

# THE EPOCH TIMES LIFE & TRADITION

The Jewish-American founder of the Exodus movement put her convictions first—even at the cost of a career.

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## HOME

# Which Seasonal Touches Are Easiest to Add In?

KARIANNE WOOD &amp; MELISSA MICHAELS

*What are your favorite ways to update your rooms as the seasons change while still keeping your basic decorations in place? I don't want to spend too much time or money, but I like celebrating the seasons.*

Bobbie J.

Melissa says ...

Decorating for the seasons brings a lot of joy, and it doesn't have to be expensive or complicated. An easy way to ensure flexibility is to consider stepping away from overtly themed décor. This way you aren't boxed into a look but can strike the balance between keeping things simple and mixing things up a bit each season. Use what you have, give preference to natural elements, and modify or arrange your decorations until they feel seasonally appropriate and inspiring. A glass lamp base that can be filled with pine cones one season and seashells the next is far more versatile than a ceramic one with a large image of a snowman on it.

If you go the way of simplicity, you can work with warm and cozy in the fall and winter and then lighten things up for the spring and summer months. Your basic goal really can be that simple.

One thing to consider is the seasonal style your house reflects during most of the year. I wouldn't expect you to be displaying a Christmas tree in August, but sometimes there's an obvious base seasonal style going on in your home. Fall and winter tones can be oh-so-comforting and just right for a natural or modern style. Spring and summer colors might lift your mood because they feel so fresh.

I think most of us gravitate toward one season or another because we like certain colors or are influenced by the climate or landscape in which we live. The style of our home and furnishings can also dictate which season we prefer when it comes to decorating. There isn't a right or wrong answer here. When you recognize the canvas of your home's primary style, it's just that much easier to add perfectly suited touches later.

To create a space that reflects a season, nothing fancy is required. Just involve all of your senses and celebrate a season's signature scents, sounds, flavors, and looks.



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**Decorating for the seasons brings a lot of joy, and it doesn't have to be expensive or complicated.**

Fall

Use cinnamon, orange, and clove scents in essential oil diffusers.

Decorate with leaves, pumpkins, colorful gourds, and pine cones.

Add more throw blankets and cozy pillows to the chairs and sofas.

Stock up on books and board games or pull out old favorites for evenings spent indoors.

Winter

Drape wreaths, ornaments, and lights on doors, beds, and mirrors. (Now is the time to go crazy with the fairy lights and candles!)

Add pine cones, mini trees, and evergreen branches to your décor.

Does the classic red-and-green combo clash with your existing décor? Substitute wintery blues, silvers, and off-whites. A touch of pale pink adds a bit of festivity.

Think simple and vintage—popcorn and cranberries on the tree, a wooden sled leaning against the front porch, paper snowflakes on the windows.

Spring

Lighten up the bedding with fresh white or floral print cotton sheets and soft blankets.

Display flowers everywhere—tulips, lilacs, daffodils, bluebells. Plant flowers outdoors in hanging baskets, wooden crates, or old metal buckets.

Dress up the dining room table with springy dishes and patterned cloth napkins.

Display bowls of colorful fruit in the kitchen and dining room.

Summer

Showcase seaside treasures—starfish, sand dollars, shells, glass containers of sand and pebbles.

Roll up winter rugs. Expose your bare wood floors or change to cotton rugs in summery stripes and hues.

Bring out your summer accessories—floral prints, nautical décor, anything that says "summer."

String fairy lights outdoors along with vibrant paper lanterns to move your living space outdoors.

*Excerpted from "But Where Do I Put the Couch? Answers to 100 Other Home Decorating Questions" by Melissa Michaels and KariAnne Wood (Harvest House Publishers, 2019).*



"Choosing good communication and gratitude over grumbling takes work, but it is worth it," Goyer says.

BARBARA DANZA

Tricia Goyer is a homeschooling mom of 10, a bestselling author of more than 70 books, a speaker, a podcaster, and a family advocate.

In her current season of life—some of her children are now grown—her household consists of her husband, eight of their children, and an elderly grandparent with dementia. It was under these circumstances that she and her family challenged themselves to live "grumble-free," that is, abstaining from complaints. As she put it, "What could possibly go awry?"

Goyer tells the tale of their "impossible" year in her new book, "The Grumble-Free Year: Eleven Family Members, and One Impossible Goal." I asked her about their experience.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What inspired you to attempt to live "grumble-free?"

**TRICIA GOYER:** Just as we were about to become empty nesters, my husband John and I adopted seven children, ages newborn to teen. For years, we dealt with big behavior problems and anger that came with adopting kids from hard places. We sought therapy and worked toward healing, yet we soon discovered our family still struggled with finding peace in our home. It came down to one big culprit: grumbling.

In our house, there are many people with wants and needs, which leads to much conflict and complaining. Eight kids still at home, two parents, and my elderly grandma all living together meant we could either live with the fault-finding and bellyaching, or we work to do something different.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How did your family re-embark when you told them you wanted to embark on a grumble-free year?

**MS. GOYER:** My husband and I asked my family if they'd be willing to take on the challenge: one year without grumbling. The younger kids thought it was a great idea. The younger teens thought it was impossible. The older teens questioned, "How?"

We knew it would be easy to start but hard to maintain, so we told our kids that if we all worked on not grumbling for a year we'd celebrate by going on a family cruise. (And, just maybe, my husband and I had already been planning on the cruise anyway ...) We knew it was enough to keep everyone motivated to keep working at it. And when I slacked, my kids would remind me of our challenge and our goal.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How did you define grumbling?

**MS. GOYER:** Grumbling is more than words. It includes eye-rolling, moaning, slamming cupboards, heavy sighing, and stomping away. It's more than just muttering words ... it goes deeper. Grumbling is truly rooted in discontent. We don't get what we want when we want it, and so we complain about it.

Sadly, our grumbling not only hurts our relationships with each other, but it also puts up a barrier between us and God. When we grumble, we're telling God, "What you've given us is not enough; you're not enough."

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What were the biggest challenges of living grumble-free?

**MS. GOYER:** Truthfully, the biggest challenge

was looking at myself first and being an example. I wanted my kids not to grumble, and I had to be the example. Grumbling is easy. Harder is figuring out what's really going on, trying to make changes, and attempting to communicate better.

While grumbling is not OK, I realized it is good communication to tell my husband my worries, the day's challenges, and my needs. Overcoming my internal grumbles, transforming my thoughts and attitude, and talking about my needs has helped me to be honest and transparent. And my children are learning that, too.

Usually, there's something more going on behind the grumbles. It may be bigger worries. It may be families being too busy and disconnected. As I started with myself first, I had to figure out these things and then teach them to my kids.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What surprised you about this journey?

**MS. GOYER:** What surprised me the most was that before our grumble-free year I hadn't actually given my kids tools to help them to do things differently. Grumbling comes easy. Knowing how to respond in a different way takes work.

I remember asking my kids, "What should you do instead of grumbling?" And I received blank stares. I had to give them ideas on how to share a need without grumbling. Or how to take a deep breath and respond to a parent's request in an appropriate way.

I worked with my kids to think through how to respond instead of grumbling. Then, we practiced doing it right. I'd send my kids

outside and pretend to call them in, just so they could "act out" responding correctly. Or I'd pretend to serve something for dinner that they didn't like and have them say, "Thank you for taking your time to make dinner. I will eat everything else, but can I just take a few bites of that?"

We teach our kids how to do so many things, but somehow we've forgotten how to teach them to communicate well and be grateful without grumbling.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What was the biggest lesson you learned during your grumble-free challenge?

**MS. GOYER:** The biggest lesson I learned was that pointing out my kids' grumbling didn't improve anything. The thing that worked the best was pointing out when they got it right. Praise goes farther than nitpicking. It turns out when kids see a mom praising one of their siblings loudly for not complaining, or being grateful instead, they will want the same type of positive attention.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** Do you feel your family succeeded in your challenge?

**MS. GOYER:** Yes! Our family grumbles a lot less, and I would call that a success. There are many times daily when I see one of my kids working up to grumble, and then choose to communicate in a better way.

We also have a common language and common knowledge about grumbling. For example, when it's been a hard day I'll tell the kids, "I know we're all hungry, and I know we're all tired—so it would be easy to grumble right now—but we can all work together to keep positive attitudes." Acknowledging times in which it would be easy to grumble helps us not to.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How has this challenge changed your family?

**MS. GOYER:** We've all changed together—and we've each changed individually—which is something that our kids will be able to carry through life. As we work on our combined weaknesses, it actually causes us to build up our individual strengths. I'm always pleased when a teacher or coach tells me how much they appreciated one of my kids' good attitudes.

Also, I've found it easier to turn around my attitude, too. Many times a day, when I feel like grumbling, I think of something I'm thankful for instead. Or I figure out a way I can communicate a need in a positive way. The changes are both external and internal.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What advice would you give to parents who want to inspire their family to live grumble-free?

**MS. GOYER:** I hope parents will take time to focus on what's often overlooked: our discontent. We get stuck in a rut of complaining, instead of working to do something different. Choosing good communication and gratitude over grumbling takes work, but it is worth it. Our challenge has turned out to be a gift to our family—one that will continue to give.

## Hope for the Holidays: A Celebration of Change

JEFF MINICK

All of us know the plot and many of the characters in Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol."

We've either read the novel or we've seen one of the more than two dozen movies made about this classic. Ebenezer Scrooge, the mean-spirited man of business, gave us "Bah Humbug," and Scrooge's name itself has become a part of the English language.

Bob Cratchit, Tiny Tim, and Jacob Marley are familiar to most of us, as is the story: Scrooge's misanthropy and greed; the visitation of Three Christmas spirits—past, present, and future—whose mission is to change his heart for the better; his awakening from miser to a man who will "honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year."

Near the beginning of "A Christmas Carol," the suffering ghost of Jacob Marley, his former business partner, warns Scrooge that unless he changes his ways, he too will be doomed after death to wander the earth wearing a chain made of "cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought of steel."

He tells Scrooge, "No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse."

Later in their conversation, Scrooge says, "But you were always a good man of business, Jacob."

The ghost replied, wringing its hands:



Bob Cratchit carrying Tiny Tim on his shoulders. A scene from "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens, circa 1844. Illustration by Fred Barnard.

"Business ... Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, benevolence, were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"

Benevolence

Charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence: All desirable character traits, but sadly gone AWOL in our public forum these last few years. Instead, many of our celebrities and politicians, our "elites," all too often indulge in malevolence, spite, slander, and innuendo.

We have now entered into the season that provides the setting

for "A Christmas Carol." From late November to mid-January, our calendars bring us a raft of holidays: Thanksgiving (gratitude), Christmas (peace on earth to men of good will), Hanukkah (rededication and remembrance), New Year's (new beginnings), and the Chinese New Year (new beginnings).

So I was wondering, and at the risk of being accused of "cultural appropriation." What might happen if all of us celebrated the spirit of these holidays?

The Holiday Season

Thanksgiving, which we have just observed, is celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November, but we can, if we choose, make every day of the year a thanksgiving. No matter how poor, no matter how alone, no matter what trials we may be suffering, surely we can find some person or circumstance for which we feel grateful. Often many of us, and I very much include myself, become so caught up in life or so accustomed to a routine that we forget to stop, look around, and appreciate what blessings we have.

"Gratitude," G.K. Chesterton once wrote, "is happiness doubled by wonder." Engaging that sense of wonder often means lifting our eyes from the cold ground to the stars. And who knows? Maybe that sense of wonder and gratitude will bring us benevolence.

Christmas for believers and unbelievers often comes wrapped in a frenetic round of parties, shopping

for gifts, and decorating. This whirl of discombobulation can anesthetize us to the spirit of that season when all of us, whatever our religious beliefs, might aspire to become men and women of "good will." To listen to others; to offer charity in our words and deeds; to forbear from that critical remark to a spouse or that snarky comment to an employee.

Hanukkah is Hebrew for dedication and celebrates the rededication in ancient times of the Temple in Jerusalem and a lamp that then miraculously burned for eight days. Hanukkah reminds us that we too can rededicate ourselves to improvement in our lives, work, and relationships. And like that solitary lamp, our words and actions can bring light to the darkness around us.

Whether we celebrate the New Year on Jan. 1 or the Chinese New Year on Jan. 25, New Year's means out with the old and in with the new. We ring in the new year with parties, with certain rituals and resolutions, and for many of us, with the fervent hope that Father Time will bring a better bag of gifts than the one given us by the old year.

Here, too, these New Year's celebrations afford us the opportunity to resolve to practice "charity, mercy, forbearance, benevolence," and other virtues. Many among us resolve to lose weight, drink less, or spend money more frugally, and these are noble pursuits. But

what might happen if we resolved to be friendlier to that old grouch next door? What might come of avoiding water-cooler gossip at work? What if we brought into our homes along with our briefcases, backpacks, and groceries a spirit of benevolence?

Mr. Cheerleader

If you have read this far, you're probably thinking, "This dude should join a cheerleading squad." Maybe.

But please bear in mind, good reader, I am addressing myself as much as to you. And given our current miasmatic political and cultural climate, I figure we all need cheerleaders. Heaven knows I do.

Let me end as I began, with Marley. To paraphrase that remorseful old ghost, the common welfare is our business. We may lack the means to change the ugly language of our politicians or the crudities found in so many of our celebrities, but we don't have to imitate their behavior.

We can change ourselves.

And that's a healthy start toward changing the culture.

*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](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.*



What exactly is the father of the groom supposed to do?

THE NEUTRAL CORNER

## Listen Dear, They're Playing My Song

What's a father of the groom to do at the wedding?

CON CHAPMAN

The role of the mother of the groom in a wedding—in the words of the blunt old saying—is simple: show up, shut up, and wear beige.

It's tough, but customs survive because they reflect reality, and it is a universally acknowledged truth that weddings are—and should be—about the bride, not the groom.

Since that's the case, the father of the groom is a doubly subordinated character in the drama; not just a bit player, but a walk-on. What exactly is he supposed to do?

Well, make the first toast at the rehearsal dinner, and keep it positive. You may have some great one-liners in your comic repertoire, such as the one that goes, "You only get married for the first time once," and "Never go to bed angry—stay up and finish the job."

Discretion, as Shakespeare's Falstaff said, is the better part of valor. Save them for poker night.

As my elder son's wedding approached, I found myself at a loss for advice on what I'm supposed to do. There is no shortage of online and in-print articles that lay out the responsibilities of the groom's mother, but his father? Wedding planners must assume

an excess of rugged individualism in the male half of the groom's parents.

I thought back 33 years to the months leading up to my own wedding for guidance. My share of the marital chores was limited because my wife loves weddings so much she used to dress up in a bridal gown on Halloween. I, on the other hand, would take my sister's eyebrow pencil, scribble a mustache and goatee on my face, and trick-or-treat as a beatnik. Opposites, you may have heard, attract.

So my only duty of consequence back then was to hire the band for the reception, a task I was happy to take on. Since the invitees would include a number of people who pre-dated rock 'n roll (including my parents) I thought it advisable—and considerate—to have music that could be danced to, in the words of the Irving Berlin song, cheek to cheek.

The premier provider of music of that type in Boston at the time was one Sebastian "Sabby" Lewis, a black bandleader in his 70s, approximately the age of my father. Lewis was a rarity in the world of swing; he remained a regional favorite in New England when he could have moved on to New York, the place where jazzmen go to prove themselves, both in his day and now. Still, he produced music hot enough to impress Count Basie who, after watching Lewis and his men perform one night, sent Lewis a telegram from the road saying simply, "Rock em, pops!"

At the end of his career, Lewis and his band had a gig at a downtown hotel, a commonplace when jazz was America's preferred popular music. A phone call was made and things were set, except for the first dance, traditionally the bride and groom's favorite song. In the case of my wife and I—whose tastes vary widely—that

would have been "Whatever We Imagine" by James Ingram, the one song we both liked, although it hasn't made its way into the wedding canon alongside "Here Comes the Bride" and "We've Only Just Begun."

When it came time to put the question to Sabby—I couldn't. Gods don't answer letters, John Updike said of Ted Williams's refusal to tip his cap to fans after he hit a home run in his last at-bat in Boston. One similarly doesn't require old musicians to learn new tricks once they've entered their seventh decade, so I asked instead for "Have You Met Miss Jones?"—a 1937 Rodgers and Hart number still played today. It evoked memories of how I'd met my wife, in a polite and professional setting, not at wet T-shirt night in one of Boston's many noisy watering holes for singles.

When we went out in the middle of the ballroom for the first dance and she didn't hear our favorite song, an explanation was in order. "Uh, it's my second favorite song" was all I could say.

That little musical infidelity has long since been forgiven, so when it became apparent that I had no chores to perform as our son's wedding approached, I was charged by my wife with putting together a playlist on my phone for the rehearsal dinner. This time, there would be no excuse—you can have any music you want when you bring your own.

And so it was with a sense of tradition that I informed my son I was putting together the music for the dinner—did he or his fiancée have any requests?

Only to hear him reply, as youth will, "Uh, thanks, dad, but we're all set."

*Con Chapman is the author of "Rabbit's Blues: The Life and Music of Johnny Hodges" (Oxford University Press).*

# Elizabeth Pipko On Standing Up for Her Beliefs

The Jewish-American founder of the Exodus movement put her convictions first—even at the cost of a career

CATHERINE YANG

“If you believe in what you believe in and you know what you stand for, you just have to keep going. You go with God. With encouragement from your family..”

Elizabeth Pipko

Elizabeth Pipko grew up hearing how lucky she is to be an American. The adults would tell her, “You have no idea what your parents and grandparents went through, coming here with no money.”

Her grandfather was a famous portrait artist in Soviet Russia who wasn't allowed to paint religious works. Her mother remembers children traded for grain because no one had anything. Her grandmother would show her photos of concentration camps during the Holocaust and tell her stories about Jews who managed to keep their faith in the face of such hell. Her father was homeless for several years when he first came to America because he had nothing, and he too would tell Pipko and her brother they were lucky.

Pipko, her younger brother, and their two cousins are first-generation Americans; their parents and grandparents are Jewish immigrants and refugees who braved dire circumstances to come to America when they had absolutely nothing. Among all the liberties they sought, the most important one, prized above all, was religious freedom.

“It was always important to me why they came here. You don't risk your life and risk everything and leave a lot of your family members just to come to America,” she said. “They all came here to get to be themselves and get to be free and get to be Jewish—something that's not really allowed, even still, in a lot of countries.”

Knowing her family story, Pipko has always been not just grateful to practice her religion, but adamant in protecting that right.

“I hope everyone realizes how lucky we are to be here and how terrifying the rise of anti-Semitism is,” Pipko said.

In responding to anti-Semitic and anti-Israel comments from Democratic politicians earlier this year, Pipko unintentionally became the leader of a movement.

## Votes Taken for Granted

“Growing up in New York City, as a Jew, as a woman ... people would assume that I was liberal, very, very to the left,” Pipko said.

She had that experience in conversations even before the madness that was the 2016 election, before Donald Trump came onto the political scene. But it was after the backlash after she publicly announced her support for the president that Pipko started looking at the numbers. Midterm exit polls show Jews overwhelmingly voted Democratic, at around 70 percent.

It's not surprising that Jewish voters have been Democrats, Pipko said, with President Harry Truman recognizing Israel and Presi-

dent Lyndon Johnson adding his support. But there's no reason to keep supporting a party that has forsaken your interests, she tells Jewish voters today.

“Anyone can make a decision for themselves. That's what America is,” Pipko said.

“If we're not supported by a party anymore, you can't continue voting for them,” she said. “No vote should ever be taken for granted.”

The Exodus movement, which started as just a tweet, has now been registered as a nonprofit and a super PAC. Since it was founded in March, the organization has expanded from a dozen chapters to 20 nationwide. Pipko has found her footing, and has a clear vision of where she wants the organization to go.

“I didn't expect, honestly, anything to come from it. I didn't think at 24 years old, I'd be running this huge organization,” Pipko said.

A lot has been achieved on social media, but Pipko wants to move onto college campuses and into real meetings with real people. It's not about convincing Jewish people to leave the Democrat Party full stop, it's “about being a support system for American Jews everywhere, no matter what side they're on.”

“It's a political organization that they know they can come to the see which candidates actually support what they support,” Pipko said. She envisions it lasting well past 2020.

“I would love to spend more time one-on-one with Americans literally everywhere, anytime that I can, just talking, because I think that America is way better than where we are right now,” Pipko said. “That's how I thought about it when I was little, and that's all I always think about America.”

## It Started With Trump

Pipko was a professional model when she came out early this year as not just a Trump supporter but a member of his 2016 campaign staff. (She's since left to focus on her organization.)

Her husband, who she married at Mar-a-Lago last December, was still a full-time campaign staffer and she had become sick of hearing people in her industry say vile and hateful things about the people who worked with Trump.

“It was just really hard to hear people say how evil everyone you know, his staff was, how evil he is, how evil his supporters are, knowing that I met some of the greatest [people] I've ever known literally on that campaign... knowing that certain things that are said about him just aren't true,” she said. “I knew that the fact that I was scared, that meant that so many other people were so scared.”

While working as a model and a full-time campaign staffer, she would hide her badge while out in the city, afraid to tell a soul because she knew it would destroy her career. Predictably, many in the industry stopped talking to her after the news broke, but for Pipko, the world was bigger than just her current career.

It didn't mean she wasn't terrified to make that announcement. Pipko remembers conferring with her brother—“he's the smartest person in the world”—and saying if he said she should do it, she would do it. She then called a New York Post reporter, told her story, and was interviewed on Fox and Friends the next day.

What shocked her wasn't the hate mail or disgusting comments, it was the long and emotional positive messages that complete strangers wrote in.

“I got paragraphs and paragraphs on email, Instagram, DMs on Twitter, mail to my house, everything from people telling me literally they were terrified to tell even their own family members who they voted for; there were people telling me that their husbands or wives don't know who they voted for, which I thought was crazy,” Pipko said.

And they said she was brave, which Pipko understands, but thinks it is crazy that this is the America we have today.



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STEVAN FANE



(Top L) Elizabeth Pipko did not think she'd have any more modeling opportunities but, as it turns out, she was featured earlier this month in an eight-page magazine spread.

(Top R) Pipko speaks at Turning Point USA's Young Jewish Leadership Summit in June 2019.

(Far L) Elizabeth Pipko in Central Park, New York City, on Nov. 21, 2019.

(Left) Pipko and her husband Darren Centinello with First Lady Melania Trump and President Donald Trump at the White House in December 2017.

(Above) Pipko at the Trump 45 Club in Palm Beach, Fla., in July 2019.

“They all came here to get to be themselves and get to be free and get to be Jewish—something that's not really allowed, even still, in a lot of countries.”

Elizabeth Pipko



COURTESY OF ELIZABETH PIPKO

Elizabeth Pipko and her husband, Darren Centinello, at the “Gotti” movie premiere in June 2018.

“The fact that these people were so inspired and so terrified to admit what I admitted just meant, you know, this country is in some kind of a dark period. That's just clear,” Pipko said.

## Confidence

Pipko is a trained figure skater.

At age 10, on a trip to Florida, she fell in love with the sport and knew right away who she wanted as a coach.

Her mom believed in her, packing up the home and family and moving to Florida from New York City to support her dream. Pipko had started late as a competitive skater, and trained all day every day while attending online school where she could take more electives and advanced classes than she would have otherwise.

At age 16, she suffered a debilitating ankle injury “and was told I'd never walk properly again,” she said.

The modeling career had come out of nowhere and at the perfect time, when she was 17 in New York City. She was sitting in a park when she was photographed, and Pipko was scouted and became a Wilhelmina model. Depressed because of the loss of skating and now in a city with few friends, modeling gave her a much-needed confidence boost. She'd spent her adolescence training alone on ice, and now had a completely different body. Pipko says if modeling hadn't happened, she would still be that anxious little girl.

When she chose speaking out about her beliefs over her career, she thought it was because the opportunities would be closed to her now. But Pipko was recently just featured in an eight-page magazine spread, working with a photographer who had done photo shoots with her before.

“I dreamed about it when I was little like so many little girls, and I'd got to do it for so long, and left off with a lot of good memories of a lot of good people, to be able to work with one of

Pipko's wedding at Mar-a-Lago on Dec. 26, 2018.

them again just meant a lot to me,” Pipko said. All of what drives Pipko are traits she received from her family.

“My mom, she taught me to literally shoot for any dream possible. My dad taught me to think and to rationalize and to be the person that I am when I attempt any problem or challenge in my life,” Pipko said. In addition to her parents, her younger brother and her

## Pipko speaks on FOX & Friends.

COURTESY OF ELIZABETH PIPKO



COURTESY OF ELIZABETH PIPKO



husband, who she met as a campaign staffer, comprise her support system. Her brother is her best friend and confidant, who she trusts with her life.

“They're the reason I succeed,” Pipko said.

Pipko adds that her father's side of the family has many lawyers and bookish professions, and her mother's side is full of artists, herself being a concert pianist.

“My mom, she's incredible ... when I was little, she tore her arm completely. So I think she's had 11 surgeries between her elbow in her shoulder and her arm and she's still performing,” Pipko said. Just last year, she performed at the White House not long after a painful surgery.

“She's literally the strongest human you'll ever meet in your whole life,” Pipko said. “And it would just be disrespectful on my part to watch her go what she goes through, and not do the same.”

Seeing Trump campaign and win as an underdog further cemented the values that Pipko inherited. She had worked on a small but dedicated staff where she learned that heart and hard work meant everything. She still remembers the turnaround they witnessed election night, in a room that just felt electric.

She was inputting data at 8 p.m., when she texted her mom that things didn't look good. Not two hours later, she was saying “Mom, we won the election, get dressed, get ready, we're going to celebrate.”

Pipko had started out as a volunteer because the campaign was in her own backyard and would provide unparalleled experience leading into the first election in which she could vote. Not 48 hours after making some suggestions to a coordinator, they hired her for a full-time position.

“To end up at 21 years old as full-time staff not just on a presidential campaign, but one of the most controversial and crazy in his-

tor, and one that ended up winning, honestly is something that hasn't hit me yet,” she said. Pipko has recently compiled her story into what will eventually be published as a memoir of her time on the campaign.

She thinks there's a lesson for everyone, whether they agree with Trump's policies or not.

“No candidate was ever treated like he was,” she said. People on both sides, everyone from friends to foreign leaders treated his campaign as a joke. But he kept on “with his head held high and all the confidence in the world. I mean, that's inspiring for anyone; if you can't draw inspiration from that, that's, you know, that's a problem. That's a huge inspiration.”

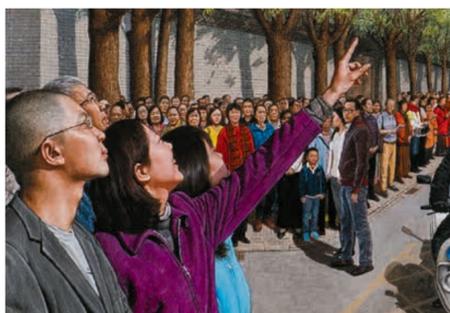
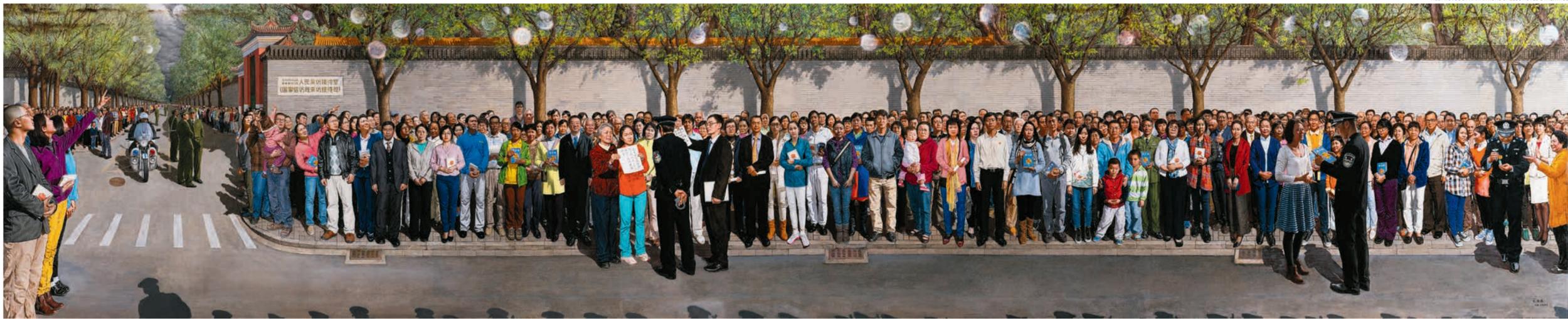
Pipko says with the grandparents she has, of course she was told growing up she couldn't be scared of anything, but they're not just pretty words.

“I'm getting swastikas mailed to my house, or I'm seeing comments that I deserve to be raped and killed,” she said. “If you believe in what you believe in and you know what you stand for, you just have to keep going. You go with God. With encouragement from your family.”

These are lessons she wants to share with other young people, because too many Americans are letting others make their decisions for them, she says. Pipko has been working on a book to tell her story, and her family's, and though it's been more work than she realized, it's been therapeutic.

“Decide what you believe in,” she said. And then even if others disagree, she added, understand that they have the right to do so, and that it's because they believe they are morally doing the right thing.

“You should be able to have friends and have family and have colleagues that disagree and are good people,” Pipko said. “So let's start there.”



Haiyan Kong spent five years working on "April 25th, 1999," an oil painting of Falun Gong practitioners in Beijing on that day. The painting spans over 4 1/2 yards and includes 400 figures, 200 of them with visible faces of Falun Gong practitioners from around the world who posed for the artist (Top, the painting in full length. Above and R, details from the painting).



# Finding Hope and Renewal in Art

'April 25th, 1999' by Haiyan Kong Wins Gold at 5th NTD International Figure Painting Competition

## THE CONTEXT: APRIL 25, 1999, IN BEIJING

Falun Gong was introduced to the public in China in 1992, and by the end of the decade, 70 million–100 million people were practicing the spiritual discipline, according to government surveys. Harassment of these adherents by the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Propaganda Ministry began as early as mid-1996, but things came to a head in 1999. After a slanderous article was published in a national magazine, many practitioners went to Tianjin to correct the record and, after several dozen arrests, were directed to the State Council Appeals Office on Fuyou Street in Beijing.

On April 25, Falun Gong practitioners of all walks of life arrived outside the State Council Appeals Office to find there were already hundreds of security officers deployed and directing people to stand across the street, lining up on the sidewalks and wrapping around the corner. The CCP had orchestrated the event in order to use the photos out of context and frame these people as a threat.

CATHERINE YANG

Haiyan Kong lay awake the night of April 24, 1999, unable to get a wink of sleep. Would she go tomorrow, or stay home? She would undoubtedly be safe if she stayed home that weekend. But if she didn't speak out for what was right and true, how would she live with herself? If everyone turned a blind eye to injustice and kept their heads down to go about their day, what kind of society would that be?

"If everyone indeed thought that way, there would be no April 25 to speak of. And then what? We would be a society without humanity," Kong said.

At the time, Kong had been an adherent of the spiritual practice Falun Gong for five years. Falun Gong, or Falun Dafa, was introduced to the public in China in 1992, and taught people to follow the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance.

The day before, a few dozen people protested outside a college in Tianjin, a port city of Beijing, because a state-run newspaper had published blatantly false information, mischaracterizing a practitioner of Falun Gong. Riot police descended on the protesters, beating many and arresting 45 people.

One of these people was Kong's friend, and they sometimes read together in the evenings. But when Kong visited this friend on her way home that night, the apartment was empty. She knew her friend had been arrested for merely wanting the truth to come to light. Kong decided that sleepless night that she would go to Beijing the next day, and make an appeal at the State Appeals Office asking for the arrested practitioners to be released.

Little did she know, she would be one of about 10,000 people coming out in support of Falun Gong at the State Appeals Office that day.

### Five Years in the Making

Kong is an artist, and ever since that historic day, she has had a wish to memorialize the scene through art.

It would be years before she would have the opportunity to do so, but for the last five years, Kong, who lives in Hong Kong, has worked on the massive oil painting that now spans more than 4 1/2 yards.

It was on display at the Salmagundi Club in New York the week of Thanksgiving, and just won the gold prize at the 5th NTD International Figure Painting Competition.

"I am grateful," Kong said. "I'm grateful for this competition and the opportunity to show this work. I'm very grateful that I have been able to practice Falun Dafa, which not only changed my health, but changed my perspective and outlook on the world, without which I could not have created this painting. And I'm so grateful for all of my family and friends who have continued to support me throughout it all."

The long, horizontal format of the painting is reminiscent of Chinese scroll paintings, Kong said, and you can look at it walking slowly from one end to the other. There are three main events within the painting as you do so, like an interaction between one of the protesters and the police standing guard.

The painting doesn't contain 10,000 figures—there are about 400 figures, and 200 of them with visible, discernible faces. Kong arrived in New York in August in order to see the painting in the space where it would hang, and add finishing details. She had been working on the painting in her home, which is small, so it was the first time she had been able to step back and see it in its full length from a few yards away.

When you look at the painting up close, you will find a sea of solemn faces staring back at you, each a portrait of faithful conviction, even in the faces so small to span only half an inch.

Every one of these figures is a real person.

"I have their names, I have their stories," Kong said.

But they are not the original protesters of April 25, 1999.

"That was what I originally wanted to do, I wanted to paint the people who had come to Beijing on that day, but when I looked at the photographs I could find, they were far too blurry for me to make out the faces," Kong said. So she reached out to other Falun Dafa practitioners she knew, who would kindly introduce her to other Falun Dafa practitioners they knew, and for the last five years Kong has photographed and painted their likeness into the painting.

"They all went out of their way for me, they went above and beyond for me," Kong said. "They matched the expressions I needed. Some cried hearing the stories of the people they were posing for. A woman was moved to tears, but then she composed herself to do this for me."

There was a woman who hadn't worn high heels like the figure she would be posing for, but without complaint stood on her toes as if she were wearing heels. There was a busy musician who traveled around the world frequently, but he took the time to pose for Kong in multiple sessions, over several years.

The work is surprisingly complex, and truly a labor of love not just for Kong, but for many.

"I have five years worth of stories," Kong said. Living in Hong Kong at the time presented unique challenges. Kong needed to find the kind of trees that were planted along the street in front of the Chinese Communist Party's headquarters in Beijing, and it turned out there was only one location in all of Hong Kong where these Chinese scholar trees grew. She was unable to find traditional art materials such as certain pigments and brushes in Hong Kong, and other Falun Gong practitioners helped her place an order for brushes from France, and guide her in Taiwan to buy pigments.

"If it wasn't for Falun Dafa practitioners, this painting would not have happened," Kong said.

Some of the practitioners Kong corresponded with were artists as well, and they provided invaluable insight—techniques and secrets of the trade that she says artists normally wouldn't so openly share.

Because of this, Kong's artistic skills have made a stunning improvement. In fact, five years ago, Kong had submitted another work into the NTD competition, and it marked her foray back into representational styles. It was a difficult process and, she now admits, rather clumsy. But

she received such meaningful feedback that it encouraged her to pursue traditional art, and set her on the path she is on today.

### A Long, Artistic Journey

Kong loved art even as a child. Her father, who was in the arts as well, saw her talent and let her take lessons. Kong had two tutors who taught her drawing and painting in the traditional style, and then for university, she applied to several of the top art schools.

At the time, much as it is today, the trend was toward abstract expressionism. This was the norm, and this was all that was taught. Kong hadn't thought much of it, because this was the acknowledged mainstream form of fine art.

"We'd have model drawing classes, and a good drawing would be one where the model did not look like the model. The goal was not to make art that looked like the thing was representing," Kong said. "The goal was to be individual, or I guess you can call it 'original.'" Students were encouraged to develop a style so obtuse as to be unreplicable—thus creating a signature, or brand. They were taught this was the way to attain success.

And it was true in Kong's case. She received good reviews and inquiries from collectors after her graduation exhibition and had a second exhibition a few years later that was also deemed a success.

But though Kong was well on her way to fame and making a name for herself, she started to wonder whether this was what she really wanted to pursue as an artist.

As an artist, she viewed a lot of works, and it was clear that the trend was increasingly toward the avant-garde. But it was also clear that artists weren't just seeking uniqueness, but darkness, or an irrational state of mind. It was chaos and despair rendered in painting and sculpture, and Kong started to consider whether this was the best way to represent the world. Art holds a mirror up to society, after all.

She remembers a moment during her second exhibition, when a foreigner who'd come to the gallery with friends got down on his knees in front of one of her abstract works and bowed his head to it. Kong says it isn't a good memory. He tried to buy the painting, but she felt she couldn't sell it to him. Now she is glad she didn't—it was dark, and she doesn't believe it would have been good for him to live with a painting like that.

There was another instance of feedback that was more personal, but it would only make sense to Kong in retrospect. Kong's son was born around the time she was a rising artist, and her home was



SEW/REDA JIN/EPHOTO

“I want to convey compassion, and give people something bright and uplifting. And I believe many artists in the world want to create traditional arts and present traditional values.”

Haiyan Kong

also her studio. But her baby would always cry when he saw her works, and she ended up having to flip them around to face the walls. Kong's mother later told her that the room she used as her studio always had such a dark, gloomy, and oppressive feeling, and it was difficult for her to even set foot in it. Kong says it's a testament to how deeply astray she was that all this went unnoticed by her at first.

**Truthfulness, Compassion, Forbearance** But then in 1993, Kong was walking through a park when she saw a group of people doing slow, meditative exercises, like those of tai chi. They had a banner that read "truthfulness, compassion, forbearance," and she felt an immediate connection.

These three words, which turned out to be the three principles taught in Falun Gong, were exactly what she wanted to represent in her work. Truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance seemed to sum up the goodness of humankind, and Kong knew that was the path she wanted to walk as an artist.

"I felt I had finally found what humans are supposed to be," Kong said. Having been immersed in darkness and chaos for years, this was a revelation. "My whole attitude changed. From then on, I changed."

She started practicing Falun Gong herself, and in addition to her new outlook on life, improved her physical health dramatically. Kong then made the decision to stop selling her modern art, which was still fetching high prices on the market. It wasn't as difficult a decision as one might think. Then for the next several years, Kong worked as a university art instructor and taught basics and fundamentals.

But raising her skills as a representational artist able to depict and communicate something truly meaningful would take a lot of work.

"Actually, my original training [with my tutors] was traditional. I had to really work to forget all of my training, it was really hard. It was actually a lot of work," Kong said. In university, they studied things like the "reality of flatness" and other modern and post-modern art philosophies in an effort to achieve that ego-centric originality. When she started making representational art again, Kong realized just how much her skills had decayed.

"It was difficult," she said heavily. "I had forgotten the fundamentals after university, and at first I would draw something, and the lines wouldn't be straight, the eyes would be off. I had trained myself to draw in that crooked style."

"A lot of it has to do with seeing," Kong

said. She was learning to see the world differently again, through a lens of truth, compassion, and forbearance this time.

While living in Hong Kong, where she had moved in 2007, she heard about the Zhen Shan Ren ("Truthfulness Compassion Forbearance") Art Exhibition, which was put together by practitioners of Falun Gong from around the world. It was an effort to depict the peaceful meditation practice through fine arts as well as reveal the ongoing persecution of Falun Gong by the Chinese Communist Party.

Kong immediately thought again of her wish to paint the April 25 event.

"This is a historic event, a protest of this scale," Kong said. "And it was completely peaceful."

"I'd lived in Beijing for 20 years, I went to the April 25th protest. I knew these streets of Beijing, and I wanted to paint this," Kong said.

But she realized her skills weren't up to scratch, and she wasn't able to finish a piece in time. Over the years, the Zhen Shan Ren Art Exhibition has gone on to tour in 900 cities in 50 countries worldwide.

But an opportunity arose for Kong when she heard about the NTD International Figure Painting Competition, which would be held in New York in 2014. She submitted a portrait of a child that, though rough around the edges, made it to the finalist round. She was afforded the opportunity to meet many other artists, including fellow finalists and the judges, who shared their own experiences and invaluable encouragement.

"I set my heart on this effort of being a better artist," Kong said. "And through my study, I also came to realize with conviction the responsibility of an artist."

Kong says an artist has a responsibility to society, and thus a personal moral responsibility as well. When a work of art is hung in someone's home or displayed for all to see, it carries a bit of the artist's character as well, and Kong feels it's only right that the effect should be a good one. Her wish to do right by others comes from her practicing Falun Gong.

Art is a powerful medium, and it inevitably influences its viewers, Kong said, and an artist has to make a choice as to which path they will follow.

"I want to convey compassion, and give people something bright and uplifting," Kong said. "And I believe many artists in the world want to create traditional arts and present traditional values. That's why a competition like this, that gives artists a chance to show these works to the world, is important."

Violin virtuoso Fiona Zheng performs with the Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra at Boston Symphony Hall on Oct. 25, 2019.



# The Art of Blending Western Classical and Ancient Chinese Music

CATHERINE YANG

The music accompanying Taoists is mystical with a strong sense of integrity, and Buddhist music is solemn and merciful—these are not mere abstractions. Shen Yun Performing Arts' composers and arrangers are masters at tone painting, and every song tells a story just as vividly as the dancers on stage.

Accompanying each performance is a live ensemble of musicians, but the Chinese instruments actually make up only a fraction of the group—they play amid a backdrop of classical symphony instruments.

Blending Western classical and ancient Chinese music is a notable feat. Many have tried, with lackluster results.

"You have to know the rules," said pipa player and composer Jing Xian. Shen Yun's own team of composers and arrangers have their own playbook of various rules. "It's a bit of a secret recipe."

**Why Shen Yun Uses a Classical Western Orchestra**  
Shen Yun is the world's premier classical

**The spaces between each note were important too because the music needed to breathe.**

Chinese dance company, and its mission is to revive the 5,000 years of traditional Chinese culture. This is an ancient, divinely inspired culture that was nearly decimated in just the last century; through music and dance, these artists have the wish to share that lost culture with the world.

Classical music is a complex system, with consistent rules for tonality, harmony, and structure. The result is a rich and universal language that could even be called one of mankind's greatest accomplishments.

The universality is such that classical music has an endless vocabulary, and in an expert's hands is capable of expressing any emotion, any narrative, any idea. Its limits are not confined to words, thus even cultures, or the spirit of a people, can be conveyed through classical music.

Classical music is thought to be European, but even in its invention, it spanned many nations—the French composer Jean-Philippe Rameau is famous for his treatise on harmony, but it was the German composer J.S. Bach who composed the handbook on tonality. The Viennese School's Haydn and Mozart

firmly established the Classical period while Beethoven brought music into the Romantic age, but the Russians put their own stamp on Romanticism. And since the very beginning, up through the present day, this universal art of classical music has been used to give listeners a picture of other cultures. Composers have a long practice of borrowing folk songs to various effects. (Mozart's "Turkish March" is one that everyone has heard, or even Dvorak evoking America in his "New World Symphony").

"Classical music is a common language," Jing Xian said. And this was an important deciding factor when the music of production is conceived.

As such, Jing Xian explained, it was important to use a musical language that is truly universal and can reach all nations.

The second reason for seating the few Chinese instruments among an otherwise standard Western orchestra is the symphony's sheer power. With a Western orchestra, you can have the swell of the strings and the brassy accent of the horns, and everything melds together to a grand effect. It's a big ensemble with a big sound.

"Our orchestra is based on the Western orchestra, and the Chinese instruments are like colors blended in colorful instruments," Jing Xian said. "We also use the classical style; we use Western harmony and orchestration techniques as well, and don't break from that traditional method of arranging music."

"But you have to know the rules of how to blend them together so that the sounds accompany each other well. You need techniques to pull it off," she said.

#### Shen Yun Music: Divine Notes

Ancient Chinese scholars had much to say about the philosophy of music, enough that Jing Xian could talk about it for days. She became a professional pipa player at the young age of 15, and pursued studies in composition, music literature, and ethnomusicology. The award-winning composer later earned her master's and a doctorate in ethnomusicology at Oxford University.

Rather than talk about how Chinese music affected traditional Chinese medicine or the different types of ensembles used in imperial courts, Jing Xian says what might be most illuminating for the

novice to understand is that there is this belief that every note is alive.

"Every tone, every note is alive," Jing Xian said. "The ancient people believed everything has life. So even the note, each single note, should have life quality—so it's alive."

This philosophy guided how music was written and played. The notes on the page weren't "strict," Jing Xian explained. They could move around, as living organisms are apt to do—meaning that a note might just be written as a single black dot on the score, but the player infused the played note with the sound of its own story, that characteristic undulation often heard in Chinese music, for example. The spaces between each note were important too because the music needed to breathe.

The name Shen Yun is translated as something like "the beauty of divine beings dancing," Shen means divine, and Yun is something like the feeling behind a movement. Chinese music has "yun" as well, Jing Xian said.

"It's like color," she said. "The notes contain different meanings as well. There is meaning behind it—the cultural and

Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra performs at Carnegie Hall in New York on Oct. 12, 2019.



**“Every tone, every note is alive. The ancient people believed everything has life. So even the note, each single note, should have life quality—so it's alive.”**

Jing Xian, pipa player and composer

The erhu has a history of over 4,000 years and is very expressive. It has been called the "Chinese violin."



For schedule and tickets to the upcoming world tour, visit [ShenYunPerformingArts.org](http://ShenYunPerformingArts.org)

philosophical background behind the notes."

"And with Shen Yun music, we use these different great traditions because that was given by the divine; otherwise, we couldn't call it Shen Yun," Jing Xian said. "It's tradition. It has the spirituality behind it to support us. That's why we're called Shen Yun—because we rely on the power of God. So we have this tradition, and we base our art on tradition, this meaningful tradition behind [what we do]."

#### A Powerful Combination

A gong sounds, and you know immediately that someone like the emperor is about to appear. The theme announces him, and you don't need to know anything about the musical technique to know it sounds royal.

Violins bow furiously, and even though no one has made a move on stage, you know something big is about to happen.

"It's this kind of thing," Jing Xian said. "You have to choose the correct mode to represent this or that feature of the music, or whatever it is you want to convey."

A Shen Yun production includes about 20 vignettes, largely classical Chinese dance pieces accompanied by the orchestra.

This means that from piece to piece, the music has to express what the Tang Dynasty imperial court sounds like in one dance and embody the spirit of the Miao people in the next dance. The production spans 5,000 years of history, and China is home to about 50 different ethnic minorities with their own cultures and customs.

The Mongolian folk dance is one audience favorite.

"They are people of the vast grasslands, and they sing under the open sky," Jing Xian said, briefly singing a few bars of what one might hear on a friendly visit.

"It's very broad, with long lines—their environment reflects in the music like that. Inside a dense city, you wouldn't sing like that. The tunes are shorter, smaller. So [their folk music] is related to their traditional lifestyle. You have to learn that and present that in a traditional way."

"Folk songs all have their own styles, and we respect that and arrange the music according to the styles that they have. You have to know the differences between each group, each nation, each minority," Jing Xian said.

"When I started, I knew very little. Then I started to learn. It has to do with the languages, the tones of their language, their religion, their traditions, and customs," she said. "You have to know their styles, these different styles. Then you have to present it in a classical way, that's all."

Jing Xian makes it sound simple, but Shen Yun's music is the result of tremendous research and intensive artistic work.

Shen Yun is, in fact, doing something completely different. All of the building blocks of this artistic endeavor are traditional, but the company is bringing these old traditions into the 21st century in a meaningful way.

"To do something different like this, you cannot just limit yourself to the technical," Jing Xian said. It's a matter of improving on various levels—artistic, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

"You have to improve all of that, all the time, in order to improve the music," she said. "Therein lies the challenge."

# Singing the Praises of Handel's 'Messiah'

A conversation with musician Marta López Fernández

Harpichordist and organist Marta López Fernández at Handel House in London.



#### LORRAINE FERRIER

Harpichordist and organist Marta López Fernández specializes in early keyboard instruments and is currently the harpichord and continuo fellow at the Royal College of Music in London. She recently took time out before a performance at Handel House in London to talk with us by phone.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What's your favorite piece of classical music and why?

**MARTA LÓPEZ FERNÁNDEZ:** Obviously, as a musician, it's quite hard to pick a piece, but I'd have to say George Frideric Handel's "Messiah" (1741). I particularly enjoy Handel's "Messiah" because, obviously, I listened to it when I was growing up, but it wasn't until I was involved in a performance of it that I really got to know all the fine details: how the music describes the action and how it develops throughout. The more I perform the piece, the more nuances I

discover. It's just amazing how Handel wrote for singers. He was a genius working with the voice!

Handel's "Messiah" is an English-language oratorio. An oratorio, to put it simply, is like an opera but based on a religious text and is performed by solo singers, a chorus, and an orchestra.

Handel's great masterpiece the "Messiah" describes different episodes of Jesus's life, from his birth to his Passion. Even though the work is very much related to Christmas today and is performed around the Christmas period, it was written to be performed around Easter time.

Because it's over two hours, there's a lot happening that I find you can only fully understand and engage with by either sitting and listening to a full performance or by being involved in it.

Handel had already written a number of operas very much influenced by the Italian style, and this comes across in the piece at times. At the same time, we can

hear in his composition how a lot of baroque music was influenced by dance forms, as he uses certain dance patterns and rhythms.

What I enjoy about being part of performing Handel's "Messiah" is having the chance to work on so many different levels: from an aria to a chorus to an instrumental movement.

As a harpichordist and organist, I'm more used to performing the "Messiah" from a historically informed practice perspective, which means that we try to revive the way it would've been played in the 18th century. We try to get as close as possible to that, starting with the use of baroque instruments in the orchestra. It is important to have a fresh approach to it and revive certain traditions so that the piece comes back to life altogether.

At the root level of the baroque orchestra are the continuo instruments, also known as the basso continuo instruments, such as the harpichord or organ, as well as

the cello, bassoon, and theorbo, an 18th-century bass lute. During the Baroque period, it was common practice that the keyboard instrument would accompany the orchestra with a continuous bass line upon which harmonies would be added. I find it very interesting to play the continuo part because this role is really the foundation of Handel's "Messiah."

Other baroque instruments in the orchestra help to revive the way the music would have been played, which is altogether quite different from how the instruments work in a modern orchestra. The string instruments were played differently, as they were slightly different instruments, and they have many unique characteristics in comparison with their modern versions.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How does Handel tell the story of the Messiah?  
**MS. LÓPEZ FERNÁNDEZ:** Handel was a genius composer who really knew how to highlight the

different characters and episodes in this oratorio. It can be emotive, energetic, and joyful, or sorrowful, and at the same time have so many completely different layers.

During the Baroque period, the widely accepted theory of musical aesthetics was the "affetti" (affections), meaning that composers sought to arouse certain emotions within the audience. All the affetti reflected through the music, the many different layers that can come out of this music, help the listener create an image of what is happening.

Basically, there are different types of actions happening. We have the choruses, which usually represent a group of people expressing glory to God, announcing the miracle of Jesus being born, and praising him. At other times, the choruses are used to punctuate the episodes, reinforcing certain messages.

I think most of the action happens either in the recitatives or arias. A recitative is a delivery

style in which a singer adopts the rhythms and cadence of speech. The text is not repeated like in the arias. A recitative has a lot more action, and it helps to prepare the setting for the following aria.

In a recitative, the singer sings about the larger context of the situation and would have less orchestral accompaniment in a less melodic way, more like musical punctuations. Some of these are very dramatic in Handel's "Messiah."

Arias have less text, and they depict the mood of the character at each moment, through only a few sentences. An aria is a solo piece that conveys very expressive or very energetic moments, depending on the completely different characters in the "Messiah." That's what I find interesting; not all the arias are the same.

Not only would the singer approach a melodic line from a different perspective, depending on the mood of the aria, but the accompanying orchestra would

too. Sometimes the aria is accompanied by a full orchestra, and sometimes it's just a few stand-out instruments known as an obbligato, so it's a little bit more intimate and meditative.

Handel wrote tremendously well for the instruments too. The instruments really "sing" with the soloists to convey a different mood in each aria, and that's something I really like about it—how sensitive he was to the human voice and what it's capable of. It's not just a sort of operatic singer and then an orchestra in the background. I find everything together becomes a whole and has a meaning, and is important—is relevant to the text.

Handel's "Messiah" can be very different to listen to when it's played by different kinds of orchestras and uses different types of singers. I would always invite the audience to listen with an open ear and mind.

*This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.*

# Holiday Gift Guide

## Gifts for Kids, Big and Little

### FOR LITTLE ONES



COURTESY OF HANSA



COURTESY OF AURORA

#### Stuffed Animals

Play is the important work of children, and stuffed animals often become the stars of the many stories their imaginations bring to life. What child doesn't love their special stuffies?

While stuffed animals are easy to come by, well-made ones require some digging. Look for those that aren't made in China, for starters. The brand Aurora has many options like the 10.5-inch Coco Bear (\$12). If a special, more lifelike stuffed animal is what you're looking for, check out the incredible offerings of Hansa, like the 24-inch Nordic Reindeer (\$139.90), the Grey and White Kitten (\$37.95), or countless others.



COURTESY OF LLORENS

#### Baby Dolls

Little mommies love to dress up and take care of their very own beautiful baby. It's lovely to watch young girls who are naturally drawn to this type of play. The search for a high-quality baby doll that isn't made in China may be the most challenging search of all. However, the beauty and craftsmanship of the dolls you can find are worth the effort.

Llorens dolls are all made in Spain. They have a number of lovely options in various skin tones and ethnicities, all very lifelike; some can take a bath and some even cry. This isn't your typical toy-store doll—what a special gift it would be to a little one in your life.

BARBARA DANZA

Oh, they're so excited! The countdown is on. The joy of giving to children this time of year brings out the kid in all of us.

But how do you choose the best gifts for the young ones in your life? You may think it's about scoring the latest toy craze or splurging on the newest digital device. Toy crazes tend to fade fast, though, and digital devices often do more harm than good.

The best gifts are those that take into consideration the interests of the individual child. Very young children benefit most from well-made, simple playthings that encourage their active

imagination, innate curiosity, and that are good, old-fashioned fun. Big kids need their budding interests stoked—like adding kindling to a campfire. Tools and resources that will help them dive deep into what's sparked that light inside have the potential to benefit them for a lifetime.

So, rather than just stocking up on plastic, made-in-China toys that will all too soon find their way to the "donate" pile, and rather than giving devices that encourage escape from the real world and addition to a digital one—here are some gifts that will enhance the lives of the children you're giving to this season and make their holiday magical.

#### Pretend Play

Pretend play is an essential part of child development. Some toys become staple tools in such play and make excellent holiday gifts. A dollhouse is an invitation for imaginative play and creativity. The Playmobil Deluxe Dollhouse (\$119.99) is a great option. Made in Germany, Playmobil products stand the test of time and incorporate building skills as well as imaginative play into all of their sets. If wooden toys are what you're looking for, PlanToys offers a number of dollhouse options, including the simple Slide N Go Dollhouse (\$160), which would make a perfect starter home for little ones.



COURTESY OF PLANTOYS



COURTESY OF MAPLE LANDMARK

#### Trains

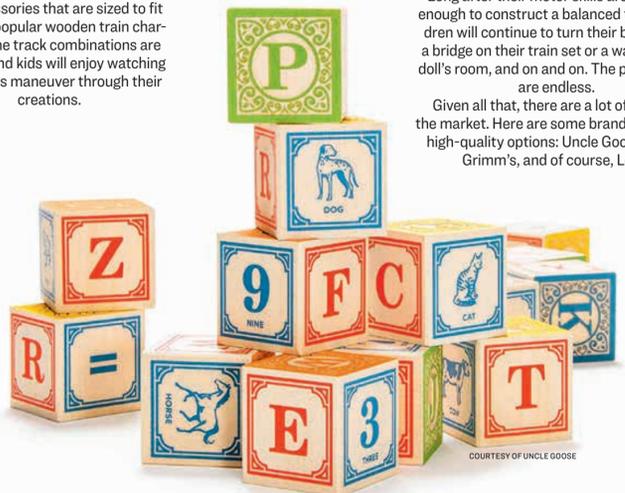
Soon into their play, it comes time for kids to create their very own world, complete with roadways, buildings, scenery, and train lines. Vermont's Maple Landmark offers a variety of well-made wooden train track sets and accessories that are sized to fit the most popular wooden train characters. The track combinations are endless, and kids will enjoy watching their trains maneuver through their creations.

#### Blocks

Blocks are truly the building, well, blocks of play. The youngest of children can benefit from simply handling blocks, and their play will advance with these simple toys as they grow.

Long after their motor skills are developed enough to construct a balanced tower, children will continue to turn their blocks into a bridge on their train set or a wall for their doll's room, and on and on. The possibilities are endless.

Given all that, there are a lot of blocks on the market. Here are some brands that offer high-quality options: Uncle Goose, Haba, Grimm's, and of course, Lego.



COURTESY OF UNCLE GOOSE

### FOR BIG KIDS

#### Lessons

As kids get older, they tend to show interests, to varying degrees, in specific subjects. Perhaps it's astronomy, oil painting, football, percussion, gardening, sewing, or woodworking. The greatest gift you can give them is an encouragement in those sorts of pursuits.

Gifting lessons is one way to do that. If you're not an expert in their field of interest, outsource the learning to someone who is, and encourage them along the way. They'll surely appreciate that you noticed and saw them for who they are. Experiences are (almost) always better than things.

#### Journal and Pens

As kids get older, they tend to have big ideas. For the pensive type, it's helpful to get those thoughts down on paper. A journal with quality paper like the Leuchtturm1917 series (\$19.95), along with some colorful pens like the Staedtler Triplus Fineliner set (20 for \$22).



COURTESY OF LEUCHTTURM1917  
COURTESY OF STAEDTLER

A Leuchtturm notebook, along with some colorful pens from Staedtler, make a great gift for the pensive type.

#### Tools and Gear

Another way to encourage the budding interests and curiosities of bigger kids is to give them the tools and gear they need to do what they want to do. Give an artist art supplies, a scientist lab tools, a sports player sports equipment. They'll use and appreciate gifts like this, and who knows how far in life such a gesture may take them.

#### Gift Cards

Some people think that gift cards are impersonal, but everybody loves to receive gift cards. Choose cards from stores that match a big kid's interest to give them an extra resource to keep pursuing something they're passionate about.



# FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES

Week 50, 2019

## The Bells

(First Stanza)  
by Edgar Allan Poe

Hear the sledges with the bells—  
Silver bells!  
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!  
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,  
In the icy air of night!  
While the stars that oversprinkle  
All the heavens, seem to twinkle  
With a crystalline delight;  
Keeping time, time, time,  
In a sort of Runic rhyme,  
To the tinnabulation that so musically wells  
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,  
Bells, bells, bells—  
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

## HOW DO YOU THROW A PARTY IN OUTER SPACE?

PROFESSIONAL BAT/SHUTTERSTOCK

## Blessed is the season that engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love.

HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE  
MARISH/SHUTTERSTOCK

# This Week in History

## THE FIRST NATIVE-BORN PRESIDENT IS BORN

*Martin Van Buren*

On Dec. 5, 1782, the first person born in the United States to go on to become president was born. Martin Van Buren was born in Kinderhook, N.Y., to his Dutch American parents, Abraham and Maria. He went on to become the ninth governor of New York, the 10th U.S. secretary of state, the eighth vice president of the United States, and the eighth president of the United States. He served one term, losing his reelection campaign to William Henry Harrison.

A portrait of Martin Van Buren, circa 1855-58 by Mathew B. Brady. Van Buren was the 8th president of the United States.



INPHOTOS/GETTY IMAGES

By Aidan Danza, age 13

# PLAIN-JANE BIRDS

**A**ccording to legend, magpies are drawn to shiny things and often steal them to decorate their nests.

We humans also tend to be drawn to the shiny and colorful things (like peacocks for example) and we don't notice things that look plain (such as wrens and sparrows).

This time of year, we give thanks for the little things, like food, family, and the little brown birds that can brighten our day just by going about their lives. Let's hear it for them!

#### SONG SPARROW

Song sparrows are covered in shades of brown and white with black on their backs.

Their behavior is entertaining; they are quick, bubbly, and active. They hop around the ground, eating seeds, then fly off into the trees, flitting from branch to branch, occasionally talking to each other. Their personality seems to be very happy-go-lucky.

It's amazing that so much volume and song comes from such a small bird. Their song is loud, and rings out about 2-4 seconds long.

A good mnemonic for the song is "maids-maids-maids-put-on-your-kettle-kettle-kettle." Sometimes they buzz, trill, and chirp during their song.

They don't use birdhouses, but they love just about any bird food, and will surely come to your feeders!

#### HOUSE WREN

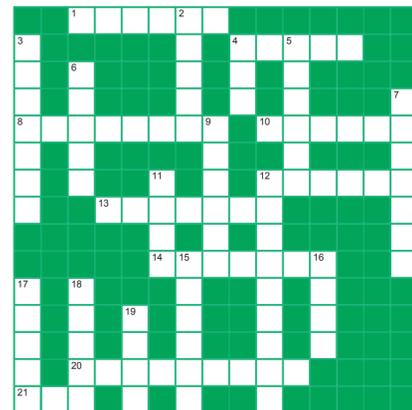
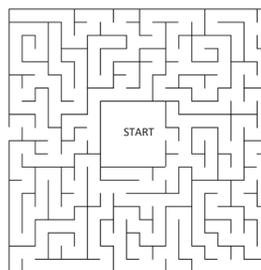
The house wren is drab in color with almost no markings. They're a darker brown, with an underside of white to tan. Their wings and long tail have a dark barring—their only mark.

House wrens have feisty personalities that distinguish them. They normally stay in trees. In breeding season, males will chase away and occasionally fight with other males. Males make multiple nests for a mate to choose. Sometimes, they evict other bird species.

Their song is quick and bubbly, like a pot boiling. It is long, and differs from bird to bird.

They give trilling calls, churrs, or rattles. They migrate in winter, so when they're in your yard, be happy that they're there!

# AMAZING ESCAPES!



#### Down

- Party food (5)
- Individual frosted treat (7)
- Party topper (3)
- Mexican party animal (6)
- Kisses, possibly (5)
- Who you invite to parties (7)
- Request your presence letter (6)
- Let us know if you are coming, for short (4)
- Observe (9)
- It might wrap a gift (6)
- Popular children's gifts (4)
- Italian party food (5)
- Popular party drink (5)
- All parties must serve this (4)

USE THE FOUR NUMBERS IN THE CORNERS, AND THE OPERANDS (+, -, AND X) to build an equation to get the solution in the middle. There may be more than one "unique" solution but, there may also be "equivalent" solutions. For example:  $6 + (7 \times 3) + 1 = 28$  and  $1 + (7 \times 3) + 6 = 28$

Easy puzzle 1

9	10		
27	9		
+	-	x	÷

Solution For Easy 1  
 $6 + (6 - 2) \times 0!$

Medium puzzle 1

8	15		
90	14		
+	-	x	÷

Solution for Medium 1  
 $1 \times 9! + (8 - 9!)$

Hard puzzle 1

12	34		
58	15		
+	-	x	÷

Solution for Hard 1  
 $8 - 2! + 9! + 9!$



#### Across

- Sugary foods (6)
- Thrilled to death!! (5)
- It falls like snow (8)
- "Welcome Home!" sign, maybe (6)
- Cake burner (6)
- Celebratory (7)
- Gift (7)
- Bunny at Easter time, often (9)
- Something to celebrate on birthdays (3)

# See What 1.4 Billion in China Cannot See



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COMMENTARY

# CAIN AND ABEL

A PARABLE FOR OUR TIMES

JAMES SALE

William Blake, in his poem "Auguries of Innocence," wrote:

Some are born to sweet delight  
And some are born to endless night

And there you have it, the inscrutable mystery that has perplexed humanity since its inception: Why is it that some are saved and some are damned? How can that be fair? And to be clear, this is not a specifically Christian issue. All orthodox religions (though some cults

try to evade it) past and present advocate the idea that at the point of death, a judgment and then a separation occurs which has everlasting consequences. The ancient Egyptians believed it, and even modern Buddhists do in the sense that reincarnation occurs. What is reincarnation but a source of pain and, therefore, of punishment? But in our modern era, if one believes in an afterlife at all—and the immortality of the soul—what especially rankles is the "unfairness" of this situation: God couldn't possibly—and how could we believe in a god who—condemns people to hell.

**There is place called hell, unpopular as that concept is now, and we can send ourselves there.**

There is a profound sense in this of binary opposition—a positive life versus a negative life. But what does a positive or a negative life mean or look like? Well, we have clues in the archetypal story about this polarity of good boy and bad boy in the Bible's account of Cain and Abel.

Cain is the first born child of Adam and Eve, the first human pair. He is the first murderer in human history, and he also has the dubious distinction of being the third human being to fall directly under God's curse as a result of his actions (following in the footsteps of his parents, therefore). Cain also has the distinction of being the first human being who was born, as opposed to being created directly by God, and of course his brother, Abel, by contrast, was the first human to die.

#### The First Funeral

There is a wonderful sculpture by Louis-Ernest Barrias called "The First Funeral," which captures the full pity and tragedy of this story: Adam carries the dead body of Abel in his arms, while Eve, his mother, bends over in grief and attempts fruitlessly to stroke the young man's hair.

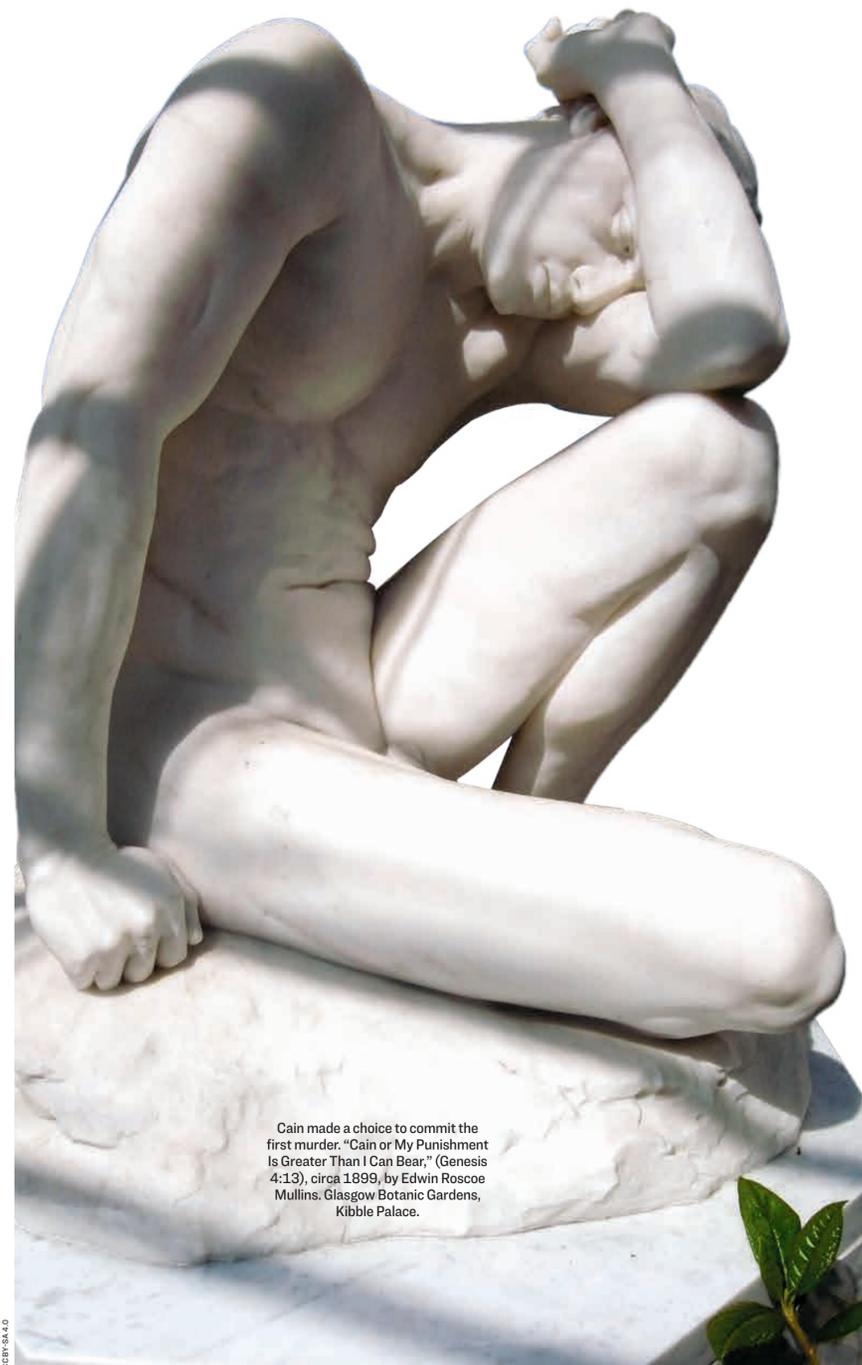
Here is the first real consequence of the story that started in Eden with the eating of the forbidden fruit. And this leads us to the deeper problem, namely, the problem of evil itself and why a so-called good God could allow evil to occur in the first place.

To answer this question—what is technically called theodicy—is outside the scope of this short article, except to say, of course, that this issue is what the whole Bible (Old and New Testaments) investigates from start to finish; the issue, in fact, never goes away. Not then, not now. Abraham asks, "Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?" and Job asks, "Why do the wicked still live?" and even Pontius Pilate unwittingly testifies to the question by asking, "What is truth?"

Evil, then, is a problem—a mystery even—that requires explanation, and nowhere more so than at the first murder that occurs in human history: Why does Cain murder his brother? Can we ever be sure of what his motive was? And if we can't, we have a situation analogous to that in Shakespeare's "Othello" where Iago commits dreadful crimes apparently without motive, and this is perhaps the worst evil of all: its purposelessness and single-minded malignancy.

However, while evil is in one profound sense inexplicable, I think the Cain and Abel story does provide us with some significant clues. The first of these is what happens when Adam and Eve first fall. They become aware that they are naked; that is to say, unprotected, uncovered, wholly vulnerable. And it is important to realize that this nakedness is not merely physical but also spiritual. They have become exposed physically (they will now die) and also spiritually, because they are self-consciously guilty of a heinous crime that has broken the divine order. They have been cast out of Eden.

Then, following the sentence of doom, the Lord God "made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them." It's all very sudden, as these epic, ancient texts tend to be, but we can ask: Where do these "garments of skin" come from? Well, we could imagine that God is some magic conjurer: Hey, presto, here are garments of skin. But perhaps in this lithe narrative compression is the idea that death now occurs in Eden: Dead animals provide garments of skin.



Cain made a choice to commit the first murder. "Cain or My Punishment Is Greater Than I Can Bear," (Genesis 4:13), circa 1899, by Edwin Roscoe Mullins. Glasgow Botanic Gardens, Kibble Palace.

CEPH/SAO

Continued on Page 17



THE EPOCH TIMES

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DANCE

# Gifts to the World of Dance

CHRISTOS GEORGHOU/SHUTTERSTOCK

## The Legacy of Marcia Dale Weary

**F**RONT ROYAL, Virginia—“Some of the most amazing dancers in the world came out of a barn,” professional ballet instructor Karen Eriksson-Lee says. “The kids would dance and then picnic in the garden, swim in the pool outside, or play games like hide-and-seek.”

The barn to which she refers belonged to Marcia Dale Weary (1936–2019) and was the original dance studio for what is now the Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet.

When Weary died this past March, there was an outpouring of affectionate tributes in the press to her teaching talent and artistry. The New York Times describes her as “a dance teacher whose school in rural Pennsylvania trained a number of prominent ballet dancers and helped populate the ranks of many major companies.” In Dance Magazine, Julie Diana Hench praises Weary not only for her skills as a teacher, but also for the other life skills she sought to impart to her students: the ability to focus, generosity, and self-discipline.

the school was like a family. Her oldest daughter, Natassia, was 7 when she enrolled, followed by Alexander and Marlene. “There was something magical in that barn,” Eriksson-Lee says. “The kids would dance and then picnic in the garden, swim in the pool outside, or play games like hide-and-seek.”

**A Teacher’s Gifts**

In describing why Weary excelled as a teacher, drawing students from across the country and from abroad, Eriksson-Lee attributed it to her practice of “breaking it down,” her rigorous standards, her demands for excellence, and her love for her students.

“Breaking it down” means teaching ballet in tiny increments. “Most teachers teach steps,” Eriksson-Lee says, “but Marcia taught how to do the steps. It was a graded, incremental technique.” No student, she says, went to the next level without absolutely mastering the steps of the current level. “And no dancer who ever worked with Marcia went out into the world without knowing technique and feeling absolutely confident.”

Weary had high expectations for her students, even the little ones, and was a disciplinarian of dance. “Some people called her school the ‘boot camp of ballet,’” Eriksson-Lee says with a laugh. “She was a tiny lady with a very big presence. You did not want to be on her bad side. You wanted to please her and follow her directions. You wanted to stay in her good graces and wanted her to be proud of you.”

Many instructors, Eriksson-Lee says, don’t want to teach ballet to very young students, but this is another area where Weary excelled. “If you want to have floors that are shiny and beautiful and sparkling,” she says, “you clean them the old-fashioned way, on your hands and knees. And that is what Marcia did with children. Sometimes she’d spend hours a day on her hands and knees with the little ones, breaking down a step, teaching them hands-on how to move.”

**Passing the Legacy Forward**

Although Eriksson-Lee works for the Seton Home Study School in Front Royal, she continues to teach dance. She and Anastasia “Annie” Kubanda, who also studied at the barn, operate the Northern Virginia Academy of Ballet. Kubanda began studying with Marcia Weary when she was 8, and stayed in the program until she was 15. From there, she went to the San Francisco Ballet School, danced with that company, and later joined the Alabama Ballet. During her auditions, several judges impressed by her technique and competence asked her if she had studied with Weary.

Like Eriksson-Lee, Kubanda has the deepest respect for Weary. “She was a very traditional woman. Old-fashioned in every way. She’d notice all sorts of things about her students. I remember

“**Marcia cared a great deal about preserving the innocence of the children, and made sure their dance costumes were modest and youthful.**”

Karen Eriksson-Lee, dance instructor and former student of Marcia Dale Weary

**Barn Babies Learn Ballet**

In 1955, Weary opened her ballet school in the barn she owned near Carlisle, Pennsylvania. As word of her skill as a teacher spread, students began driving long distances to attend her sessions. Eventually, some parents even rented or bought homes in the area so that their children could be “barn babies.”

For 30 years, Karen Eriksson-Lee studied and worked with Weary. After graduating from Shenandoah Conservatory, now Shenandoah University, with a major in dance and a minor in psychology, Eriksson-Lee continued to dance at the barn school. She also enrolled her three children in Weary’s classes, driving from Front Royal, Virginia, up to Pennsylvania. Like others, she and the children moved to Carlisle, and eventually Weary asked Eriksson-Lee to join her faculty.

She describes Weary as being old-fashioned. “Marcia (pronounced Mar See Ah) cared a great deal about preserving the innocence of the children, and made sure their dance costumes were modest and youthful.” Like so many of the writers of the online tributes and obituaries, Eriksson-Lee says



when I was little, I had a green plaid dress that I loved to wear. Marcia liked it because it was traditional, and told me ‘Never stop dressing that way.’ Students weren’t allowed to chew gum, and she corrected anyone who used the Lord’s name in vain. ‘How would you feel if I used your name as a swear word?’ she would say.”

Kubanda points out that Weary also taught her students optimism. “She told us all the time, ‘What do you say if someone asks you if you can do a fouette?’ You say, ‘No, but I’m working on it.’”

“No one can be Marcia,” Eriksson-Lee says, but like so many others who studied with Weary over the years, she and Kubanda are passing on their mentor’s techniques and passion for music and dance to a new generation of ballet students.

Today the Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet has 95 staff members, 300 academic year students, and more than 600 dancers who enroll in the summer program. In addition to teaching

dancers, Weary helped train many other teachers, choreographers, and administrators.

**Weary also taught her students optimism.**

As Julie Hench writes: “Weary made dreams come true. She touched the lives of countless people and will remain in our hearts as future generations of dancers grow and blossom through her legacy.”

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](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.



FRAME BY KRASOVSKI DMITRI/SHUTTERSTOCK; PHOTO BY BLOG.CPYB.ORG



ROSALIE O’CONNOR

© rosalie o’connor photography

1. Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet’s founding artistic director, Marcia Dale Weary instructs a student.
2. Karen Eriksson-Lee with summer camp dancers in the mid-1990s.
3. Marcia Dale Weary (C) and her student ballerinas, circa 2012.
4. The barn, also known as the Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, where Marcia Dale Weary initially instructed her “barn babies.”



COURTESY OF KAREN ERIKSSON-LEE

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THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH AND TRADITION



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COMMENTARY

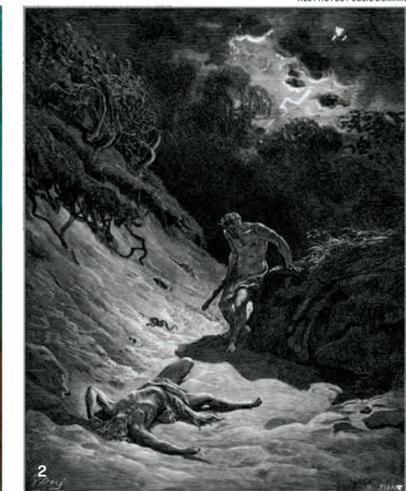
# CAIN AND ABEL

## A PARABLE FOR OUR TIMES

Adam and Eve hold their dead son Abel. "The First Funeral," 1878, by Louis-Ernest Barrias. Plaster. Museum of Fine Arts of



ALL PHOTOS PUBLIC DOMAIN



1. After God rejects Cain's offering, God warns Cain against unrighteousness; Cain does not heed God. "Cain and Abel," 1740, by Giovanni Domenico Ferretti.

2. "The Death of Abel," (Genesis 4:8-9) 1865, by Gustave Doré. Illustration for the Bible.

3. "Cain and Abel Offer Their Sacrifices," (Genesis 4:1-7), 1865, by Gustave Doré. Illustration for the Bible.

Continued from Page 13

But what, therefore, Adam and Eve understood from this experience was the sure sign from God that evil had to be "covered" in some way; this covering, while physical, also symbolically represents a covering of their spiritual crime. But since they have forfeited physical life, the death of a living creature in covering them acts as a kind of substitute or payment. And note that it has to be a living creature, not a covering with a fig leaf or other kind of vegetation, for that would not be like for like.

If, now, we fast-forward to the beginning of the drama of Cain and Abel, we find that Cain offers God "of the fruit of the ground," whereas Abel offers "the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions." Abel's offering is accepted but Cain's is not.

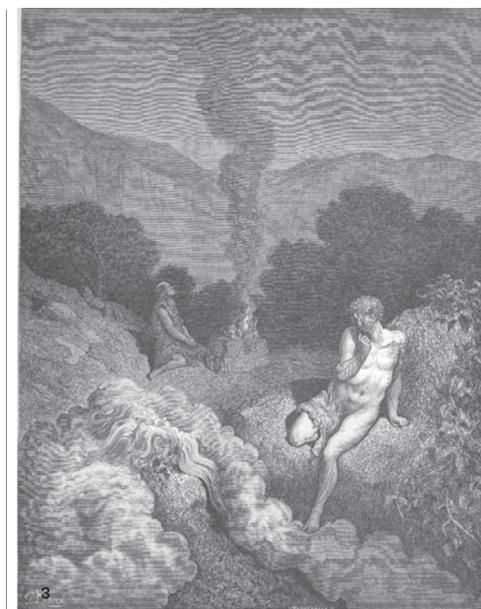
Irrespective of whether Cain's fruit offering was of his best or not (for the Jewish Midrash holds that Abel offered the best of his flock but Cain did not present the best of his harvest), the fact remains that Cain's sacrifice had to fail, since it failed to heed what God had made plain in Eden: namely, that the substitution to cover their crime cannot come from vegetation but must involve the sacrifice of a living animal. Indeed, in virtually all early cultures, we find animal sacrifice as the key mechanism for appeasing the gods.

### Sin Is Crouching

Cain's offering was a willful rejection of the revelation already made. And that Cain was and is without excuse is made plain by the fact that God tells him, after God rejects his offering (Genesis 4:7), that if he does the right thing, his "countenance will be lifted up," but if he doesn't, "sin is crouching at the door." Despite this overt and direct warning, Cain still goes on to murder his brother and to compound the evil further by denying it: "Am I my brother's keeper?" So he commits three straight sins, in fact: the willfully wrong offering, the actual murder, and the callous denial.

This perhaps all seems remote and arcane, but as with so much in sacred texts, it speaks to us now. How? It speaks to us in the sense that Cain had gone his own way. That a sacrifice to God was necessary was not in doubt; he knew that and he responded to it, but responded to it in his own terms. He, in other words, decided to fashion his religion according to his own desires. The animal sacrifice was the right way, but he knew something better.

Truly, Cain was a son of Adam and Eve



in that they, too, knew better than God. They wanted to be wise and so ignored the warning and ate the fruit. Cain was wise—in his own eyes—and when that wisdom was directly exposed as pride by God, he became insensate with a homicidal rage against his own brother. In one sense, killing Abel was an act of envy, and in another it was spite: If Abel was God's favorite, then Abel's death would soon put a stop to that!

And so we see, as well, a profound impiety at work. For the idea that Abel could be separated from God by an act of murder showed that Cain believed neither in the immortal soul nor in the power of God to raise the dead, or more simply, as Jesus says in Luke's gospel, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." That in eternity—beyond the veil of flesh, the garment of skin—one cannot be lost and God is there.

### Freedom and Consequences

And here is the final and really revealing insight into the story. Sadly, not everyone finds God either in this life or in the next, for not all religions or beliefs automatically lead to the same destination. The

**Cain commits three straight sins, in fact: the willfully wrong offering, the actual murder, and the callous denial.**

Cain and Abel story shows us the profound way in which freedom of the will is built into our DNA, as it were, and if that were not itself an ultimate paradox: Doesn't DNA constrain us? Nevertheless, Cain had a choice to make and he made it.

God is perfectly free. We were created perfectly free, though we fell away from that perfection of freedom; but it all means that our actions have consequences, real consequences. We can, in fact, damn ourselves—as the ancient Egyptians and Greeks and all the other ancients knew. There is a place called hell, unpopular as that concept is now, and we can send ourselves there. And we do it by being wise in our own eyes, and believing that we know better than the sacred revelations of the divine in scriptures throughout the world, by being our own lawgivers, as if we knew.

In the world we now see all around us, the political movements are engaging in the drama of Cain: They know better than what previously was revealed about wisdom, morality, and spirituality. Each man and woman is able to build his or her own, and their collective, utopia. Communism, for example, is a particularly virulent form of "Cain-ism," and where it is practiced we find not one Abel who is murdered, but millions.

But the opposite of this "knowing," which we are called on to practice instead, is very simple: It is called "faith." And interestingly, in the New Testament this is recognized in the Epistle to the Hebrews where it says, "By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain..." In other words, he understood and accepted what had been revealed in the garden to his parents.

We need more spiritual "faith" today so that we stop trying to be wise like gods, and so come to recognize who we truly are. If that were to happen, then we might be much freer from the demonic grip that murder has on our societies, individually and politically.

All quotes are from the New American Standard version of the Bible.

James Sale is an English businessman whose company, Motivational Maps Ltd., operates in 14 countries. He is the author of over 40 books on management and education from major international publishers including Macmillan, Pearson, and Routledge. As a poet, he won first prize in The Society of Classical Poets' 2017 competition and recently spoke at the group's first symposium held at New York's Princeton Club.

## THEATER REVIEW

# A Fuller Story Added to the Familiar Holiday Offering

JUDD HOLLANDER

NEW YORK—People love the idea of second chances, which goes a long way in explaining the staying power of Charles Dickens's 1843 novella, "A Christmas Carol," quite possibly the ultimate tale of redemption. Newly arrived to these shores is Jack Thorne's stage adaptation of this timeless classic, nicely directed by Matthew Warchus. First seen on the London stage in 2017, the play is now dispensing holiday cheer, a moral lesson or two, and the occasional spine-tingling chill at Broadway's Lyceum Theatre.

Ebenezer Scrooge (Campbell Scott), the most miserly man in Victorian London, has amassed a vast fortune through his business of money lending, but he has no friends, and certainly no use for such things as kindness, love, or generosity.

Scrooge's bookkeeper, Bob Cratchit (Dashliel Eaves), knows this full well. Of course, Scrooge finds the annual "Ho! Ho! Ho!" of the Christmas holiday nothing more than a waste of time.

Things change one Christmas Eve when Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his deceased partner, Jacob Marley (Chris Hoch). Condemned for his own wicked time on earth, Marley offers Scrooge the possibility of a different path, via the upcoming visitations of three spirits. These souls will try to teach the dour Ebenezer the error of his ways by showing him the person he used to be, and the person

he is doomed to become. That is, unless he resolves to become a better man.

Thorne has taken the basic elements of the Dickens work and expanded on various points to make this show stand on its own. Chief of these additions is giving Scrooge a more tragic back story—one only hinted at by Dickens—which helps to show why money has become a god to him at the expense of all else.

Also expanded are the characters of Scrooge's beloved sister Fen (Rachel Prather), and Belle (Sarah Hunt)—the woman he loved and lost.

## Festive Yet Dark

The festive atmosphere is apparent the moment one enters the theater, with cast members offering oranges and cookies to those in attendance. Also quite enjoyable are the Christmas carols performed by the company, with the aid of some onstage musicians.

Of course, the original tale is rather dark in spots, and although the set by Rob Howell effectively captures its overtones, the production is helped tremendously by the sight of well over 100 lanterns hanging from the ceiling, giving it a rather special quality. Ultimately, what is presented has a sense of welcoming familiarity, intending to entertain and enlighten rather than emphasize a sense of foreboding.

The show owes much to the time-honored tradition of Christmas pantomime. Long a holiday staple in England, its presence is



▲ Ebenezer Scrooge (Campbell Scott) and his bookkeeper, Bob Cratchit (Dashliel Eaves), as they appear in Jack Thorne's stage adaptation of "A Christmas Carol."

## 'A Christmas Carol'

The Lyceum Theatre  
149 W. 45th St.  
New York

Running Time  
2 hours, 15 minutes  
(including intermission)

Closes  
Jan. 5, 2020

Tickets  
212-239-6200, AChristmasCarolBroadway.com

clearly evident in the last section of the play as the production takes great relish in moving the original story in a somewhat new direction, while inviting the audience to be both a witness and participant in the final scenes.

## Effective Performances

Scott makes a fine Ebenezer Scrooge. He nicely brings forth the character's long-held bitterness and disdain, while believably showing his transformation as he seeks redemption for himself and forgiveness from those he has wronged. Scott plays the final scenes as a man almost giddy with delight. Most affecting is the moment when

Scrooge comes face to face with the child he once was and wishes he could spare him what is to come.

Sebastian Ortiz simply steals the show as Cratchit's lame son, Tiny Tim. An actor with cerebral palsy (as is Jai Ram Srinivasan, who alternates with Ortiz in the role), his entrance and soft speech is guaranteed to bring a tear to even the most cynical audience member. Ortiz's scenes with Scott are particularly moving.

The rest of the cast is quite good, with standouts including Prather, Hunt, and Andrea Martin and LaChanze. The latter two are, respectively, the Ghosts of Christmas Past and Present. A nice touch is the way

the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come—usually the ominous, silent type—is handled here.

There are a few problems with the show: The beginning feels a bit rushed, and it would have been nice to see the character of Marley given more to do in his initial appearance. However, these are minor quibbles.

This version of "A Christmas Carol" is a welcome addition to the theatrical holiday pantheon and looks to be a perennial audience favorite in the years to come.

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



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## FILM REVIEW

# A Love Letter to Good, Old-Fashioned Murder Mysteries

IAN KANE

Much like Westerns, murder mysteries (at least good ones) seem a rarity these days as far as the film world goes, with a few exceptions. It's not clear why the storied genre has declined through the years, but it may have to do with the generally shortened attention spans.

In such classic films as 1941's "The Maltese Falcon," to the various Sherlock Holmes films, all the way up to 1995's "The Usual Suspects," audiences were

invited to deduce who they thought the murderer was, since the killer's identity always remained a secret until the film's very end. And that obviously requires patience.

But don't tell writer and director Rian Johnson that. He seems to have single-handedly reinvigorated the genre with his new film "Knives Out" and proven that whodunnit flicks aren't quite done. Johnson knows the tropes of the genre (what I like to call "mansion murder mysteries") well, and audiences are invited to tag along with the detective in

his investigations.

The film's setting is the Thrombey Estate, an imposing, multistoried mansion complete with dusty antique furniture, candelabras, and archaic weapons of all sorts adorning the walls. It's reminiscent of other gargantuan mansions, such as those featured in "Clue" (1985), "Murder by Death" (1976), and many other films. In other words, if this residence had walls that could talk, it would have many sordid stories to tell.

The 85-year-old patriarch of the Thrombey clan,

▲ The cast: (L-R) Don Johnson, Jamie Lee Curtis, Chris Evans, K Callan, Ana de Armas, Christopher Plummer, Michael Shannon, Jaeden Martel, Riki Lindhome, Toni Collette, and Katherine Langford in "Knives Out."

Harlan (Christopher Plummer), has apparently been murdered. Ironically, the man himself was a crime/mystery novelist of considerable acclaim. He was supposedly found dead by his housekeeper Fran (Edi Patterson) and was in the midst of scheduling a reunion with his various family members, who have largely been at odds with one another.

Detective Benoit Blanc (a very game Daniel Craig) has been assigned to investigate the murder and commences to gather clues and interrogate those suspected while brandishing a somewhat dodgy Southern accent.

Although Craig is the production's main star, the supporting cast—as the various suspects—is a star-studded affair comprising the who's who of Hollywood's glitterati. We've got the ever-versatile Michael Shannon ("The Shape of Water"), who plays Harlan's youngest son; Jamie Lee Curtis as Linda, Harlan's daughter; Don Johnson as her shady husband, Richard; Chris Evans as their wastrel son, Ransom; and other, equally recognizable faces.

As Detective Blanc interrogates the family, it becomes evident that each of them has their own motive that could potentially single them out as the prime suspect.

What is brilliant about the film is that the suspicious characters engage in behavior that is as telling, perhaps even more so, as what comes out of their mouths. Whether it be the pursing of the lips, a raised eyebrow, or

an uncomfortable shift in one's chair, the film harkens back to a bygone age where subtlety was the order of the day, and audiences were routinely invited to discern whether any of these abstruse elements were sufficient noteworthy to raise their suspicions.

This movie doesn't take itself too seriously, though, and you can see that the all-star cast is clearly enjoying their clever, tongue-in-cheek lines. Craig chews up scene after scene, even when he isn't saying anything. You can see that he's quite an actor's actor. And his role here could easily be shown in acting lessons as a masterclass in how to carry yourself with gravitas, without being showy.

The rest of the cast is also superb, with the always excellent Jamie Lee Curtis standing out in her role as Harlan's indecipherable daughter. The imposing mansion itself seems like one of the film's characters, and the surrounding autumnal pastels of the New England countryside are breathtaking to behold.

"Knives Out" is a throwback to earlier eras in cinema, but instead of coming off as an outmoded dinosaur, it's clever and fun. That makes the genre feel new again, and hopefully ushers in a new wave of murder mystery motion pictures.

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

## 'Knives Out'

Director  
Rian Johnson

Starring  
Daniel Craig, Chris Evans, Jamie Lee Curtis

Rated  
PG-13

Running Time  
2 hours, 10 minutes

Release Date  
Nov. 27, 2019

★★★★★



Slim (Daniel Kaluuya) and Queen (Jodie Turner-Smith) disguised as a gangster and call girl, as they try to outrun the law, in "Queen & Slim."

## 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.

# Riveting Storytelling in Tragic Tale of Love

## MARK JACKSON

I reviewed "Black and Blue" recently, which is about killer cops. "Queen & Slim" is about cop killers; it's a runnin'-from-the-law instant classic, which is being labeled by some as "The black Bonnie and Clyde." Which is nonsense. But before I get into that, let me say, it's the rare film I'll give a 5-star rating to. Five stars means I want to see it again.

"Queen & Slim" actually has much more in common with 1991's "Thelma & Louise." White Louise shoots her friend Thelma's would-be rapist, and black Slim shoots the white cop who was about to kill his date; the commonality being that both homicides were cases of self-defense.

While Bonnie and Clyde were a couple of low-life criminals long since glorified in the minds of the American public, having been played by drop-dead gorgeous actors and spun as homegrown, do-gooder Robin Hoods. Which is basically the subversive agenda of communism's infiltration of Hollywood. What?? More on that later. Actually no, not enough space for all that. But one of these days ...

## All-Black Production

Black writer, director, cast (for the major roles)—black everything. And yet "Queen & Slim" is about as universal a film as you'll ever see. White folks, regardless of the fact that here's yet another racist white cop at the heart of this film, will appreciate this movie for its deeply human story, its riveting storytelling, and its haunting soundtrack.

And much like "Thelma & Louise," it's a celebration and romance of the American road: the glowing vistas at dusk; the nostalgic, Americana atmosphere of ghost towns and run-down, low-rent decay that we embrace in our movies, as seen from a getaway car, which here—in a tribute to "Thelma & Louise" (as well as "Green Book")—is also turquoise.

It's first and foremost a black film for black folks, because it's not easy in America for

## 'Queen and Slim'

Director  
Melina Matsoukas

Starring  
Daniel Kaluuya, Jodie Turner-Smith, Bokeem Woodbine, Chloë Sevigny, Flea, Indya Moore

Rated  
R

Running Time  
2 hours, 11 minutes

Release Date  
Nov. 27

★★★★★

The lovely British actress Jodie Turner-Smith as Queen.



non-African-Americans to understand how it is when black folks get stopped in remote areas by the police. A very good, real-life, caught-on-camera example of how it often happens is to be found in the documentary "Wrestle." To be fair, being a cop is possibly the toughest job in America. I have a good anecdote. You'll have to keep reading.

## What Goes Down in 'Queen & Slim'

First, let it be noted that there's a trend happening where some of our best African-American stories are being told and acted out by African-Brits. The male lead actor of "Queen & Slim," Daniel Kaluuya, is British. I did not know this. I should have known this, because we've already got Idris Elba, Emomn Walker, Naomi Harris, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, and Carmen Ejogo coming over here and acting blacker than our own black folks. (I'm black; I can say that.) And now add female lead Jamaican-British breakout/knockout model Jodie Turner-Smith to the mix.

Anyway, these two play a couple out on a Tinder first date in Cleveland: Queen (Turner-Smith) is an attorney looking for guilt-relief after learning her client just got the death penalty. Slim (Kaluuya) is a sweet, unassuming, laid-back guy who works at Costco. True to her name, Queen is a tad princess-y and doesn't suffer fools gladly. Slim does not ring her sophistication-requirement bell, and they both recognize the date is tanking. He offers to drive her home, regardless.

They're pulled over by a white policeman (musician Sturgill Simpson). Slim offers no hostility, but his query as to whether the officer could please hurry up searching the trunk, since it's freezing out, is met with instantaneous cop hysteria: the drawn gun, tension ratcheted up to 11.

Queen's attempt to assert her legal prowess only results in a nasty leg wound from getting cop-blasted. The resulting cop-and-Slim tussle results in a dead cop, due to the kill-or-be-killed nature of the situation.

Queen and Slim, like Thelma and Louise, flee the scene of the crime. Slim's not sure; Queen asks, "Do you want to be owned by the state?" Obviously, they shouldn't run. But given the circumstances, they obviously must.

They head to New Orleans to seek help from Queen's Uncle Earl (Bokeem Woodbine). What does Uncle Earl do? Let's say, similarly to 2005's "Hustle & Flow," he's the manager of a few ladies lounging around his house in scant clothing and bathing suits.

In good outlaw fashion, Queen and Slim alter their hairstyles, with Queen transforming from lawyer-casual attire to a tiger-print miniskirt and python go-go boots, and Slim from everyday Joe to velour tracksuit-wearing possible gangsta. The black stereotypes are far from who they are, and so it becomes a quiet, shame-laden, hellish Halloween costume party for the both of them.

## Languid Pacing

"Queen & Slim" takes its time, possibly a tad too much time at over two hours. But some scenes definitely benefit from the pacing. Such as when, having gotten an inkling from the way they've thus far handled an extreme crisis together, and realizing they have practically nothing left to lose, that all might warrant a right-here, right-now, second date.

And so, on a Deep South blues-bar dance floor, there is solace to be found in the fact that, although they are instantly recognized as fugitives from the law, nobody's about to pick up the phone and call the cops. The heretofore missing chemistry is found in the dance. It's sweet, tender,

dreamy, and tragic; finding one's predestined soul mate when you're trying to outrun death row is tragedy writ large. But for a few cozy moments, they are transported, and we with them.

Unlike "Thelma & Louise" there are no sophisticated secondary storylines, like Brad Pitt's charming thief, Thelma's fool husband, and Harvey Keitel's detective who keeps trying to offer the two women a way to soften the blow of the legal freight train bearing down on them. "Queen & Slim" is more one-note. But what a note.

## Who'll See It

What we've got here is difficult to nail down, genre-wise. Yeah, it's a road movie, etc. Though slow-paced, it's never boring. The tension is high, with pockets of relief; there's much humor, and there is access to the humanity laid bare in characters who normally appear as stereotypes in lesser films.

And in the end, there's a great love and an aching tragedy that'll sit with you for a few days, in the ways we Americans prefer, like the haunting melancholy of a favorite country song. And incandescent acting, by Brits being Muricans. And Jodie Turner-Smith is one chiseled, Nefertiti of an ebony goddess whose career will explode after this.

How well one can appreciate this tale viscerally depends, naturally, on one's background and life experience: whether one got fed by the food stamps or by the silver spoon; whether one got to shine and excel in a supportive setting, or shone, excelled, and got called the N-word regardless; whether one experienced much peace, or grew up invisible and needed to stay that way in order to get anything at all out of life.

## Our best African-American stories are being told and acted out by African Brits.

People of color don't often get to see a realistic story. It's either a Tyler Perry POV or a white director's take. Here is, finally, a black, female screenplay writer and a black, female director, telling a tale America has rarely heard in a film language we all speak fluently. In the end, though, background matters little. As in all great storytelling—the humanity will speak to everyone. It'd be nice to see "Queen & Slim" get some Oscar recognition.

Oh, and that cop anecdote? I once tended bar in an off-duty cop & detective bar on the border of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, back when that area was still crack-dealer lethal. A strange no-man's land: There was Robbie, jet-black detective with a Jheri curl and a .44 Magnum under his suit jacket, his detective girlfriend Delilah, who carried a pink-handled, snub-nosed revolver in her purse, and many successful crack dealers. And the cops and the dealers all knew each other, and drank together.

Once at 3:00 a.m., a young white cop, 25 years old, laid his soul bare, as bar patrons are wont to do if the barkeep is a good listener. "Mark," he said, "I started off wanting to help people and do good. In three years, I've seen so much horrible stuff, I just don't care about anything anymore." He said that was par for the course with cops. Many cop suicides these days. As well as many Queen- and Slim-type existences in America. The times we live in. Sad. Scary. Go warm your hands at the warmth of the humanity at the heart of this tragedy.

ESSENCE  
OF  
CHINA

# An Ancient Chinese Story: The Leper Who Met a Famous Tang General and Was Cured

SU LIN

**L**i Jing was a famous Tang Dynasty strategist who was also well-versed in literature. After he retired, many people thought he had become an enlightened being. In the "Extensive Records of the Taiping Era," there is a story about him as an enlightened being.

There was a Taoist priest named Yiqing in Changshu County, Suzhou, in the year Dali of the Tang Dynasty. He often traveled to Jiaying. One day, he stepped on a boat and was greeted by a strong, sweet scent. He suspected there was someone extraordinary on board. He surveyed everyone. They were all vendors except for an unusual man who was standing at the bow of the boat. He looked calm and serene.

When the boat was halfway through the journey, the priest asked to have his seat shifted to the bow so he could have a chat with the extraordinary man. When he was sitting next to the man, the scent was even stronger. He started talking with the man.

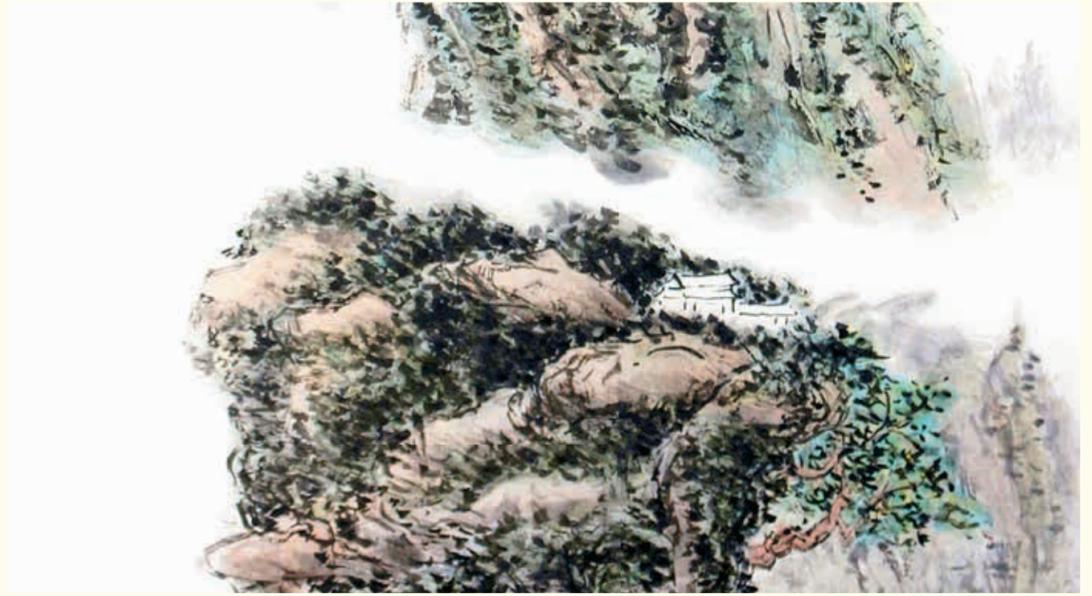
The man said: "I was a local. I had leprosy when I was a child and lost all my hair and brows. I hated myself and thought maybe I should go to the mountains and get myself eaten by some tiger or leopard."

The man told the story of what had happened to him. He walked for a few days on the mountain. The farther he went, the more remote it became. All of a sudden, he ran into an old man.

The old man asked him: "Who are you? Why did you come to this part of the mountain?"

The man explained his intentions.

The old man felt sorry for him and said: "You'll be cured of your illness



After more than 10 steps into the stream, a few houses came into view. The old man said: 'You can't go straight into the mountain with me yet. Stay here for about a month or so, and I'll visit you.'

since you ran into me. Come with me."

He followed the old man for over 10 li (around 3 miles) until they came to a stream.

After more than 10 steps into the stream, a few houses came into view. The old man said: "You can't go straight into the mountain with me yet. Stay here for about a month or so, and I'll visit you."

The old man gave him a packet of medicine and asked him to take it. The old man also invited him to help himself to the dates, chestnuts, lily, beefsteak plant (perilla), honey, and other things that were in a hut.

He settled down at the hut as the old man went farther into the mountain.

The man with leprosy took the medicine. After that, he did not feel

hunger or thirst, and he could not feel his body weight, either. After about two months, the old man finally came back.

The old man smiled. "You're still around? That's very patient of you. You've recovered from your illness; do you know that?"

The other man said no. The old man asked him to look at himself in the stream.

The other man looked at himself. His hair and eyebrows had grown back, and there was a rosy glow on his face.

The old man said: "You can no longer stay here. The medicine you took not only cured you but also allows you to enjoy longevity. Focus on the path of self-cultivation. I'll see you in

**The man with  
leprosy took  
the medicine.**

SUN MINGGUO/THE EPOCH TIMES

20 years' time."

The other man had to return to the mortal world. He asked the old man for his name.

The old man said: "Have you heard of Li Jing of the early Tang Dynasty? That's me."

The man bade farewell to the old man and left the mountain.

"The 20-year arrangement is about to come to an end, and I fear that my practice might not be up to the expectations of my master. I'm going back to the mountain to look for him," the man explained to Yiqing.

Yiqing recorded the extraordinary account.

*From the 'Extensive Records of the Taiping Era.'*

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