes a plethora of beautiful songs and iconic numbers that music fans will love.

Sharon McManus dances with Gene Kelly in one of many dances in "Anchors Aweigh."

Frank Sinatra (L) and Gene Kelly star in "Anchors Aweigh."

ESSENCE OF CHINA

Governor Tends Plague Patients in Ancient China

Xin Gongyi avoids infection and cures a cruel local custom at the same time

CINDY CHAN

When Xin Gongyi took up his new post as governor of Minzhou, he was deeply troubled by a cruel local custom. The residents had such a fear of disease that during an outbreak, family members had no qualms about abandoning their stricken loved ones to save their own lives.

This was during the Sui Dynasty (581–618) in ancient China, when filial duty had already been established for hundreds of years as a central tenet of traditional Chinese society.

Xin Gongyi made his best effort to rectify the situation, setting an example by caring for the infected people himself on the front line.

Still, it was not until after a major plague in the area that he made a breakthrough. Not only did he remain unharmed, but his compassion and generosity throughout the epidemic genuinely moved the residents such that they changed their ways.

A famous doctor later cited Governor Xin as an example for government officials everywhere to follow.

A Talented, Caring Official

Xin Gongyi was a diligent student from a young age, having been taught history and the classics personally by his widowed mother.

He came from a family of status; both his grandfather and father had held respected positions as governors in different provinces. Xin Gongyi himself was much admired for his knowledge and opinions. His discussions with other Confucian scholars while at college especially earned him esteem.

Xin Gongyi was also honest and upright and had a strong sense of responsibility. He served as a talented government official during the Sui Dynasty and held high-level positions in different parts of China before being appointed governor of Minzhou.

Minzhou is located in what is now Gansu Province in northwestern China. Its custom of forsaking disease-stricken relatives began in the dynastic period preceding the Sui Dynasty.

When Xin Gongyi arrived in Minzhou, he was distressed to learn about this custom, where conscience and feelings of affection and loyalty seemed to vanish, and principles of human relationships and filial piety gave way to people's desire for self-preservation. Many disease-stricken people died due to lack of care.

Xin Gongyi decided to send subordinates to inspect the various districts of Minzhou and identify cases of ill people being abandoned. He ordered that they be transported to his own office, where he had a space arranged for them to stay and be cared for.

His compassion and generosity throughout the epidemic genuinely moved the residents such that they changed their ways.

'Life and Death Are Arranged by Fate'

When summer arrived, an epidemic broke out, and several hundred people were infected. Xin Gongyi accommodated them by filling up the main hall and corridors of his office with sickbeds. He set up a couch there for himself, which he also used as his own bed, and handled official affairs from there, among his plague-stricken guests.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Part of a Qing Dynasty painting titled "Activities of the Twelve Months (The Sixth Month)," showing various activities people engage in during the month of June. One of a set of 12 hanging scroll paintings by anonymous Qing Dynasty court artists.

Xin Gongyi used his own salary to buy medicine and hire doctors to treat the patients, and he also helped to care for the patients himself.

Gradually, they all recovered, and Xin Gongyi summoned the families to take their relatives home. He also sincerely spoke to them about their custom.

"Life and death are arranged by fate, and having contact with the sick will not necessarily put you in danger," he said.

"In the past, family members abandoned their ill loved ones, and many died under those circumstances. This time, as you can see, I brought all the afflicted people here with me, and I was with them day and night. Yet I have not succumbed to disease and remain healthy and safe, not to mention that the patients all recovered," Xin Gongyi told everyone.

"You mustn't abandon those who are ill anymore. Let go of that custom from the past," he advised.

A Doctor's Note to All Officials in Government

The family members all felt ashamed upon hearing Xin Gongyi's words. They thanked him and took his words to heart. Following the plague, the residents of Minzhou abolished their custom and began to take care of each other with faithful kindness and filial devotion.

Xin Gongyi's story is summarized in the medical text "Songfeng Shuoyi," or "Songfeng on Epidemic Diseases," written by Liu Kui, a famous Qing Dynasty doctor who used Songfeng as an alias.

Liu Kui also paid tribute to Xin Gongyi in his book, stating: "The reason Xin Gongyi was not infected in the epidemic was that he was an upright, honorable, charitable, and benevolent official. It was his karmic reward."

"All government officials in the world need to be aware of this example," Liu Kui concluded.