

THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

ALL PHOTOS IN PUBLIC DOMAIN



(Left) Detail of birds and (right) detail of birds and sea spray.

## TAKING YOU THERE

### Rocks, Waves, and the Reflecting Sun: Nature's Sweeping Image in 'A Rocky Coast'

#### WAYNE A. BARNES

*Some pieces of art move me so that I am compelled to write about them—what they look like, but more often, how I see the scene in its own history. This is what the series "Taking You There" is about.*

For years, I wrote only about what piqued my interest. In discussing art—paintings and sculpture—it was either pieces I had purchased and displayed in my home, or those I bid on unsuccessfully. Always, the interest was self-generated.

Then something different happened. I was provided several links to websites with paintings and asked if I could write about one of them. Would any of these stir my senses? The odds seemed against it; how particular I thought my taste to be.

Then, in the midst of that group, I laid eyes on one that simply drew me in. It was otherworldly, and yet it was of this world. It was "A Rocky Coast" by William Trost Richards. From the first moment—like seeing the girl of your dreams across the room—I was hooked. Not only that, I thought I felt a spray of mist blow across my desk, and the salty tang of the ocean before me, reaching out from the painting, truly taking hold of my senses. I breathed in through flaring nostrils and—I was there. Now I want you to be.

#### How the Painting Moves Us

It is a stormy day. It could be any time in the daylight hours, for the intensity and depth of the clouds dampen the flooding daylight to verge on darkness. But the artist was a Philadelphian, and the rock formations smack of a New England coastline, so this is assuredly a sunrise.

**I felt a spray of mist blow across my desk, and the salty tang of the ocean before me.**

The sky has movement, from midway up the painting on the left and then streaming diagonally to the upper right. It is shades of gray and a billowing lighter hue, only to return to a deepening darker gray. It has direction. It draws you into the picture, and then it pulls you out to sea. But this is only the backdrop for the real show—the rocks in the foreground.

I have always liked paintings with rocks. Can an artist paint a pile of boulders so they look real? Can you reach out and touch them, feel their coolness from the seawater that just broke over them, and sense how hard the formation is, compared with so much of nature that is soft and pliable?

*Continued on Page 4*



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TRADITIONAL CULTURE

# O Say Can You Hear: Songs Celebrating America

JEFF MINICK

"I hear America singing," the poet Walt Whitman once wrote.

Given the pandemic shutdowns, a summer of riots in some of our large cities, and an election so bitterly fought that it could make vinegar taste sweet, America isn't exactly bursting into song these days. The general mood in our land is bitter and angry, and as glum as a man with a hangover at a funeral. Most folks, I suspect, may listen to music, but unlike Whitman, I don't hear America singing.

Which is too bad. In the past, and even recently, Americans celebrated themselves and their history in song. Music acted as a unifier, providing a bond for a diverse people. It championed the American way of life, honored working Americans, brought determination and comfort in times of war, and even taught a little history along the way.

**A Tie That Binds**

In my elementary school days, our teachers taught us American folk songs. We learned such classics as "Oh! Susanna," "I've Been Working on the Railroad," and "The Yellow Rose of Texas."

Patriotic music also had a place in our classrooms. Among other songs, we sang "The Star-Spangled Banner," "The Marines' Hymn," and "America the Beautiful." Moreover, we learned the North Carolina state anthem "The Old North State," with its rousing lyrics "Hurrah! Hurrah! The Old North State forever! Hurrah! Hurrah! The good Old North State!" Today, I wonder whether students know such an anthem exists.

One of my teachers from that time even dug out "Doctor Ironbeard," a 19th-century satirical tune about a medicine show hustler. She asked me to sing it at a school assembly, thinking it might amuse the audience because my dad was the town's doctor, but I refused, more from shyness than from wishing to protect my father. My friend Albert Shore became Doctor Ironbeard and gave a stellar performance that I remember to this day.

All these songs forged a bond among us and brought alive our past.

**Even recently, Americans celebrated themselves and their history in song.**

**Songs About Those Who Built This Country**

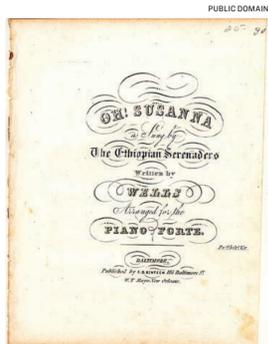
Those songs we learned from our teachers and from records at home often included lyrics about Americans from the past who helped make this country. "Sweet Betsy From Pike" told the story of a pioneer couple heading West, "John Henry" was the steel-driving man who died with a hammer in his hand, and "Low Bridge, Everybody Down" featured a man with a mule named Sal who pulled boats on New York's Erie Canal.

In 1961, Jimmy Dean's "Big Bad John," written along with Roy Acuff, became No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100. Man, I loved this ballad about a miner, "who stood six-foot-six and weighed two-forty-five," a stranger with a mysterious past who saved the lives of his fellow miners by holding up "a sagging timber" when the roof of the mine began to collapse. "Big John, Big Bad John" made such an impression on me as a kid that I can still sing the lyrics today.

More recently, Billy Joel's hit "Piano Man" described forgotten men in bars—the real estate novelist, the sailor, the bartender with dreams of being a movie star. The song speaks of disappointments and aspirations.

**Songs of War**

We're all familiar with "Yankee Doodle," originally composed during the French and Indian War to mock colonials, but the Revolutionary period also produced long-forgotten songs like "Chester" and "War and Washington." The War of 1812 gave



(Top) Do Americans sing traditional American songs anymore?  
(Above) A song every schoolchild used to know: "Oh! Susanna"; 1848, by Stephen Foster.

us our national anthem, and some soldiers and civilians in the Mexican-American War took popular melodies of the time and added new lyrics about such battles as Monterey.

But it was the Civil War that brought the greatest number of such songs into play, music that remains familiar to many of us today. "John Brown's Body," "The Battle Cry of Freedom," "Dixie," "The Bonnie Blue Flag": Military bands played these and other rousing tunes, and the soldiers belted out the lyrics.

Other more sentimental songs found their place around the campfires of both armies: "We're Tenting Tonight on the Old Camp Ground," "Just Before the Battle, Mother," "All Quiet Along the Potomac Tonight," and "Lorena."

World War I saw American soldiers and sailors singing a mix of songs from Great Britain and from our own Tin Pan Alley. Our soldiers and Marines, for example, adopted "Pack Up Your Troubles" from British troops



Portrait of the American hero Davy Crockett, 1889, by William Henry Huddle.

SIRTRAVELALOT/SHUTTERSTOCK

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES



Kate Smith, circa 1938, the year that "God Bless America" became her signature song.

lad of Davy Crockett," and Tennessee Ernie Ford's "Mule Train" were some of these childhood favorites.

And then there was Johnny Horton, king of the historical ballad. Though he didn't compose all the songs he performed, this singer and songwriter gave my childhood a trove of such gifts as "Comanche," "Sink the Bismarck," "Johnny Reb," "North to Alaska," and what remains his best-known hit, "The Battle of New Orleans."

Although I occasionally brought music to the students in the history classes I once taught, now I wish I had made use of that resource far more often. In fact, were I to return to the classroom, I would design an entire course of American history around our musical past. The kids would love it, and from personal experience I know now that songs stay with us long after we may have forgotten dates and events.

**A Prayer for America**

Originally written in 1918 by Irving Berlin, "God Bless America" became a major hit when it was sung by Kate Smith in 1938. Berlin made several changes to the song in that 20-year interval, giving us the version so many of us know today. Here is the first stanza:

God bless America, land that I love  
Stand beside her and guide her  
Through the night with the light  
from above  
From the mountains to the prairies  
To the oceans white with foam  
God bless America, my home sweet  
home

These lines that once brought pride to Americans probably seem antiquated nowadays to some people or even deserving of repudiation. Do we still think of America as the "land that I love"? Do we ask God to bless this country? Do we still think of this beautiful land as "my home sweet home"?

Those of us who answer yes to those questions should make this song our anthem of hope in these dark times.

**Light in the Darkness**

In her online article "Civil Disobedience, Homestyle," editor and writer Annie Holmquist recounts her family recently gathering around a piano and singing some of the songs mentioned here. She reports the positive effects of such entertainment, ranging from the mental and physical benefits of singing to the hope and patriotic pride delivered by some of these American classics.

Near the end of her article, Holmquist writes: "By singing these songs, we instill the truths contained in their words in our hearts. We learn once again to have faith in God, to gather and build community within our own families, and to delight in the blessings of living in a country with a wonderful history and heritage."

Just as music once brought solace and comfort to those in distress, just as it inspired our ancestors to take pride in their country, song can do the same for us.

Sing out, America.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminarians 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.

## Virtue of the Brush in a Time of Chaos

"When things are chaotic to the extreme, order must be restored."  
- "The four books" by Zhu Xi



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## TAKING YOU THERE

# Rocks, Waves, and the Reflecting Sun: Nature's Sweeping Image in 'A Rocky Coast'

Continued from Page 1

If the artist makes you believe that he has, literally, glued a miniature rock—a stone—right there into the middle of his painting, like some sort of mixed media with nature's best-looking rocks, then he is qualified to paint almost anything else in the world. Rocks are among the toughest subjects for a painting composition.

Usually you need something else on them, or around them—flowers, luxuriant grasses, even a chipmunk in full scamper—to which the rocks are just a platform, a backdrop, the thing the observer really doesn't see because they are busy with the pretty colors of bright blossoms, or the darting of a cute creature.

But not here, not for William Trost Richards. What he did back in 1877 was take the rocks, pure and simple, and so beautiful, with so many striations and such intricate detail, and make them the centerpiece of his painting. He didn't need anything else to be framed by them, planted around them, or to jump on them. No, Richards takes your eyeballs and literally forces you to look directly at his rocks, in all their magnitude and richness, their hardness and wetness, and their very boldness. He painted them so they would find a place in your heart.

The center formation is just off-center, to the left. (Disaster would be found in a painting's design if such a thing were actually centered.) Then he shifts the rocks, slightly leaning to the left, so that your head leans with them. They are the first thing you see, and that is the first reaction you have.

Picture a rollercoaster you are riding on. Can you see the tracks going up the face of the rock? It starts to descend and makes a steep, downward turn left. You feel your body rolling with the movement, leaning with the wind flowing over you, and holding on to the safety bar for dear life. Here, Richards has latched you onto the center formation, tons and tons of solid rock. They have magnetism, and their left-lean moves your eye in that direction.

You look past a gap through which you see the ocean, and then there are more rocks. But they are not as clear, not as defined, not as mesmerizing, because they are at the edge of the painting. They are a little taller than their brethren in the middle. Their role is to keep your vision in the painting and not slide off the edge, past the frame and out onto the blank museum wall. No, these rocks stop the movement of your eye, but only for a moment.

In the distance beyond this left formation is the bright spot on the horizon where the sea and the sky touch. This is the direction of the rising sun, and that illumination now grasps your attention. Then comes the upward drift of your vision to the right, through that largest open space on the canvas. Keeping your eye interested in this slow progression across the sky, there are seagulls. While they may seem to be arranged in no particular order, they are, and the artist has placed just the right number of them so they are a flock, but flying erratically over the ocean. If you cannot hear their screeches and squawks calling out in the distance, you are not listening.

Further along, the clouds go from the lighter gray to a deepening tone. The upper right of the painting does the same thing the rocks did on the left. This mass of dark sky holds on to your vision and then sends it downward. There we see more rocks, lighter ones, gray to off-yellow. There is even a point at the top of the ridge reaching up toward the darkened sky. This pulls down your vision, finally flowing to the most active section in the painting.

Not in shadow as the other formations, these rocks catch the sun's rays, and their radiance adds vibrance to the entire scene. They have the sea marching toward them in rows of waves, crashing at their base, stirring up swirls and eddies. But the white wave has to be perfectly balanced. It cannot be too high, like a towering geyser exploding in all directions, for that would draw your attention away from the rocks, especially the centerpiece ones. The spray cannot be too small, either, for this whiteness balances out the radiance of the distant horizon on the far left. These two sunlit sections have measured amounts of brightness, as though on a seesaw with the center boulder providing a million-year-old fulcrum.

Just to keep it interesting, Richards has salted in more gulls above the crashing waves. You know they are the identical color as the darker birds. But with his variation of fool-the-eye, the center birds are dark on light, while the ones on the right, white on dark. It is the play with the sunlight, behind the center higher ones, that makes them appear dark, while the ones off to the right are illuminated by the same rays as the yellow rocks.

It is Richards's mastery with colors, his understanding of light and shadow and perspective that peppers in these little touches of life that hold our attention. And don't miss the almost imperceptible pink, all across the water's surface, a gift of the rising sun. But beware, red sky in morning ...

## Rocks are among the toughest subjects for a painting composition.

ALL PHOTOS PUBLIC DOMAIN



Detail of the rocks in "A Rocky Coast."

## Taking You There

The foreground also needs to be addressed. Here is perhaps the artist's greatest mastery of drawing his most exquisite rocks. The light from the sun shoots between the left and center boulders, glancing off the latter, so you know it is streaming through. It is evidenced by the glistening surface of these nearest table boulders. They are, in a way, welcoming, the path you would take to enter the painting and walk closer to the water. There is where you, too, will catch the first rays of the new day. You will feel and smell the spray on the sea breeze that comes in so reliably each daybreak. You could stand back and just stare at it, or you could move forward and inhale it from within the painting.

Now go back and see it all again as you take a second clockwise adventure, this time from inside the frame. The enormous center boulder is so near, not more than an arm's length away. All around you are well-defined rocks, so rough-hewn that only nature could have made them. It took a genius to duplicate this on canvas.

Now you are in the middle of it. Be intrepid. Be bold. The rocks, the water, the wind, the reflecting sun—all together painting nature's sweeping image. There is surging and swelling, pushing and pulling, rising and falling, cresting and ebbing. At once, there is such swirling, all the motions in nature's repertoire. There is a momentary calm, and you take in a breath. But then there comes another crash, and a splash and the spray, and you are breathless.

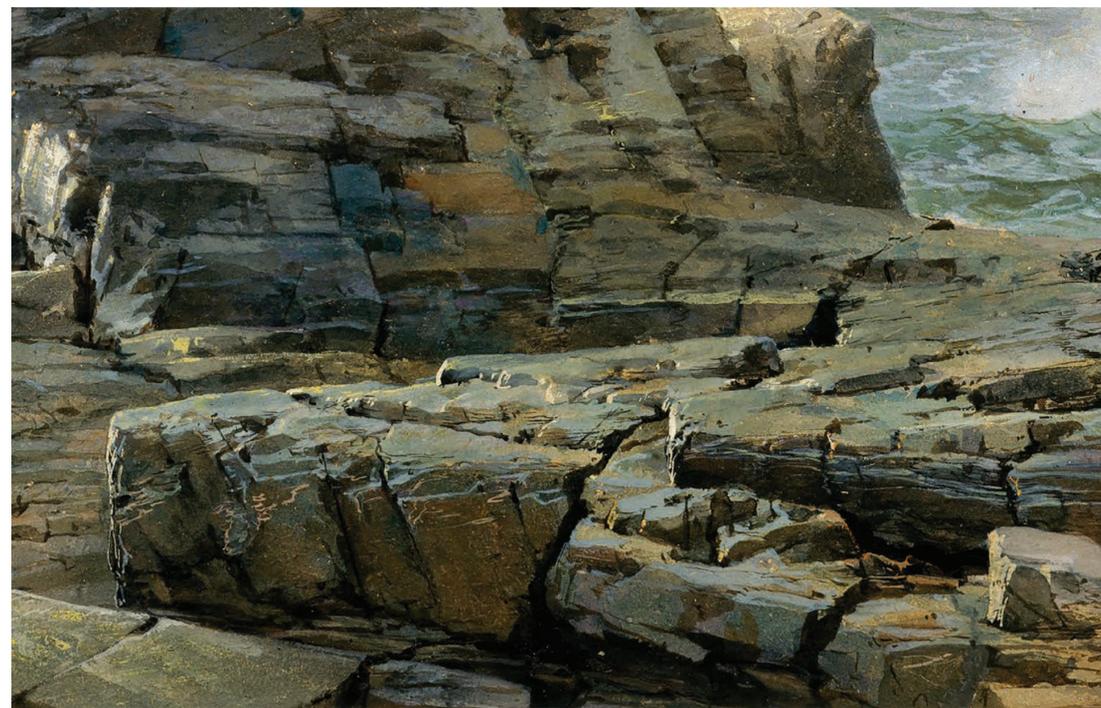
I sit in my chair before the painting, on the rollercoaster, moving with the tossing and turning. I feel my chair begin to tilt and rock beneath me. It is my body moving with the rhythm of the painting.

At first, I had wondered about the title, "A Rocky Coast," and thought the artist might have chosen better. After all, it seems so—well, plain. Anyone might look at this image and say, "Yeah, I've seen that on a postcard!" But you haven't, and there is nothing quite like this so well-designed scene in nature.

A point worth making is that, unlike oil on canvas, watercolor and gouache on paper leave no room for error once the brush is dabbed onto the surface. Flub one seagull and you have to start all over, again. So, the artist had just one chance to get it right, and this for every one of the hundreds of times his brush caressed the paper.

Richards has captured the battle royal, the sea against the land, in a brutal and dynamic way. He has given his painting the motion of this never-ending collision. So, no, it is not a mere postcard photo, snapped at random, and sent to a relative in Des Moines. Rather, it is an image that he planned and designed and executed as few others could, presenting all of this enormity in a two-by-three-foot frame. His ability to do this is the miracle that is art.

Wayne A. Barnes was an FBI agent for 29 years working counterintelligence. He had many undercover assignments, including as a member of the Black Panthers. His first spy stories were from debriefing Soviet KGB defectors. He now investigates privately in South Florida.



Detail of the rocks in the foreground of "A Rocky Coast."



"Hokusai Manga," by Katsushika Hokusai. Published by Eirakuya Toshiro. Woodblock-printed book. Ink and color on paper (vol. 12, ink on paper), paper covers; 9 inches by 6 1/4 inches by 3/8 inches. Purchase—The Gerhard Pulverer Collection.



"Hyakunin isshu uba ge etoki: Gon Chunagon Sadayori," circa mid-1830s, by Katsushika Hokusai. Preparatory woodblock drawings; ink and color on paper. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, Freer Gallery of Art.



"Hyakunin isshu uba ge etoki: Kisen Hoshi," circa mid-1830s, by Katsushika Hokusai. Preparatory woodblock drawings; ink and color on paper. Gift of Charles Lang Freer, Freer Gallery of Art.

## FINE ARTS

## Katsushika Hokusai's Traditional Manga, Printmaking, and More

The exhibition 'Hokusai: Mad About Painting' at the Smithsonian

## LORRAINE FERRIER

Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai created an astounding number of marvelous works, many of which were prints. He began his illustrious career as a printmaker, but in his 30s he started to paint, eventually leaving printmaking behind in his late 60s and early 70s in order to concentrate on his painting.

In the exhibition "Hokusai: Mad About Painting" at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art (the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery), 120 of Hokusai's works are on display from Charles Lang Freer's collection. Freer's collection is the world's largest collection of Hokusai's paintings, drawings, and sketches.

The yearlong exhibition had opened in November 2019 to commemorate the centenary of Freer's death. The exhibition will be one of the first shows that visitors will be able to see when the museum reopens, the date of which is yet to be announced.

The Japan Foundation assistant curator of Japanese art, Frank Feltens, curated the exhibition. He talks about Hokusai's printmaking, in a phone interview, allowing us a glimpse into a few of the artist's printed works.

The Epoch Times: Hokusai completed a

traditional Japanese printmaking apprenticeship. Did traditional apprenticeships end in the Edo period (1603-1867)?

Frank Feltens: The traditional printing industry consisted of a very clear-cut division of labor. A print designer would create the print design and then that design would be transferred by a carver onto the woodblock. Those woodblocks would then be passed onto a printer to print. The eventual object would then be sold by one of the publishers who ran the print shops in Edo.

This kind of division of labor basically collapsed with Japan's modernization in the late 19th century. There are still people specializing in this noble, ancient craft but not as many, of course, far fewer than in the Edo period when it was a huge business and a huge way of disseminating information.

The Epoch Times: You have some rare preparatory woodblock designs by Hokusai in the exhibition. Please tell us why they are rare.

Mr. Feltens: We have a pretty significant collection of the preparatory drawings for the "Hyakunin isshu uba ge etoki" ("One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each as Explained by the Wet Nurse") prints. This is a late Edo-period interpretation of the classical anthology "One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each" [by 12th-century poet

Fujiwara no Teika]. All of these drawings belong to one series that Hokusai made in his last years of printmaking. They are a rarity to have particularly because usually these drawings would be lost in the process of creating the print. Oftentimes these drawings, which were made by the artists themselves, would be pasted directly on the key block (the woodblock in the production process that creates the outlines in the entire print). In order to be able to be as precise as possible, the carver would carve directly through that drawing.

The Epoch Times: In the exhibition, there's what looks like an instruction manual with illustrations of dance moves.

Mr. Feltens: Hokusai was asked by a publisher to create illustrations for a manual on how to dance, so the title of this book basically means "Teaching Yourself How to Dance." It's actually one of my favorites. You can just use that book at home and start dancing. You get all the moves that were popular at the time, so once you were out on the street, you could show them off.

The Epoch Times: In the exhibition, you have some printed books called "Hokusai Manga." From my understanding, Hokusai's manga is different from how

we think of manga now.

Mr. Feltens: That's right. Now manga can be anything from comic books to social commentary, both for children and adults in equal measure. In Hokusai's time, the term "manga" meant something like doodling or jotting, so it signifies something made impromptu.

The term "Hokusai Manga" is actually a series of books that were produced on the basis of Hokusai's drawings, starting when he was alive in 1814. These books proved so popular that they kept being republished with different images scavenged from the leftovers of Hokusai's atelier after he had long passed away.

The incentive of creating the first volume of books on manga was actually to disseminate knowledge of Hokusai's style among a broad readership. In other words, he wanted to encourage people to copy him, to paint like him, in order to increase his fame.

I think he wanted to both encourage people to paint like him but also to paint or pay attention to art in the first place.

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

To find out more about the "Hokusai: Mad About Painting" exhibition at the Smithsonian National Museum of Art, including the reopening date, visit [Asia.si.edu](http://Asia.si.edu)



Our actions have consequences. "Dante and Virgil in the Ninth Circle of Hell," 1861, by Gustav Doré. Oil on canvas; 10.3 feet by 14.7 feet, Brou Museum, Bourge-en-Bresse.

## LITERATURE

## More Dante Now, Please! (Part 2) Let's Hear It for Free Will!

JAMES SALE

In Part 1 of this article, we spoke of the importance of young minds being exposed to great literature—though the point is true for all people of whatever age. Great literature can provide an antidote to "woke" virtue signaling, and also provide a context within which some real thinking about life, the meaning of life, and our purpose can be explored.

And we made the point that classic texts are those which have proven their worth over centuries, even millennia, not the latest and fashionable books spouting clichéd memes. Dante, we said, is a good example of just such an author who is valuable to read and, further, to study. Indeed, although he died 699 years ago, his work is as topical and relevant now as it was then.

Perhaps the most important area in which Dante is decisive and adamant is on the question of human free will. On this, everything depends—and by "everything" I don't just mean his "Divine Comedy" or the rationale for the poem, or even "just" Christianity (whose theology underpins the poem), but I mean Western civilization itself.

### Determinism or Free Will?

British writer A.N. Wilson in his book "Dante in Love" puts it this way: "The story of Christian theology—and it could be said, the whole story of Western thought—has been an everlasting battle between Determinism and some effort at declaring a belief in our freedom to make moral choices. If we are no more than the sum of our DNA, or no more than what the materialist forces of history have made us, or no more than the product of our social environment, then the courts of law—let alone Hell—are monstrous engines of injustice; for how can someone be held to account for his behavior if it is all preordained?"

Isn't being held to account for one's behavior—or not—one of the issues of the hour now in America?

The consequences of not maintaining the core belief in free will are all around us. To believe in free will (and incidentally, William James, the father of American psychology, expressed this wonderfully in his aphorism "My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will") is to take personal responsibility for one's own fate and

situation. Whereas, the contrary is the consequence of Determinism.

Determinism leads to helpless hand-wringing, evasion, and the notion that one is a victim of circumstances. This is nowhere more apparent than in the increasing consensus that criminals are not criminals, that they cannot help their crimes and so need help rather than correction, and that one must not, therefore, judge them or even their behavior.

As writer Theodore Dalrymple observed in his book "Our Culture, What's Left of It": "When young people want to praise themselves, they describe themselves as 'non-judgmental.' For them, the highest form of morality is amorality."

This attitude manifested in looking at the riots across America, and even in the UK many of the media persistently describe the rioters as "peaceful" and seem to want to minimize the idea that they are culpable for the damage or injury they inflict. Why, so the media suggest, they are protesting rightly against societal wrongs!

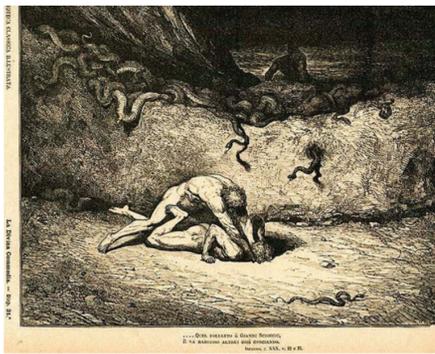
As Robert Oulds, director of The Bruges Group, in his "Moralitis: A Cultural Virus," commented: "[This attitude] is damaging the very social justice causes that it was supposed to help, because it has abandoned reality in favor of an emotive and irrational phenomenology of grievance." For "grievance," we can clearly read "victim status."

To be very clear, I am not saying that we need to be Catholic, as Dante was, or even Christian in order to believe in free will, but it is essential that we do believe in free will. The famous 18th-century atheist Edward Gibbon (as cited by Margaret Thatcher) allegedly observed of the Athenian Greeks: "In the end more than they wanted freedom, they wanted security. When the Athenians finally wanted not to give to society but for society to give to them, when the freedom they wished for was freedom from responsibility, then Athens ceased to be free."

This statement is a profound observation that is still true, and it means that empires and civilizations are conquered not from without, but from within. What could be a starker witness to our present peril?

### Possessed by Reality

So, while the ideas of free will and personal responsibility are not Dante's own, his poem powerfully explores their ramifications. The



The torments of Hell endured by Capocchio, in an illustration by Gustave Doré for Dante's "Inferno."

### What we have in Dante's incredible poem and his depiction of Hell is truth.

whole three-tier structure of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise demonstrates what happens when people exercise their will, or ignore the reality of it.

First, think about our relationship to reality. In "What's My Type: Use the Enneagram," author Kathleen V. Hurley wrote: "We come to understand that reality lies not in what can be seen and touched and possessed, but rather in what is unseen, intangible, and can be possessed by no one. Indeed, reality begins to possess us."

In this sense, "The Divine Comedy" is a profound commentary on our lives' choices, and on novelist Ayn Rand's perception that "we can evade reality, but we cannot evade the consequences of evading reality." Our actions—our thoughts, our motivations—matter, and eventually they catch up with us, if not in this life, then in the next.

There is a poignant and powerful moment at the end of Canto 29 of the "Inferno" where Capocchio, an alchemist and falsifier of nature, admits to Dante (following Clive James's loose but expressive translation here): "My trade/ Was falsifying nature. I did well/ In life. But everything is real in Hell." The consequences of reality cannot be avoided; we make decisions, but then the decisions, as in Hurley's phrase, possess us.

What "The Divine Comedy" reveals is that there are three levels of decision making.

### Psychology of Addiction

The first tier, Hell, is for those who take no responsibility for their actions. They are condemned forever to repeat their dysfunctional behaviors, their self-pitying words, and their obsessive and repetitive

thoughts; they cannot break free from the decisions they have made in their mortal life. And, in a profound sense, they don't want to.

Perhaps the best parallel we can find for this kind of behavior in our life now is addiction: Addicts often know that drugs, drink, gambling, sex, or whatever else obsesses them are bad for them or have them in thrall, as it were; but still, knowing that, they cannot break free.

Keith Humphreys, a leading professor on the psychology of addiction, put this amusingly when he said, "The existence of Starbucks is evidence that man is an irrational creature." Though not life-threatening in the same way as drugs, even coffee has the power to make us drink it when we know the fifth cup is far too many!

Hell, then, is a place where we cannot break away because we do not want to. We prefer to be in Hell; that is our choice, our free choice. As A.N. Wilson says, "No one is in Hell who did not in a sense choose to be there." Or as Dorothy L. Sayers expresses it more positively in "A Matter of Eternity," "Hell is the enjoyment of your own way forever."

We have got what we want—but no more; no Paradise, and no change from the misery that is our choice.

Long ago in 1912, scholar Edmund Garratt Gardner wrote: "Let all Hell, all the world, even all the hosts of Heaven, come together and combine in this one thing; they will not avail to extort a single consent from free will in anything not willed." The power is in our will to decide, and not even God overrides this freedom. Indeed, freedom is the backdrop of love itself, as Dante's poem makes clear, for love cannot be love if it is not freely given.

### Neglecting the Soul

Putting all this in secular and psychological terms, Irish poet Thomas Moore says: "When soul is neglected, it doesn't just go away, it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence and loss of meaning." What a brilliant way of interpreting the problem: The soul—or what we nowadays call the Self—is "neglected."

We see this very clearly in addicted people—that lack of attention to themselves, that lack of pride in themselves, and everything they have, eventually, becoming subordinated to only one thing: their "fix." And "fixed" they are.

But criminal behavior, too, is equally a kind of "fix," as Dante reveals only too well. For example, as we finally discover in the lowest depth of Hell, Satan is fixed there along with history's three greatest traitors: Cassius, Brutus, and Judas Iscariot.

The ancients thought the same. Krishna in the Indian scriptures speaks of doers of evil, ignorant men whose passion for lust, wrath, and avarice are a threefold way to Hell, as explained in Donald A. Mackenzie's "Indian Myth and Legend." How interesting that Krishna identifies three of the major sins we find in Dante: lust, wrath, and avarice.

The modern Western world doesn't like even the idea of Hell—doesn't like God being "judgmental"—and so seeks to undermine its credibility. Dante is a salutary reminder that freedom is good, our ultimate goal in fact, yet its misuse has dire and eternal consequences.

The great poet W.B. Yeats said, "The imagination has some way of lighting on the truth which reason has not..." This is exactly what we have in Dante's incredible poem and his depiction of Hell: truth.

If this is Hell, then what happens in Purgatory and Paradise? How are they different, and what states of mind make all the difference, so that one can be there rather than in Hell? These are the topics of our next article.

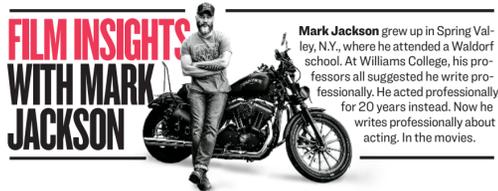
James Sale is an English businessman whose company, *Motivational Maps Ltd.*, operates in 14 countries. He is the author of over 40 books on management and education from major international publishers including Macmillan, Pearson, and Routledge. As a poet, he won the first prize in *The Society of Classical Poets' 2017 competition* and spoke in June 2019 at the group's first symposium held at New York's Princeton Club.



(Left) R. Scott Cooper (Sterling Hurst) endures an ecstatic church-goer, in "Small Group the Movie." (Below) Ballard Nelson (Robert Riechel Jr.) as an unethical filmmaker-producer.



(Above left) Mary Cooper (Emily Dunlop) and husband R. Scott Cooper (Sterling Hurst) arrive for the small group church meeting. (Above middle) Matt Chastain (front, C) and Sterling Hurst (R) play the confrontation scene in "Small Group the Movie." (Below) The women of the Christian small church group pray for Mary Cooper (Emily Dunlop) during a rough time for her.



### POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

## A Spy in the House of Love

MARK JACKSON

Faith-based movies like "Small Group the Movie" are becoming more prevalent in America. Amid COVID and election-fraud dark times—is it any wonder? People are looking for answers. They're searching for faith, in the hopes that it's not just some random universe out there with seemingly random laws that we've had the misfortune of falling into.

Some Christian movies have been major hits, but most play to a dedicated fan base that doesn't stress overly much about low production values, as their faith is already strong. "Small Group the Movie" isn't as in-your-face as many examples of the genre, and that's its strength. Less is more.

### Pseudo-Christian Spy

The movie kicks off telling the story of Georgia-born documentary filmmaker Scott Cooper (Sterling Hurst), who's been hired by film producer (and former professor at Scott's alma mater film school) (Robert Riechel Jr.) to go undercover and infiltrate Southern American Christian culture and spy on them with some James Bond spy-cam glasses. Never mind the fact that this sort of "Punk'd"-type hidden-camera ruse, in that context, is probably illegal six ways to Sunday; it does make for an interesting premise.

Scott's mission, should he choose to take it, is to dig up dirt on the current state of Christians, which will hopefully yield a scathing exposé of a variety of hidden bad behaviors, and demonstrate to the world

### 'Small Group the Movie'

Director  
Matt Chastain

Starring  
Sterling Hurst, Emily Dunlop, Matt Chastain, Robert Riechel Jr., Derrick Gilliam, Nelson Bonilla, Matt Mercurio, Caleb Hoffmann, Kasandra Bandfield, James Cole, Marilyn Chung

Rated  
PG-13

Running Time  
2 hours, 1 minute

Release Date  
Oct. 18, 2018

★★★★★

The cast of "Small Group the Movie."



the hypocrisy of these so-called faithful. Clearly the producer, played to swoaty, slimy, chews-with-his-mouth-open, unctuous perfection (actually to the point of caricature) by Riechel, is carrying a major grudge, but we never find out why.

So Scott, a live-and-let-live agnostic, has his qualms about his artistic and moral integrity immediately quashed by said conning producer, who reminds him that he's now under contract. And Scott also realizes that he can't back out anyway because he's broke—Scott and his wife, Mary (Emily Dunlop), move from California back to Scott's native Atlanta.

Once ensconced in their new home, the Coopers are immediately culture-shocked by their stereotypically redneck-y (also to the point of caricature), apparently dumb-as-a-post, chaw-spitting biker neighbor (Caleb Hoffmann), who invites Scott to go shooting at the local range where they've got excellent new targets that look like "Obama bin Laden."

### Big Group, Small Group

Scott goes to church, and he's immediately not loving the come-to-Jesus arm-waving lady next to him, who's so transported she smushes his James Bond glasses with her hands. He's at a loss as to where to begin shooting footage.

After a few "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" church visits, they finally find one that's jussst right: It's got "small groups." A "small group" is a smaller church group that hangs out together for fellowship, study, and sharing; the men go male-bonding camping, the women support each other, and so on. Perfect! Let the sleuthing begin.

Shane Baxter (Matt Chastain, the movie's writer and director) plays the member of the small group who invites Scott and Mary in. He's funny and delightfully irreverent to an almost shocking degree, which strongly balances the fervor of most of the other members who would normally be perceived as overly zealous by non-Christians.

### Segue

"Small Group" proceeds as a mildly light comedy until Scott gets invited to Guatemala with a number of the other men, on a mission of compassion in conjunction with Engadi Ministries, run by Sam Channell (Nelson Bonilla).

This is a program intent on saving male youth from the otherwise inevitable, inescapable Guatemalan street gang culture, and it would appear that actual local gang members were recruited to play themselves. It would also appear from the density of the tattoos that it's

most likely the notorious Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang that originated in Los Angeles to protect Salvadorans, because El Salvador is only about 300 miles south of Guatemala.

It gets quite dangerous; there's a brief but shocking pedophile sex-trafficking moment, a near execution, and some serious pistol-whipping—all of which ground the film in admirable ways. And by that I mean any lingering tinge of the Joel Osteen-glitz variety that non-Christians tend to associate with Christian films and be allergic to is erased by Christian good deeds that obviously take raw courage.

### The Only Drawback

Once Scott's devious ulterior motive comes to light, his new friends register a range of emotions spanning shock, disgust, vitriolic righteous indignation, raw animosity, betrayal, deep hurt, and combinations of all of the above.

### The main message of 'Small Group' is to try to avoid judging people until you really make an effort to get to know them.

And it's this major conflict that you sense coming, from a long distance out, and start to slowly and inwardly cringe in anticipation of. You develop affection for these people and don't want to see them get hurt. For me, it almost ruined the entire experience; it's quite a long period of dissonance to tolerate, waiting for the resolution.

That said, forgiveness is a major Christian focus. Does our somewhat hapless anti-hero, Scott, have a character arc? Does he change? Does he embrace his lost faith? Does a certain very annoying character emerge as a heroic, two-tours-in-Iraq war vet and medic?

Let's just say that the main message of "Small Group" is to try to avoid judging people until you really make an effort to get to know them. As messages go, it really doesn't get much better than that.

Moreover, underlying that, one might draw comfort from extrapolating that this seemingly random universe at its core might hold deep meaning, exquisite organization, innocence, curiosity, a core of goodness, and the ability to positively resolve all apparent dissonance. One might only need to spend time getting to know it better before judging it as random.



"The Disobedient Prophet," circa 1895, by Jean-Léon Gérôme. Georges-Garret Museum, Vesoul.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

## Straying From the Straight and Narrow Path: 'The Disobedient Prophet'

ERIC BESS

The story of the disobedient prophet is told in the Bible in the book of 1 Kings. The story goes as follows:

A man of God traveled from Judah to Bethel. God spoke through him and cursed an altar where King Jeroboam made an offering. Jeroboam ordered the man of God to be arrested, but Jeroboam's hand shriveled up when he pointed to identify him.

Jeroboam asked the man of God to pray to God to restore his hand. The man of God granted Jeroboam's wish and Jeroboam's hand was restored. Then, Jeroboam invited him to eat and drink, but the man of God responded that God had commanded him to not eat and drink on this journey nor return home the way he came.

An old prophet, who lived in Bethel, heard about what the man of God did and sought him out. The old prophet found the man of God sitting under an oak tree and invited him to eat and drink with him. Again, the man of God explained God's command.

Then, lying, the prophet told the man of God that God spoke to him also and that God informed him to bring back the man of God to eat and drink. The man of God listened and returned with the old prophet.

While they ate, God, through the old prophet, informed the man of God that he had disobeyed God's orders and therefore would not be buried with his ancestors.

After their meal, the man of God got on his donkey and rode away but was attacked and killed by a lion. His body was left on the road, with the lion and donkey next to it.

The old prophet heard about the attack and went to find the man of God's body. He took the body home and buried it in his family's tomb.

**'The Disobedient Prophet' and the Underpainting**  
Jean-Léon Gérôme was a 19th-century French academic painter who had recently regained popularity.

In his painting "The Disobedient Prophet," Gérôme reveals to us the part of the story from 1 Kings and part of the painter's process. The focal point, to the left in

the composition, is the lion and the lifeless figure of the man of God. The lion stands with its head high and with a paw on the man's chest. The direction of the lying figure, painted foreshortened, draws our eye toward the right side of the composition.

On the right side, in the distance, we see the old prophet riding his donkey and waving his arms. Other, unidentifiable figures are visible in the distance. The man of God's lone donkey is at the far right of the composition, but it faces back toward the old prophet to keep us from leaving the picture plane.

This is an unfinished painting by Gérôme, and we're looking at an underpainting. The foreground is painted in sepia-like colors, most likely burnt umber, white, and black. The sky and distant background have pastel colors applied for the purposes of atmospheric perspective.

These details reveal certain qualities about Gérôme's painting process. Gérôme was a formalist and not a colorist. In other words, his primary concern was the three-dimensional form of the objects and not extravagant color.

Gérôme would accomplish the three-dimensionality of the whole composition in lights and darks and then glaze (apply a thin, transparent color) and scumble (apply a thin opaque color) over this three-dimensional foundation.

This three-dimensional foundation would have influenced the future decisions that Gérôme made and the painting's overall look.

**Keeping to the Righteous Path**  
A good journey starts with a good question, and I'm left asking how the story from 1 Kings, the painting, and the painter's process can possibly guide us to become better people.

The story about the man of God is about straying from the straight and narrow path of truth. The man of God is tricked by the old prophet who pretends to be a man of God also, and the man of God suffers for confusing the truth of God with the lie of the prophet.

In Gérôme's painting, the man of God's dead body is foreshortened to lead our eye to the old prophet, and the man of God's donkey faces the old prophet as well. The old prophet, instead of

God, becomes the centerpiece, the deciding factor of the man of God's fate.

To me, the old prophet's actions only appear to be kind; they are actually symbolic of how the appearance of kindness can lead people of God to disobey God. To get to the truth of the matter, we must ask ourselves how the old prophet's lies affected the man of God.

The man of God is lied to and lets this one moment decide his fate, a fate that leads him away from God. God makes it a point to punish the man by having him not buried with his ancestors; ancestors, whom I presume, were also people of God.

**This is an unfinished painting by Gérôme, and we're looking at an underpainting.**

I take this to mean that the man of God, for his disobedience and lack of faith, will not dwell with his ancestors or God in the afterlife. Instead, he will dwell with what he ultimately followed: the old prophet and his lies.

To me, the fact that the old prophet first lies to the man of God to get him to disobey God and then takes the man of God's body and buries it in his own family tomb, instead of with the man's ancestors, is symbolic of the idea that the old prophet is a false prophet. He leads doubtful souls to an afterlife outside of God's realm.

The old prophet's supposed kindness, a lie masked by the beauty of kindness, does tremendous harm to the man of God: His life ends, and his very soul is separated from God.

How often are we led astray by people, objects, interests, and so on? How often do we let kindnesses veiled in untruths lead us away from following the righteous path, a path made specifically for us?

The man of God had God with him the whole time. God spoke to him and God's message was within him, yet the man was led astray the moment he doubted God's direct message to him.

**Form and Color**

How does Gérôme's underpainting tie into this? The underpainting is the truth, the basic foundation of the painting in that it sets a path for everything else that will be added to it. The colors are later applied to adorn the forms, the truths, to which they are attached.

The underpainting, in which only form is depicted, addresses—for the formalist painter—the most important aspect of painting: the effects of light on the world. All else is secondary. Light illuminates the object's sensuous reality, its truth. All else is secondary.

A good painting is imminent if a good foundation is laid. I think we are similar to this, as human beings: We will lead a good life if we have a righteous foundation guiding us. If God is the creator of our underpainting—the underlying truth of our lives—and illuminates our path with divine light, then our future will be one in which we are joined with our ancestors, which I see as being symbolic of that which is authentic to us.

If our foundation accepts lies as truth, disregards righteousness, and is misled by colorful expressions instead of searching for the underlying truth, we may instead find our future—like the man of God who was unable to be buried with his ancestors—as a constant reminder of our inauthenticity in the presence of God.

The 1 Kings story "The Disobedient Prophet" and Gérôme's process are, for me, a warning to discern colorful lies from the truth in our hearts and minds. Having this discernment can steer us toward our authentic and righteous path.

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

*Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist and is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).*

## In Earnest: Egg Tempera and the Essence of Painting

American artist Stan Miller's egg tempera painting of Charles

LORRAINE FERRIER

In 2019, American artist Stan Miller's egg tempera portrait of Charles won second place in the Southwest Art Magazine Artistic Excellence Art Competition.

In the painting, Charles gazes intently, directly across to the left of the painting. At first glance, he appears sad, but a closer look at his furrowed brow reveals a man deep in thought. Miller has rendered Charles's expression in such brilliant detail that just those few facial features evoke a curiosity as to just who Charles is. Everything in Miller's portrait has been carefully rendered to create such a curiosity. For Miller, the subject is the most important aspect of the painting, he said by email.

**Miller believes that painting with egg tempera is like writing a novel, while working in watercolor is similar to writing a short story or even a poem.**

**Artist Stan Miller**

For over 45 years, Miller has been painting in Spokane, Washington, specializing in both watercolor and egg tempera paintings, according to his website. He's been teaching students both mediums for nearly as long—in Spokane and around the world.

As a boy, Miller was particularly inspired by his brother's artistic talent, and he vividly remembers a family trip to Wisconsin, at age 8 or 9, to see his father's friend, the watercolorist Randy Penner.

As a junior high school student, Miller wished for a future career as an

artist. He even wrote a career paper on the subject, but he didn't quite believe it was possible.

For the past four decades, he's been living that dream—exhibiting his paintings worldwide to much acclaim.

**The Wonder of Egg Tempera**

Miller began experimenting with egg tempera (dry pigment and egg yolk) in the mid-1970s. He'd been inspired by the works and techniques of Andrew Wyeth, his favorite American painter, and by the mixed media paintings of Wyeth's son, Jamie, at the Brandywine River Museum of Art in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania.

He found the Wyeths' egg tempera paintings fascinating. If it hadn't been for their paintings, he wouldn't have touched egg tempera. "There was a uniqueness, a mystery as to just what the medium was. ... They kind of looked like oil paintings, but thinner. They had characteristics of watercolor, but not as wet," he said.

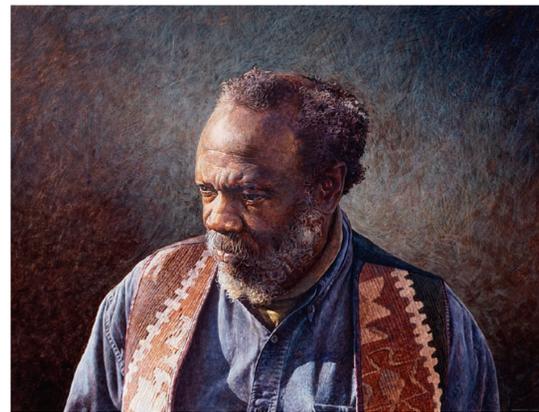
Miller now sees egg tempera as a medium between oil and watercolor. Egg tempera paintings present a semi-glossy, tacky surface, one that's extremely tempting to touch, he said. And he also enjoys the depths that egg tempera brings to a painting; it has a three-dimensional aspect that he rarely sees in oil or watercolor paintings.

**An Earnest Medium**

Miller enjoys the expressive, spontaneous nature of painting with watercolors much more than the slower medium of painting with egg tempera. But for Miller, the patience required to paint in egg tempera pays off. "There is a seriousness, a power that I feel when an egg tempera is finished that for me makes egg tempera a much more powerful medium than watercolor," he said.

Miller believes that painting with egg tempera is like writing a novel, while working in watercolor is similar to writing a short story or even a poem.

An egg tempera painting takes him 10 to 20 times longer than a watercolor



Detail of "Charles," 2002, by Stan Miller. Egg tempera on paper; 24 inches by 36 inches.

painting of the same size. "I have to be much more patient when working in egg tempera; certain stages can become extremely tedious," he said.

To paint with egg tempera requires many thin, but not watery, paint layers—sometimes as many as 10 or 20 layers, Miller explained. He likens the process to varnishing a piece of wood 10 times instead of once.

**Egg Tempera, a Rarely Used Medium**

Although Miller teaches painting around the world, rarely do his students want to learn egg tempera. He believes that few students take up the medium because of the laborious painting process. In addition, "An egg tempera painting looks quite ugly throughout the painting process. It doesn't finally come together until the final glazes," he said.

For those students interested in learning, he directs them to his YouTube video explaining the basic egg tempera process he uses in his paintings.

**The Essential Art of Painting**

"Learning to handle the medium is craft, not art," Miller said. He believes the art of painting centers on the subject matter and how the artist chooses to portray the subject.

"As in writing, it's not [the] writing style alone that makes a great writer, contrary to what many think. Rather, it's the subject, how we handle the subject, the originality of the subject, the mood, and the big and most important principle: editing—emphasis and de-emphasis within the story—this is the art of writing and painting," he said.

Miller explains that Ernest Hemingway put extreme importance on editing to get to the heart of a subject; painting is no different. The color, medium, and technique are secondary to the subject matter portrayed.

In essence, "What does the subject have to say to us, the world?" he said.

*To find out more about Stan Miller's art, visit StanMiller.net*

MUSIC

## The Singer Whose Voice Follows the Spirit: Iestyn Davies

Countertenor transforms congregations and concert halls with his angelic sound

J.H. WHITE

"A choir's role in the Anglican church and the church of England is to elevate the worship," Grammy-Award-winning countertenor Iestyn Davies told me in a phone interview.

When Davies feels like he's singing well, he says it feels like "you're in a solar system where everything aligns and just feels good. When I really connect, the audience feels that as well. It touches people in a different way."

While Davies has a low speaking voice and used to sing bass, he now sings exclusively in the falsetto range as a countertenor.

"I never really thought I wanted to be a countertenor," he says. But he was introduced to the range at the highly acclaimed men and boys Choir of St. John's, Cambridge.

Having just turned 8 years old, Davies had been one of the youngest members ever of the famous choir. Seven services a week, recordings, and tours to the United States, Canada, Brazil, and Hong Kong cultivated a high standard of musicianship.

"It's one of the few jobs I can think of where a boy of 8 is expected to do the same level of work as an adult of 20," he says. "There was something about the religion, about the monastic devotion, where you repeat this process every day. It's about being part of it and respecting it. It gives you a sense of duty."

**A Priest's Face**

Davies's family is rooted in Christian faith. His Welsh father had 13 uncles and aunts, and all the

men were either priests or bishops. When Davies was born, his grandmother held him in her arms and said, "Oh, he's got a priest's face," Davies told me with a laugh.

But Davies is quiet about his spiritual faith. He looks at Christian teachings as a guide.

"The one thing you can do is look at the life of Jesus. The way in which he led people and the way in which he acted is a good way to live," he says.

In addition to his family's ties to faith, they were also musical. Davies's father, for example, was the founding cellist of the Fitzwilliam String Quartet.

"Music was in my daily life," Davies says.

At 8 years old, he joined The Choir of St. John's, Cambridge. Though Davies didn't join for religious reasons, he does believe that music is essential in the churchgoing experience. He notes that even the Greeks and Romans understood the importance of music, which is why they built temples and amphitheaters with sound and acoustics in mind.

To connect with divinity, "all the senses need to be activated," he says.

Although the countertenor range is often described as ethereal and angelic, which naturally align him with spiritual roles, that's not why he started singing in that range.

From 8 to 13 years old, Davies sang treble in the highly demanding St. John's choir. After graduating St. John's, once his voice broke, he was part of a less-serious school chamber choir

where he sang bass.

"It was a chance for me to explore my voice." While singing bass, "I didn't feel anything special. I couldn't express myself," he says. One day during a rehearsal, Davies flipped into his falsetto range. His fellow choir members turned to him and told him it sounded nice. They said, "You should take it more seriously."

"That bug was there. The flame was lit," he says. Davies never looked back. Now that he had the medium, his desire to perform became stronger than ever. He returned to St. John's to sing as a countertenor in the choir and earn his undergraduate degree.

Davies has since performed around the world and earned many accolades, including three Gramophone Awards, a Grammy Award, and the MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) in the Queen's New Year's Honors List 2017 for services to music.

**Bringing Music to Life**

"For a long time, the St. John's choir was defined as the underdog to King's College, just down the street in Cambridge," Davies says. The Choir of King's College, Cambridge famously broadcasts Christmas carols every holiday season.

But in the 1950s, St. John's hired Welsh choirmaster George Guest, who adopted a contrasting style to King's. He taught a continental tone prevalent at Westminster Cathedral, the mother church of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales.

"The St. John's sound is very ex-

pressive with a lot more vibrato, a bit more guts. It sounds more dynamically variant, a surer tone," Davies says. He explains that it's a less flutey, breathy sound than one would typically expect from a traditional boys' choir.

Choirmaster Guest wanted the boys to infuse spontaneous emotion into their singing. That starting point has stayed with Davies throughout his professional career.

**While Davies has a low speaking voice and used to sing bass, he now sings exclusively in the falsetto range as a countertenor.**

Guest would reinforce the concept that the emotion brings something to the music that the composer is unable to express on the page of music. The choirmaster would say, "We'll bring something to the religious service. We'll lift the worship of the congregation or enhance the experience of a concert audience in a way that the composers are unable to instruct."

"It's quite exciting to listen to, hearing a 13-year-old singing with that passionate sound," he says.

*J.H. White is an arts, culture, and men's fashion journalist living in New York.*

For more arts and culture articles, visit [TheEpochTimes.com](http://TheEpochTimes.com)

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REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

# Earnest Cavalry Western Salutes Camaraderie

"She Wore a Yellow Ribbon" (1949) marks legendary director John Ford's second film in his Cavalry Trilogy—nestled smack dab in between "Fort Apache" (1948), and "Rio Grande" (1950).

After the crushing defeat of Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer and his 7th U.S. Cavalry Regiment at Little Big Horn (in Montana Territory) in 1876 by a coalition of Native American tribes, the U.S. Army braces for further hostilities and bloodshed.

The film is centered on a small outpost in Texas called Fort Starke. Stationed there is a small U.S. Cavalry detachment including Capt. Nathan Brittles (John Wayne) and his direct superior, Maj. Mac Allshard (George O'Brien).

It opens in an unexpectedly humorous way. The fort's senior enlisted soldier and Brittles's right-hand man, Irishman Top Sgt. Quincannon (Victor McLaglen), apprises Brittles of the past weekend's report. While Brittles is putting on his uniform in his bedroom, Quincannon takes several swigs of whiskey from a bottle that he has secreted nearby.

When Brittles finishes dressing and walks out into the main quarters' room, he slides up to Quincannon's liquor-soaked jowls and takes a big sniff. Reeling back, he exclaims: "Ya got a breath on ya like a hot mince pie!" Brittles then turns to cross out another day on his calendar; he is to perform his last patrol before retiring from the military in six days.

Things get more serious when one of Brittles's men, Sgt. Tyree (Ben Johnson), reveals that major moves are being made by the Southern Cheyenne in the area.

The tribe's aggression is rapidly stepping up. This, in turn, worries Maj. Allshard since his wife, Abby (Mildred Natwick), and her niece, Olivia (Joanne Dru as the woman who wears the yellow ribbon), are living at Fort Starke with them.

In light of this development, Allshard orders Brittles to transport the two women to another outpost, where they'll be able to travel back East to safety. Brittles is initially resistant to the plan since being laden down with "women's junk" will endanger his patrol. Things are even more complicated because two lieutenants stationed at Fort Starke are vying for Olivia's amorous attentions. However, Brittles is a career military man who obeys orders and also has a soft spot for both women. Therefore, he agrees.

**Wayne is surprisingly multidimensional as a grizzled yet compassionate military man.**

The romantic subplot, involving the two junior officers Cohill (John Agar) and Pennell (Harry Carey Jr.) and their contentious courtship of Olivia, plays out during Brittles's last patrol. When the patrol finally reaches the designated outpost, they find it embattled by Natives and chase them off. But the place has already been devastated, sustaining heavy

losses. When Brittles discovers that the wagons that were going to transport the two ladies have been destroyed, he takes it hard and blames himself for a "mission failure."

Just after Brittles and his men bury the dead, Cohill and Pennell choose that most inappropriate time to challenge each other to a bout of fisticuffs over Olivia. Brittles quickly puts the kibosh on the two men's quarreling and chides them severely. From that point on, the two young men settle into a less contentious friendship.

It soon becomes apparent that a major assault on Fort Starke is being planned by a large coalition of Native tribes, similar to the one that obliterated Custer's regiment. It is against this looming menace that the reality of retirement begins to set in on Brittles. Having served 40 years in the Cavalry, it's the only thing he knows. And since he lost his wife and two children to the Natives, he has no real home to return to. To a career military man like Brittles, his fast-approaching retirement almost seems more daunting than the impending assault on the fort, especially at a time when he feels everyone needs him the most. Will he rise to the occasion on the eve of battle and somehow manage to thwart the impending attack?

Ford's cavalry tale moves at a rather ambling pace, although the strong performances turned in by its stellar cast make the watching easy. Wayne is surprisingly multidimensional as a grizzled yet compassionate military man afraid of reaching the end of his trail—with regard to retirement.

This heavy subject matter is



(Above) Victor McLaglen (L) and John Wayne in "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon."



Capt. Nathan Brittles (John Wayne) and his two young charges, Lt. Cohill (John Agar) and Lt. Pennell (Harry Carey Jr.), each hoping to win the hand of one young lady.

elevated in part by the comedic chemistry between Wayne's Brittles and McLaglen's Quincannon. In fact, I could have seen a sitcom being developed around these characters and their hilarious interactions.

Mildred Natwick also gave a great performance as Allshard's wife, Abby, who is ever-supportive of the rank-and-file cavalrymen on patrol, helping to nurse a severely injured man and also lending her sewing skills for a confederate flag needed for a funeral.

In all, "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon" is a beautifully shot Western that works. It even turns scenes that would be considered corny or cliché into displays of quiet earnestness and sincere sentimentality. That, in my book, is quite an achievement—any way you slice it.

*Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To learn more, visit [DreamFlightEnt.com](http://DreamFlightEnt.com)*

## 'She Wore a Yellow Ribbon'

**Director**  
John Ford

**Starring**  
John Wayne, Joanne Dru, John Agar

**Running Time**  
1 hour, 44 minutes

**Not Rated**

**Release Date**  
Oct. 22, 1949 (USA)

★★★★☆

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