

THE EPOCH TIMES
ARTS &
CULTURE

STEVE WINEINGER



"The Tempest," 2017, by Steve Wineinger. Oil on canvas; 36 inches by 24 inches.

FINE ARTS

American Painter Gloriously Captures God's Creations

Steve Wineinger's wondrous art

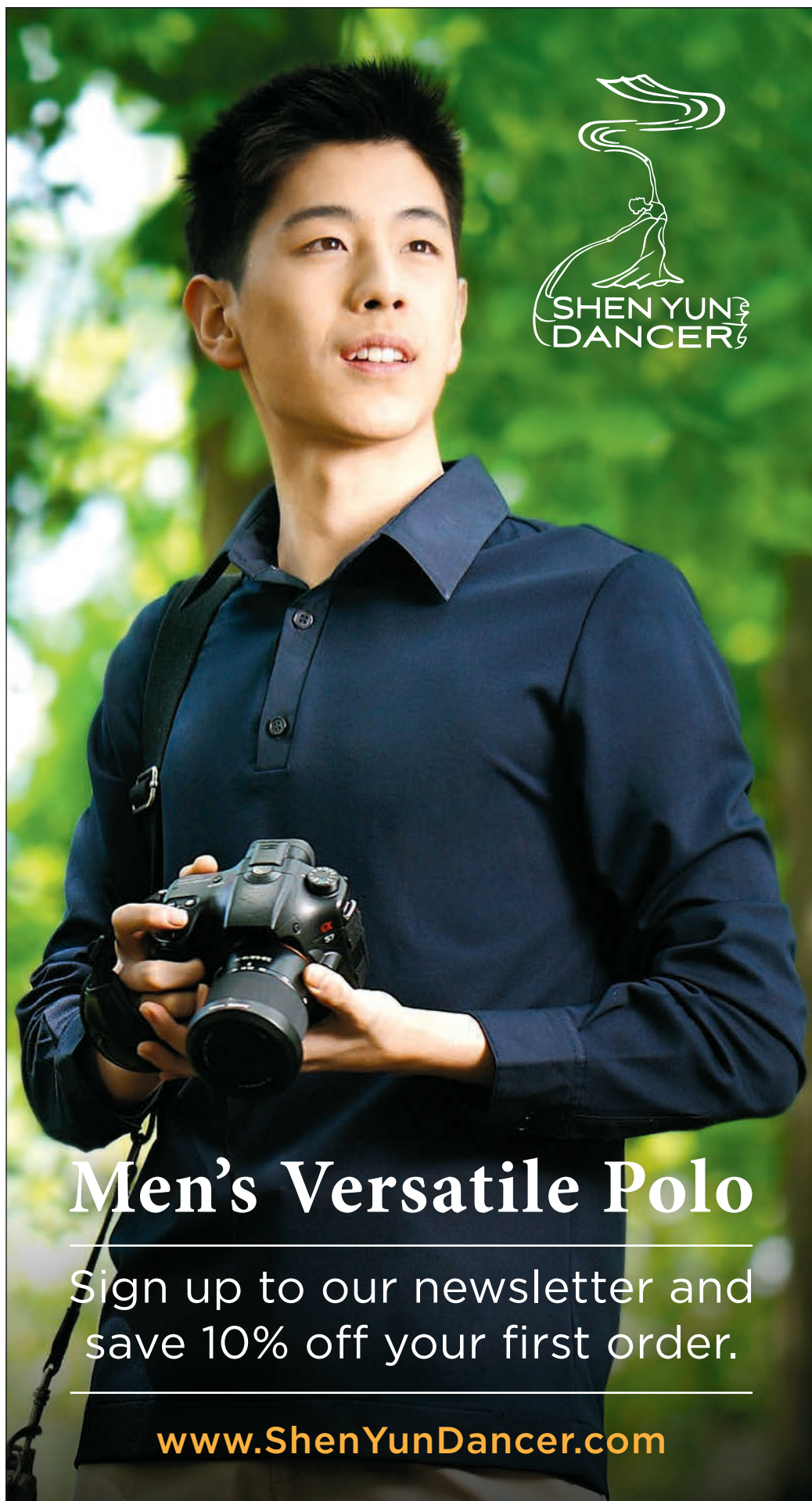
LORRAINE FERRIER

You won't find American realist artist Steve Wineinger's paintings online easily, if at all, but for decades he has been quietly painting and mastering his art on his farm near Spokane, Washington.

The self-taught artist creates fascinating still lifes, sweeping American landscapes, and historical paintings mainly in oil, charcoal, and watercolor.

In each and every one of his paintings, Wineinger challenges himself to chase and capture elusive light on canvas, in appreciation of God's creations.

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TRADITIONAL CULTURE

When Knighthood Was in Flower: A Brief History of Chivalry

JEFF MINICK

In my adolescence, my friends, my brother, and I often pretended to be knights. Our shields were metal trashcan lids, and our swords were sticks or scrap lumber with hand guards held in place by screws. Around the woods and fields we'd charge, pretending to fight the bad guys, rescue damsels in distress, and win our share of glory. Sometimes I'd saddle up the pony we owned, Fritz, and gallop around the yard slashing at the air with the sword my grandfather had made for me, while yelling insults at my imaginary enemies.

We read the stories of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, watched the movies "Ivanhoe" and "Robin Hood," and looked at picture books featuring men in armor from long ago. One favorite book of my late elementary school years was Howard Pyle's 1891 novel, "Men of Iron," which told the story of Myles Falworth, first as a squire and then a knight, and his struggles to redeem his father's name.

Perhaps inspired unconsciously by this affection for knights and chivalry, I later spent two years in graduate school earning a master's degree and undertaking a year of doctoral work studying the Middle Ages. In my master's thesis, I wrote of the minority of King Henry III, successor to King John of "Robin Hood" fame, and enjoyed learning about one of the boy-king's mentors, William Marshal, a famous knight of the day.

The changing tactics of war and the introduction of gunpowder to the battlefield eventually put an end to these mounted warriors. They disappeared long ago and now appear only in movies and books.

But chivalry had a much longer shelf life.

As Jones reminds us, the knights of the Middle Ages only faintly resembled our modern romanticized impression of them. He writes: "Chivalry and the pleadings of the Church and legalists might help to prevent the worst excesses of raiding against the civilian population, but at his heart the knight was a practical warrior, willing to lay aside the principles of his caste if that was what the situation called for."

As time passed, however, others beside the Church sought to gentile and refine the ferocity of these men.

Love and Honor

Over several hundred years, literature, song, and women of the upper class helped elevate the standards of the code of chivalry.

In the late Middle Ages, courtly love—the chaste affection of a knight for his queen or for another lady of the court, and his performance of heroic deeds in her honor—became fashionable. The extent to which knights actually practiced courtly love remains debatable, but certainly it became the subject of the troubadours' chansons and the tales told by poets in the great halls.

The written literature of the late Middle Ages also looks frequently at knight-

hood. The 14th-century poem "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" takes us first to Arthur's court at Christmastide, where we witness the courtly behavior of knights and ladies, and then on a quest with Sir Gawain, the most saintly of the Knights of the Round Table. In "The Canterbury Tales," Geoffrey Chaucer gives us a marvelous description of a knight: a meek and humble man plainly dressed, who has fought in many wars, and is "a verray, parfit, gentil knyght."

Published in 1485, Thomas Malory's "Le Morte d'Arthur" idealized knighthood and became the source for so many of our own books and movies about King Arthur's court. Malory wrote this book at a time when men encased in armor and riding warhorses would soon disappear from the battlefield, but he encapsulates in his story and characters the virtues that we today associate with knighthood.

Here are some of the chivalric virtues found in Malory's romantic tales: Like his earlier counterparts, a knight must display prowess and bravery on the field of battle.

He practiced largesse, sharing with his companions and often with the poor whatever wealth he possessed.



Many believe the knight's journey was actually one toward sainthood, as the tales of Sir Gawain suggest. "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," from original manuscript, circa 14th century.

Hard Men
In "Knight: The Warrior and World of Chivalry," military historian and expert in medieval warfare Robert Jones devotes a chapter to chivalry as developed and practiced 1,000 years ago. Here he examines the growth of certain rules of warfare, the gradual exclusivity of a knightly class, the creation of various orders of knighthood, the development of heraldry and badges, the founding of military orders like the Templars and the Order of St. John, and the attempts by the Church to end some of the violence and viciousness of battle and conquest.

Like some of today's celebrities, these medieval warriors were acutely aware of their image. They longed to be seen both on the battlefield and in tournaments as brave men skilled in the use of sword and lance, and able to vanquish any and all enemies. This desire for recognition of their prowess, strength, and courage drove them to attempt great deeds both in combat and in tournaments.

These knights were not without their critics. The Church in particular tried to restrain their violence and depredations in warfare. In "Knight," Jones includes the example of Bernard of Clairvaux, a 12th-century French abbot, who denounced these mounted warriors in this way:

"What ... is this monstrous error and what the unbearable urge which bids you fight with such pomp and labor. ... You cover your horses with silk, and plume your armor with I know not what sort of rags; you paint your shields and saddles; you adorn your bits and spurs with gold and silver and precious stones, and then in all this glory you rush to your ruin with fearful wrath and fearless folly."

Is Chivalry Dead?

Many people, especially women, complain that chivalry is dead, that men no longer act like gentlemen, that they lack manners and polish. There may be some truth to this idea. After all, we have largely banished the words "ladies and gentlemen" from public speech, and when words disappear, so do the concepts they represent.

But chivalry was always more than just courtesy and good manners. Included under that umbrella of a word are values like honor, loyalty, courage, generosity of time and money, a willingness to defend the weak, and as old-fashioned as it may sound, to treat women as ladies. Some would argue that even these virtues have gone missing in many men. Certainly our news media often reports

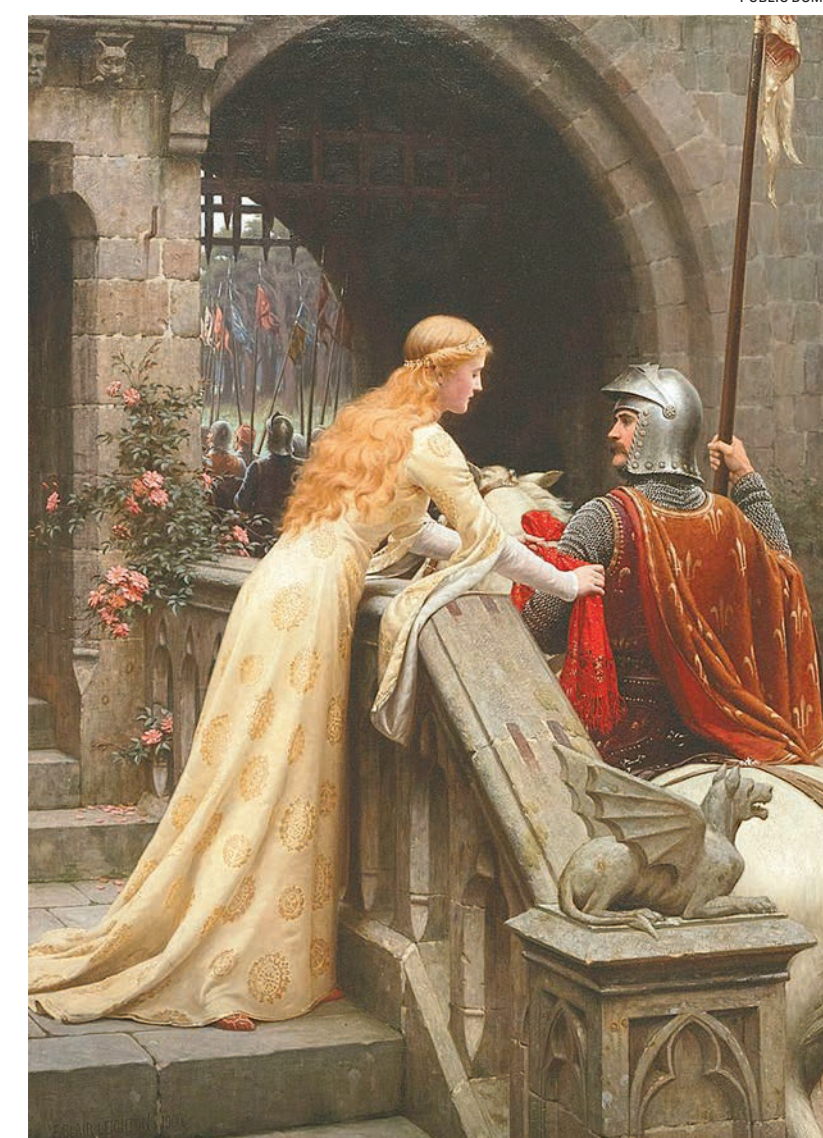
To develop these virtues required centuries of work and refinement.

stories about men who have failed to step to the defense of a woman being assaulted, leaders who seem to lack any sense of honor, and others who fail when circumstance tests their courage.

If chivalry is disappearing, then the subsequent cost to our culture will be enormous. To develop these virtues required centuries of work and refinement, and the chivalric virtues are some of the basic underpinnings of our society.

On the other hand, when I turn from the news headlines and look at my family, friends, and neighbors around me, I see plenty of men who still practice the old ways of chivalry, who treat women with respect, who help out others whenever they can, and who live honorable lives. They're not riding white horses and waving bright swords, but in my eyes they are knights—good strong men worthy of respect and commendation.

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. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust On Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.



(Far left) "God Speed" by Edmund Leighton, 1900.

(Left) The chivalry of the Middle Ages was embraced during the late Victorian era.

What People Are Saying



I read The Epoch Times daily. I still like hard papers [...] and I still like to grab that paper in my hand, but I get more printed versions of stories than ever before. You guys have done an amazing job, and really—I think there's such a void in media, especially newspapers. They slant so solidly one way that there are very few papers that I can really feel that I can rely on, and The Epoch Times is one.

SEAN HANNITY
Talk show host



I congratulate you and The Epoch Times for the work you are doing, especially with regard to keeping the menace of the communist threat in front of us.

DR. SEBASTIAN GORKA
Military and intelligence analyst and former deputy assistant to the president



I rely on The Epoch Times newspaper for factual and unbiased news coverage.

LARRY ELDER
Best-selling author, attorney, and talk show host



The Epoch Times is a great place where you can understand traditional values in a way and in a tone and through content that is accessible. It's smart.

CARRIE SHEFFIELD
Columnist and broadcaster



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FINE ARTS

American Painter Gloriously Captures God's Creations

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It's a challenge he wholeheartedly embraces: "We only have so many years in this life, and there're so many things a person could do, but to get mastery of any of them is a lifelong challenge, it seems," he said in a telephone interview.

An Artist's Will

Wineinger's process of creating art is both determined and disciplined. He believes that college is not a necessary step in art training, but the basics of art do need to be mastered. "Art—I think it's 10 percent talent and 90 percent hard work," he said.

When he was in high school, or maybe even earlier, he got his hands on a book by Norman Rockwell in which the artist explained the color palette and his own illustration process. "That book fell apart; I looked at it so much, and absorbed it. It was a hardbound book, and now it's an assortment of pages," he said.

For about 18 months, Wineinger studied fine art at a regional college to expand and deepen his knowledge. Mid-semester, his tutor told the class to direct any questions that they had to Wineinger because "He knows more about painting than I do." Wineinger was flattered, but that wasn't why he was paying tuition. He didn't return to class.

From then on, Wineinger taught himself art, a process he likens to a rigorous version of homeschooling. He disciplined himself by following the fine art syllabus that major art institutes used. For practice, he'd copy works by artists he admired, and in doing so he was able to deconstruct the techniques they used. He'd practice every step he studied in books: from setting up models' poses for compositions, to creating full-scale charcoal layouts, to transferring drawings onto canvases, to underpainting canvases before painting.

He kept a sketchpad on the nightstand by his bed. Before he went to bed, he would sketch something, anything: a family member, the kitchen dishes, or a piece of furniture. "It was difficult at the beginning but got easier over time," he said.

He also sought guidance directly from other artists. In particular, he found himself gravitating toward published illustrators.

(Above) "Cape Kiwanda, Oregon," 2011, by Steve Wineinger. Oil on canvas; 24 inches by 36 inches.

(Right) "Haystack Rock at Dusk," 2011, by Steve Wineinger. Oil on canvas; 24 inches by 36 inches.



They seemed to have the most discipline, a high output of work, and therefore the most experience, he said. Wineinger had several helpful conversations with illustrator Tom Lovell, a contemporary of Norman Rockwell and famous for his illustrations in National Geographic.

The Art Show Circuit

During this period, Wineinger began to show his work at major regional art shows within about a 300-mile radius from Spokane. A local agent scheduled his shows anywhere from two weeks, to a month, to three months apart.

It was a grueling show schedule because of the type of paintings Wineinger created. His oil paintings could take at least six months to dry before varnish could be applied. For him, varnishing is of utmost importance to enhance the colors and details in the work; without it, the paint would appear dull.

Wineinger began to feel that he was a painting factory. "I had to stand there [in the studio] and churn out work, and that wasn't what I wanted to do," he said. And with such a tight show schedule, he had no time to go out in the field and research new subject matter.

As all his inventory had been sold, he decided to leave the show circuit and take commissions or paint just what he wanted.

Art Hikes

Wineinger discovered many of his landscape subjects on hikes, often with his wife of 44 years, Rickie. His paintings "Cape Kiwanda" and "Haystack Rock at Dusk" were created after the couple's wedding anniversary trip to the Oregon coast.

Wineinger first found Cape Kiwanda when he was researching their vacation, trawling

online through photographs of the Oregon coastline.

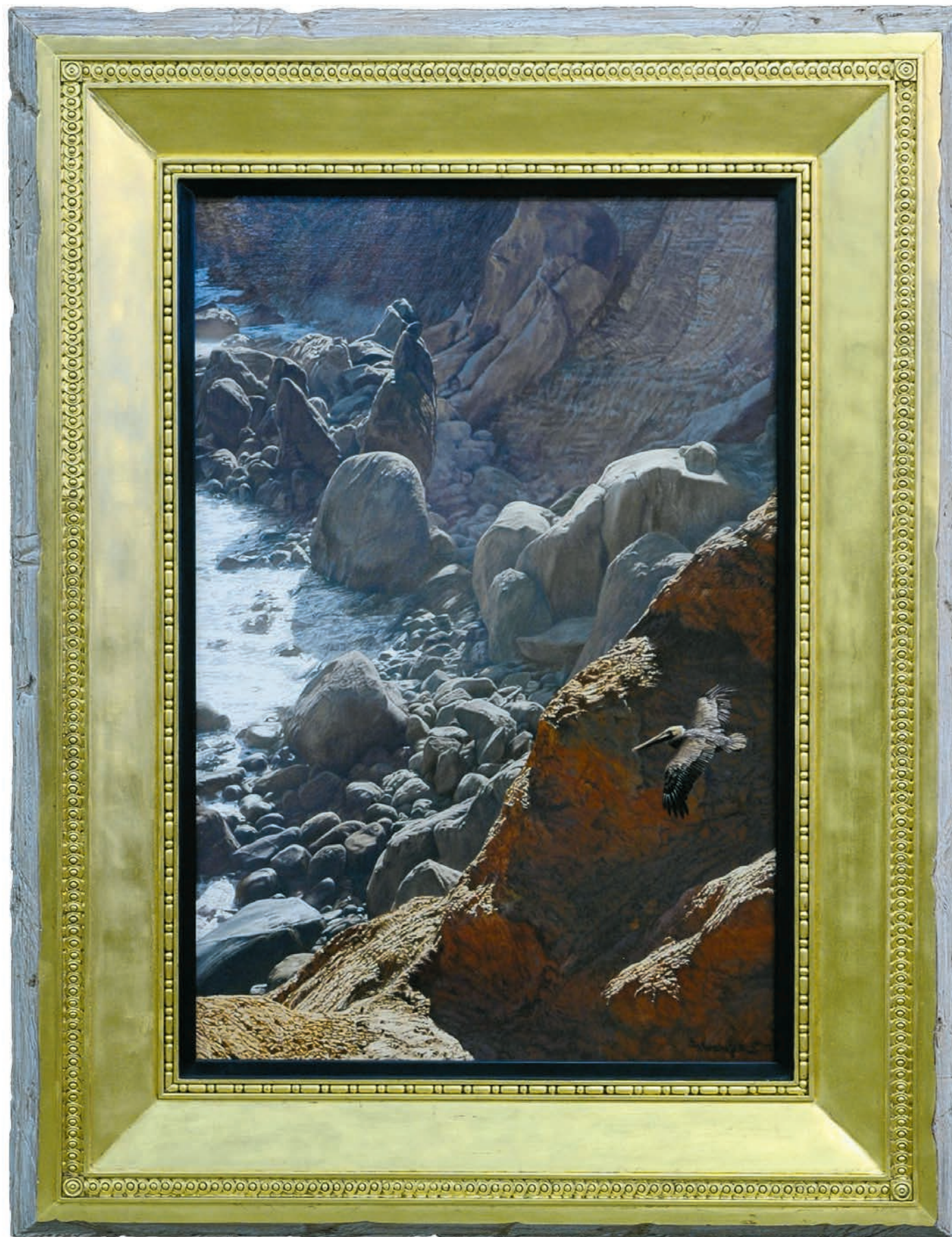
The couple arrived in Oregon tired, having driven nearly all day. Settling into the motel, Rickie checked the weather report. Sunshine had been predicted, but the forecast for the night ahead had now changed to storms and heavy fog. They decided to head off for the hike that afternoon, swapping their much anticipated supper of fish, chips, and beer for their backpacks and camera gear.

There was no road to the cape; they had to hike along the rugged coastline. Once there, Wineinger spent some time on a rocky outcrop finding the best spot for his composition. "It was very steep, and I had to hang on to bushes and be able to hold on to my camera so we wouldn't tumble into the ocean.... I stood in that spot for about an hour and a half, because of the light changes," he said.

Wineinger took around 800 shots of the cape. At sunset, the light and colors change moment to moment, revealing light and shadows that are best seen when reviewing the images back in the studio, he explained. As the couple walked back to the car at sundown, Wineinger turned around to see an amazing dusky shot. That scene became his painting "Haystack Rock at Dusk."

Wineinger's painting "The Tempest" came about from a different hike, this time in Hawaii where they used to own a couple of properties and where they'd spend some time every winter. Often, they'd go on hiking and photography jaunts.

One time, Wineinger happened upon a map showing the ancient Hawaiian royal sites, one of which had a koi pond. He had often felt disappointed when he looked at koi art. "They lacked the punch of the movement of the water and the distortion and the



(Above) "The Pelican's Domain," 2012, by Steve Wineinger. Oil on canvas; 36 inches by 24 inches.

(Left) "Late Autumn on Mica Creek," 2018, by Steve Wineinger. Charcoal over watercolor wash on cold pressed board; 19 1/4 inches by 36 inches.

refraction, which gave it life," he said. He effectively captured the movement of the water in "The Tempest."

Photography, an Artist's Tool

Wineinger stresses that "all of the photographs are merely guides." He believes that replicating a photograph perfectly is a terrible way to produce art. "You have to change the color. You have to change the composition. You have to put things in, or take things out. There's a lot of work to transition from a photograph to a work of art," he said.

And that transition involves a fundamental understanding of the foundations of fine art. For example, to paint "Cape Kiwanda," he adjusted the color palette and used five photographs to make a composite image.

Photographs can also help with different components in a composition. Once, Wineinger needed to find a mountain man, a trapper, for a painting. He found the right model at his local mall, a homeless man living behind the dumpsters. "He looked like a trapper. He was missing teeth. He looked a little wild. His hair was long and crazy," he said. He set up the paid photoshoot in a storeroom in the mall, using a fan he had in his car to create the effect of a mountain man on horseback. Voilà! He had his trapper.

Photographs are just a tool to record the details of a subject: the form of a tree, the shape of an animal, or to record muscles or feathers. But they shouldn't be what you try to reproduce, he added.

Another compelling reason Wineinger gives as to why blindly copying photographs doesn't make great art is that in photo-

graphs, shadows are black. That's not true in nature. "You can stand on the edge of a beautiful mountain or canyon and see nuances of colors. The shadows actually should be blue or purple, not black."

Frame Making

Wineinger began making picture frames for his art after a trip to Europe with his wife and a friend, who had previously lived in Europe for a number of years.

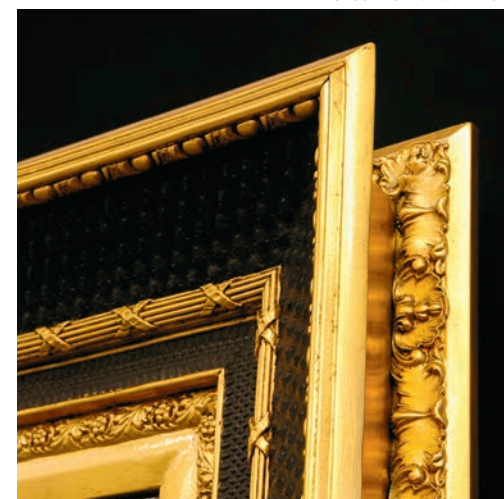
His friend knew of several large art collections where the works could be viewed up close, rather than fighting tourists to get a glimpse of art in the likes of the Louvre. Wineinger was struck by the workmanship of the picture frames, and he noticed how the frame seemed to elevate the art.

"They were fabulous landscapes and still lifes, but what made them prizes wasn't just their age but the presentation," he said. Similarly, in America, he'd seen art up close by Hudson River School painters Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran and was impressed not only by the art itself but also by the frame. "I think the frames are as impressive as the artwork, in many cases," he said.

Wineinger and his son began to learn how to make frames. They connected with European frame makers and restorers, experts who worked for the Louvre or for heritage buildings. On several occasions, his son spoke to experts who, not seeing them as a professional threat, divulged their frame-finishing trade secrets to him, Wineinger said.

Wineinger hand carves some of his frames, but he also sources materials from a

ALL PHOTOS BY STEVE WINEINGER



Steve Wineinger started making frames for his paintings after seeing old paintings in Europe and realizing that the frame was an important part of the painting's presentation.



Realist painter Steve Wineinger in his studio in Spokane, Washington.



In this cityscape study, Steve Wineinger expertly captures the light and rain. Charcoal over watercolor wash; 15 1/4 inches by 10 1/2 inches.

historic Chicago company. In the 1800s, the workshop employed Austrian and German woodcarvers to create moldings and flourishes. It's these moldings that Wineinger sometimes uses.

For his frames, Wineinger combines the best traditional methods with today's materials. For instance, he undercoats the frames with red paint, similar to the red clay primer used in the 1700s. He's interested in the frame's durability and, most importantly, the beauty of the end result.

The Aberration of Art

Wineinger ponders on the purpose of art and the artwork in general. He's made a living from his art, as well as augmenting his income when he pursued other ventures. But he questions artwork created by living or recently deceased artists, which sells for \$50 million to \$150 million. "Who determines the value of those pieces? ... Who determines what is to be collected?" he said.

He's also personally known prominent oil and watercolor artists who have done very well on an international scale. But he sees a link between an artist's character and the art they create. Of the very successful artists he's known, he says: "They were odd. ... I would not want my kids to spend the weekend with them, or I wouldn't want my grandkids to emulate their lifestyle at all. And that's when the light went on. Most of these things: that these people produce are not beautiful: They're dark and perverted, and some of them were done on drug trips. I know that."

"I think we need to be asking ourselves, why have we gone this route?"

Wineinger believes that art, and even sports, is being politicized and used to shape society. "Now, it's not just about athletic excellence. ... Now, it's about social justice. And football is not about football anymore: It's about everything else."

"But I believe in a chief engineer of all that we see. I believe that we were created and that everything else was created. ... And with that perspective, I do believe talent is given to us, whether it's music, dance, architecture, whatever it is; I think we just don't conjure it up ourselves," he said.

Wineinger believes that art used to be about capturing God's creations on canvas or with other materials.

"I believe the purpose of art is to lift up our human existence, as well as glorifying the one who created it in the first place."

To find out more about Steve Wineinger's paintings, he may be contacted at SRWFineArt@gmail.com

“There're so many things a person could do, but to get mastery of any of them is a lifelong challenge.”

Steve Wineinger, artist

CLASSICAL DANCE

Shen Yun Principal Dancer Communicates Truth Through Art

CATHERINE YANG

The first thing that captivated Elsie Shi about classical Chinese dance was the flips—the way dancers looked as if they were flying, the way she felt tumbling through the air. She would try to prolong the feat as long as possible, staying in the air as long as possible, before touching the ground again.

“Back then, I wanted to learn gymnastics, but I was too old for that,” Shi said in an interview. At around age 10, Shi might have been too old to start gymnastics, but her school had an extracurricular classical Chinese dance program she could join. And that led to the discovery of what she now views as a mission.

Since 2013, Shi has been dancing in practice with Shen Yun Performing Arts, the classical Chinese dance company that has become a worldwide phenomenon. Shen Yun has revitalized the once little-known art of classical Chinese dance, a form with millennia of history in its very bones, and has become the standard bearer globally for the artistic caliber of the dance. From an early age, Shi took on classical Chinese dance as a hobby, and that soon became an aspiration, before realizing her dream and joining the top classical Chinese dance company in the world. Now an award-winning artist, taking home the Gold Award in the 2016 NTD International Classical Chinese Dance Competition, Shi wants to use her gift to give back.

“I want to bring the beautiful and the very grand 5,000 years of Chinese history, and classical Chinese dance—the unique side of this dance form and the beauty behind it—I want to express this to the audience,” Shi said.

Expression

Through her dance performances, she realized that the dance form wasn't just technical brilliance and gravity-defying flips—that was merely the vehicle to express inner meaning—and that classical Chinese dance is all about inner meaning.

“It's really different from other dance forms,” Shi said. “You really feel the difference.”

Once you grasp that unique feeling of classical Chinese dance, she explained, you start to understand it. The form itself is the culmination of 5,000 years of civilization, and fully capable of expressing the traditional culture and values of this ancient civilization.

It's a famously expressive form, making it perfect for storytelling. A typical Shen Yun program includes several storytelling dances, sharing myths and legends from Chinese history, as well as the occasional modern-day tale.

To give an example of the multilayered

Elsie Shi, a dancer with Shen Yun Performing Arts, leaping across stage in the 2016 NTD International Classical Chinese Dance Competition.



China that touches on the persecution.

For Shi, art is a precious vehicle for sharing the truth with a wide audience, and she is grateful that she can lend her gift to give

voice to this issue. Her feeling grew even stronger once she'd learned that some of the audience members came from China, where such truthful information is censored. No matter where she goes around the world, and what sort of audience is in the theater, the reception has always been warm.

“I am very honored, so much that it's hard to express,” Shi said. This, and expressing the beauty of classical Chinese dance, are the most important things to Shi as a Shen Yun dancer.

expression the dance is capable of, Shi described a role she took on a few years ago. In a vignette taken from an episode of the adventure “Journey to the West,” a merry band of travelers happen upon a queen. Shi's character was the queen—which called for noble bearing and a refined, elegant countenance—who during the course of the story gets possessed by a scorpion's spirit.

“And then it's a completely different feeling. There are similar movements, but you can't do them the usual way. Instead, it's very crazy and vicious,” Shi said. Then, she had to switch back from the scorpion to the majestic queen. The effect had to be instantly clear to the audience; to accomplish the feat she “needed to be very clearheaded,” she said.

The focus on clarity and attention to detail is in the very culture of the company that Shi is part of. All of the artists, she said, are focused on improving every day, every moment.

Truth Through Art

Shi says that her first encounter with Shen Yun was an interesting one. Someone had come to her place of study in Taiwan to give a presentation about classical Chinese dance and Shen Yun. And through that, Shi and her mother (a teacher at Shi's place of study at the time) learned about a study center in Taiwan that focused on the arts with a specialization in classical Chinese dance.

During that first encounter, Shi also learned about Falun Gong.

It's a spiritual practice that includes self-cultivation and following the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance, as well as offering meditation exercises. People around the world today know about the practice from hearing news that it has been persecuted by the communist regime in China since 1999.

Many of the artists with Shen Yun practice Falun Gong themselves, and there is sometimes a storytelling dance set in modern-day

Between the Stage and the Audience

Being part of the company is unlike anything else, Shi said. Where else do you get to tour around the entire globe every season, bringing something so beautiful to millions?

“You get to see so many different cultures, and it's very different, seeing every country and seeing different peoples,” Shi said. The cultures can be very different, she explained. Sometimes people clap and cheer when something especially dazzling happens on stage. Sometimes it's considered rude to do so, but the audiences are still ever warm and excited. She is always grateful to hear how inspired and uplifted the audience members are, and it's become clear that Shen Yun is much more than entertainment.

“It's a cultural learning event as well,” Shi said. Just as she learns about new cultures in every new city she visits, the audiences are getting acquainted with traditional Chinese culture, the beauty of classical Chinese dance, and the truth about China's past and present.

And if seeing the beautiful dances and thrilling flips makes you want to try your hand at learning it, just as Shi once did, Shi wholeheartedly encourages the effort. “Why not give it a try!” she said.

ens. He slept in a wine cask and would eat, drink, and defecate on the street, with no care to conceal any of his body's natural functions.

Although some of his actions may have appeared odd, the cynic's aim was to improve people's lives and align them with reason, nature, and virtue.

The cynics also valued freedom of speech. For example, as they believed in reason, they publicly spoke against theories or thoughts that had no rational basis.

Famous Anecdotes About Diogenes

On hearing a fool tune a harp, Diogenes said, “Are you not ashamed to give this wood concordant sounds, while you fail to harmonize your soul with your life?”

One day Diogenes saw a boy cup his hands to take a drink of water from the river and exclaimed, “He teaches me that I preserve an unnecessary utensil,” and he tossed away the only utensil he owned, a shell he used as a cup.

While sunbathing in Craenum, Diogenes was approached by Alexander the Great, the most powerful man in the Western world, who stood in front of him and said, “Ask me any boon you want.” Diogenes replied, “Stand out of my light.” When Alexander declared he was the king, Diogenes said, “I am Diogenes the cynic,” which means “Diogenes the Dog.”

“If I were not Alexander, I would wish to be Diogenes,” Alexander the Great said. As here was Diogenes, who lived true to his beliefs and who needed nothing and no one, perhaps Alexander, for the first time, saw true power.

Elsie Shi won the gold award at the 2016 NTD International Classical Chinese Dance Competition.



TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Diogenes of Sinope, the Dogged Cynic

LORRAINE FERRIER

The great ancient Greek philosopher Socrates (470–399 B.C.) believed that self-sufficiency is the key to a good life. And that the good life is dependent on our virtue, which is well within our control.

Socrates's friend Antisthenes (455–365 B.C.) founded the philosophy of cynicism based on freedom as well as Socrates's ideal of self-sufficiency, and on the belief that these can be realized under the rigors of toil and hardship.

Diogenes (404–323 B.C.), who put the philosophy into practice, said that the only way we can be truly self-sufficient and free is by understanding our true human nature, which he believed was at odds with human society. Therefore, to understand ourselves, we should remove all unnecessary trappings and unnatural desires instilled in us by society.

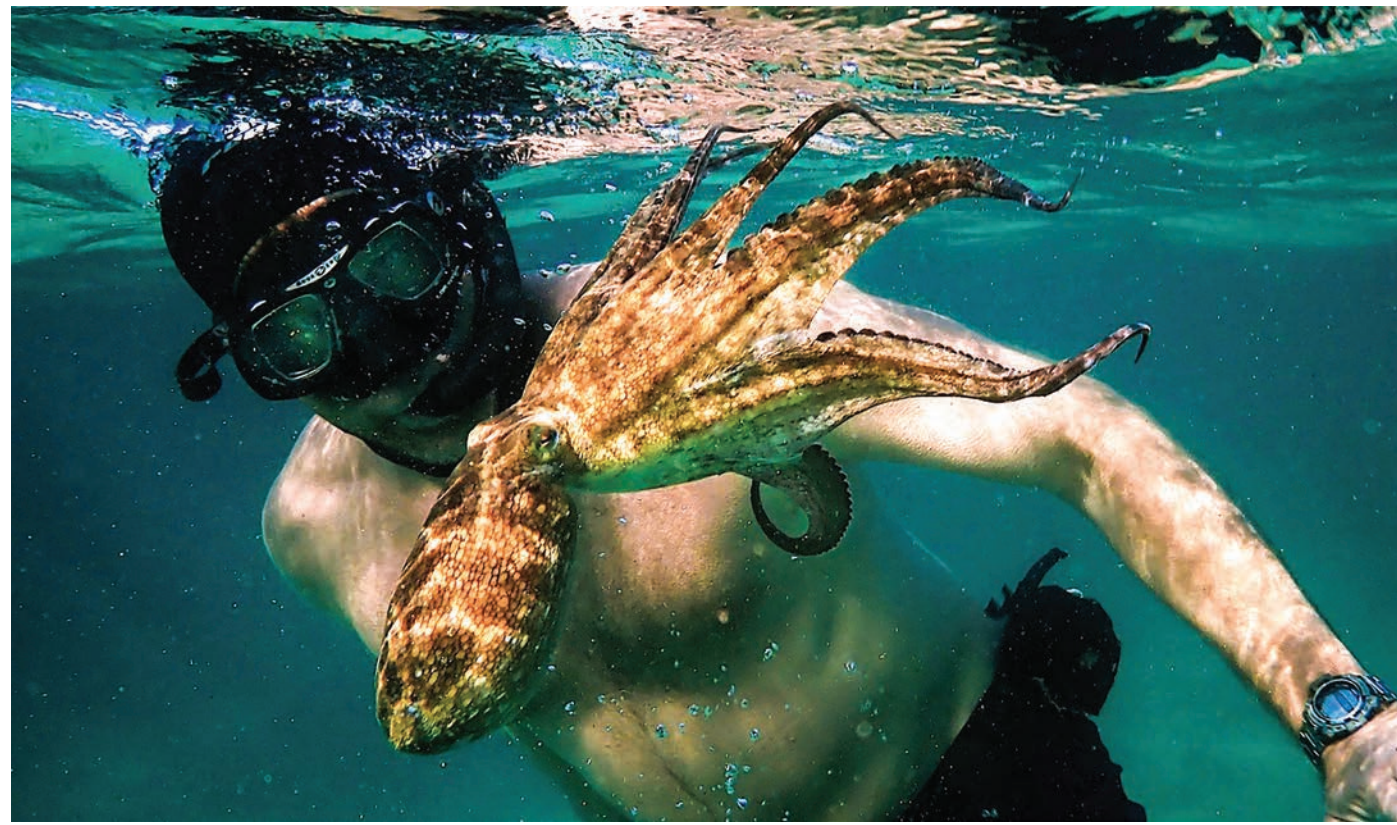
The root of the word “cynic” comes from the Greek word “kunikos” meaning dog-like. Theories differ on exactly how and why the cynics used this word for their way of life. Some say it's because the dog is shameless. It was certainly a description Diogenes embraced for his behavior.

Diogenes lived a simple life outside of social customs and etiquette on the streets of Ath-



“Diogenes,” 1685–1734, by Andrea Procaccini after Carlo Maratti. Etching; 20 1/16 inches by 14 5/8 inches. The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1951.

Diogenes lived a simple life outside of social customs and etiquette on the streets of Athens.



(Left) Interspecies friendship of the aquatic kind: filmmaker Craig Foster and his teacher in “My Octopus Teacher.” (Top right) Filmmaker Craig Foster renews his spirit with this project. (Bottom right) The octopus lives in a kelp forest off the coast of South Africa.



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.

A Love Letter to the Perfection of Nature

MARK JACKSON

I have intense arachnophobia—I hate anything that's got eight, fast-moving legs. This fear used to extend to the similarly eight-legged octopus. Then, one day my brother brought home some octopus sushi and ate it. I forced myself to try a piece. Tasty! My horror of the octopus family instantaneously evaporated. I began to find octopi fascinating, hilarious, and adorable. Thanks to the stunningly beautiful documentary “My Octopus Teacher,” I now love them.

What's become apparent via a myriad social media posts is that the vast majority of animals enjoy a good animal-human cuddle. My favorite is a leopard enjoying a head-scratch, using its giant paws to maneuver its hooman's hand. “More scratches on this spot here please,” all the while emitting industrial-strength purring, like an idling Camaro.

What this film reveals is that a wild octopus (which is a mollusk, basically a shell-less snail) is unbelievably intelligent, and also likes a good human-cephalopod cuddle. Which makes you wonder whether there isn't something to the Buddhist concept that many animals are really incarnated human spirits who got shunted down a few levels due to an overabundance of karma.

Healing Via Octopus

Told from South African filmmaker Craig Foster's perspective, “My Octopus Teacher” is about his transformative relationship with a common octopus that he discovered living in a little rock cave near the beach bungalow where his family stayed when he was a child. Foster had spent countless hours playing in the nearby tide pools and diving in the shallow kelp forests that are home to a vast array of marine flora and fauna.

This is the first documentary to chronicle almost the entire lifespan of a solitary

“My Octopus Teacher”

Director
Pippa Ehrlich, James Reed

Starring
Craig Foster (a filmmaker), his son, and his octopus friend

Rated
Documentary

Running Time
1 hour, 25 minutes

Release Date
Sept. 7, 2020

★★★★★

Craig Foster and film directors navigate a kelp forest.



(Left) The octopus in a twirly mood. (Right) Filmmaker Craig Foster shakes hands with his octopus friend.

ocean-dwelling animal, and in so doing, describes the storyteller's personal healing (due to that animal) as well as showcases animal behaviors previously unknown to even marine biologists.

The story kicks off in an area off South Africa's Western Cape. The ocean is primal and powerful there, but the otherwise dangerous currents are thwarted by a thick kelp forest that creates a relatively calm sanctuary. The water however, is freezing—below 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

It's this rare, challenging world that Foster hopes will cure his midlife crisis. He outdoes Navy SEALs by free-diving and snorkeling in swim trunks, without the use of a rubber wetsuit or scuba breathing apparatus. As he says, one eventually comes to crave the invigorating cold, which “upgrades the brain.” He also doesn't want to disturb the environment or impose his presence in any way.

Foster explains that he turned to diving, one of his main childhood joys, when he came to this crossroads. He'd burned himself out as a filmmaker—physically, emotionally, and mentally—and was unsure of his next step in life. He had nothing left to give in art or in his human relations.

The desire to heal himself, in order to be a strong presence in his son Tom's life, led him to this drastic measure of what archetypally is an extended, underwater, oceanic version of a vision quest.

A vision quest was the boyhood-to-manhood rite of passage for most Native American tribes. It's four days and four nights in a 10-foot circle, with no food. For modern folks, that's also no phone, no computer, no books, no writing utensils, no tent, and no people around. Uncomfortability and deprivation are paramount. In the silence, nature teaches the quester.

Man Meets Mollusk

In one of his early forays, Foster sees a strange-looking cluster of shells sitting on the sand. As he observes, suddenly—poof!—an octopus, which had been using all of its 2,000 suction cups to hold all those mini-shields in place around its body, drops them all at once and explodes away in search of another hiding place. Who knew an octopus could do such a high-intelligence thing?

Foster's interest quickly grows—so many fascinating mysteries to learn about, so little time. He decides to visit this kelp sanctuary, and in particular this one little rubbery, shape-shifting, color-changing denizen, on a daily basis.

Soon, Foster's inspired to pick up his camera again and start filming, and the resulting footage in turn inspires directors Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed, as well as his buddy and cinematographer Roger Horrocks, to eventually get in on the action for a year and a half, resulting in this wondrous tale.

Early on, Foster fumbles and drops his camera, which scares the daylight out of the octopus; it flees and disappears. Luckily, Foster had spent time in his youth around Kalahari tribesmen master trackers and is able to track the barely noticeable, telltale signs of octopus activity, tiny remnants of crab meals and such, to find

it again—living in a new cave.

E.T.

There's more than a little resemblance between the octopus and Spielberg's “E.T.,” as they are both brownish and a bit homey. But discoveries and surprises abound, such as the myriad of shapes and colors the octopus can morph into for camouflage. It can produce tiny hornlike spires on top of its eyes, as well as twirl its legs into little ornamental spires.

There's octopus crab-hunting, and octopus-on-land escapes from sharks. There's the at first incomprehensible flinging up of the arms at schools of fish. What is that? That's an octopus playing with fish is what that is. There's a learning curve we get to observe as the octopus figures out how best to trap tricky-to-catch lobsters.

There's also nail-biting drama as an encroaching pyjama shark (so named because of its stripes) causes the octopus to pull its seashell-shield move, which almost works, but which then calls for a subsequent kung fu move of maneuvering up on top of the shark's back and rodeo-riding around up there, undetected. You can almost hear the shark going, “Where'd that sneaky piece of lunch disappear to?” while wearing an octopus on its head.

Of course, instances such as the above-described scenario are due to tinkered-with, re-created action, enhanced and somewhat emotionally dictated by the movie's musical score. The glass-half-empty take would be that this is artificial and manipulative; the glass-half-full take is that it's dynamic storytelling.

Simply Amazing

The octopus's level of intelligence is a revelation. Its abilities for camouflage and survival are nothing short of amazing, and its trust in Foster—especially when it reaches out a little tentacle to gently touch his face—may make you tear up.

The hypnotic imagery of this ecosystem is enchanting, especially the shots looking up from the sandy ocean floor, past the tall silhouettes of treelike kelp, to the eternally rippling surface, which looks like the Milky Way in motion.

Foster's specific reasons for feeling personally and professionally lost are left somewhat unclear, and therefore we're also left a bit clueless as to how his close encounter of the octopus kind specifically changed his emotional, psychological, spiritual, and familial circumstances, other than he felt less self-involved and more able to put others' needs first.

But it matters little. “My Octopus Teacher” is a reminder of how ridiculous it is for humans to be bandying about concepts of inhabiting Mars when we know so little about the miracles of life right under our noses. Especially using the long outdated and flawed-from-the-start Origin of Species theory, and our self-involved notions of how high the human rung on that cockamamie evolutionary ladder sits.

Most of all, “My Octopus Teacher” is a crazy, octopus-appreciation 101, love letter to the perfection of nature, so mind-blowing that it leapfrogs all Darwinian foolishness and points straight to the Creator.

FILM

'Dangerous' and 'Jezebel': Bette Davis's 2 Oscars in the 1930s

TIFFANY BRANNAN

Bette Davis became one of the most respected actresses in Hollywood during the 1930s, largely because she rarely played average heroines. Do the characters she created continue to challenge our expectations today?

People who love 1930s cinema are familiar with the Pre-Code Era, which is roughly categorized as 1930–1934. These first few years of talking pictures have acquired a cult following in the 21st century because of their daring violence, flagrant immorality, and shockingly risqué.

Then the lawless fun came to a screeching halt in July of 1934, when the Motion Picture Production Code began to be effectively enforced by Joseph I. Breen and the newly formed Production Code Administration.

The loss that people mourn the most regarding the demise of pre-Code freedom is strong female characters. They resent how the complex female characters who challenged moral boundaries on the pre-Code screen were replaced by strictly traditional female roles under the Code.

However, Bette Davis characters challenge this misconception. In the 1930s, Miss Davis was nominated for four Academy Awards for Best Actress, winning for "Dangerous" (1935) and "Jezebel" (1938).

Bette Davis in a promotional still for the 1938 film "Jezebel."

'Dangerous' is set in modern times in 1930s New York, while 'Jezebel' is set almost a century earlier, in 1850s Louisiana.

(Left) A lobby card for the 1935 film "Dangerous," featuring Bette Davis and Franchot Tone.

(Below left) Bette Davis in a 1940s publicity photo.

(Below) In "Dangerous," Joyce Heath (Bette Davis) is an alcoholic actress who goes on the wagon when young architect Don Bellows (Franchot Tone) believes in her.



Her roles in these films are not only testaments to her amazing talent but also proof against misconceptions about the depictions of womanhood in Code films.

A Dangerous Jezebel

At first glance, one might think that "Dangerous" and "Jezebel" bear no similarities besides being Warner Bros. pictures starring Bette Davis. After all, "Dangerous" is set in modern times in 1930s New York, while "Jezebel" is set almost a century earlier, in 1850s Louisiana.

Furthermore, when the films begin, Davis's characters are in very different circumstances. Joyce Heath in "Dangerous" is an alcoholic, has-been actress who has been left destitute and depressed after a series of unlucky incidents have branded her a jinx. Julie Marsden in "Jezebel" is a proud Southern belle of position and means, who lives with her Aunt Belle (Fay Bainter) but follows no rules except her own reckless will.

However, upon closer examination, the characters reveal how similar they truly are. Both harbor deep affection for their respective leading male characters,

but they are selfish and arrogant in their pursuit of love. Their unfeminine way of handling the men in their lives prevents either of them from living happily ever after in the usual sense.

Not Your Average Heroine

Bette Davis rarely played meek, subservient women. She sometimes played very feminine, kind, and traditional ladies, but her characters were never one-dimensional love interests for male co-stars. Hailed as one of Hollywood's most talented performers, she was valued for her acting prowess above her appearance. Since she often played films' central characters, she received top billing above her leading men. That was because she played characters who were very complex, multifaceted, and sometimes even sinister.

The only thing they were not—as pre-Code female characters were—is obviously unethical or loose in their morals. If they were, like all characters in Code films, they were punished for their sins.

Davis's two Oscar-winning roles are very complex. Both women present many characteristics and natures throughout



Bette Davis in a scene from "Jezebel."



Fay Bainter (L) and Bette Davis with their Oscars for, respectively, supporting and lead roles in "Jezebel."

In the 1930s, Miss Davis was nominated for four Academy Awards for Best Actress, winning for 'Dangerous' (1935) and 'Jezebel' (1938).

are completely trusting and understanding toward her leading men's characters. Gail encourages Don to break their engagement because of his fascination for another woman, knowing he would still think of Joyce even if he married Gail. Similarly, Amy endeavors to be friendly to everyone staying at Julie's plantation, including the jealous and vindictive hostess herself, despite the guests' hostile feelings toward Yankees.

Both Gail and Amy display the feminine virtues of yielding their own self-wills and personal desires for the ultimate good of the men they love. Rather than selfishly trying to possess Don and Preston, Gail and Amy relinquish them to Joyce and Julie. It is only by giving them up for their own good that these ladies win the man's heart and hand in the end.

In both these films, Davis's characters realize that they must be feminine and gentle, but only after it is too late. In "Dangerous," Joyce responds to Don's compassionate concern for her, allowing him to lead her to orchestrate a successful comeback on the stage. However, she remains elusive in setting a date for their wedding, since she hasn't told him that she is still married to another man, Gordon (John Eldredge). When her husband refuses to give her a divorce, she decides to destroy them both if she can't have her way, even though it will ruin Don.

In "Jezebel," Julie humbles herself before Preston when he returns from the North, only to realize that he has already married another woman. Refusing to admit her defeat, she steers the conversation toward hostility between the North and South to make Preston feel disloyal because of his Northern bride and sympathies. She pits him against her other admirer, Buck (George Brent), provoking them toward the possibility of a deadly duel, since she doesn't care whom she hurts in her selfish pursuits.

The True Prize

These two characters, actress Joyce Heath and Southern belle Julie Marsden, are comparable in terms of their natures as well as events in their respective films. In both movies, Margaret Lindsay plays the virtuous wife of the leading man, to whom Bette Davis's character loses out.

It is easy to see why Joyce and Julie do not earn the hands of the men they love. Although selfish, manipulative women could successfully control and destroy men, they never won happy endings in Code films. However, the dramatic acting required to create such characters could win Academy Awards.

Although Joyce and Julie seem irredeemable, their own folly ultimately leads them to redemption and the possibility of future happiness, although not with Don or Preston. Both women realize that their own selfishness and disregard for others has led them to destroy lives, including their own. They also realize that the only way to redeem themselves is by doing something to help the men they loved and lost, even though they are happily married to other women.

Both women renounce their selfish lifestyles, admitting that they are not as feminine as their rivals, who display gentleness, bravery, generosity, and nobility of spirit. Even though Joyce and Julie lose their men, Bette Davis won her Oscars.

Tiffany Brannan is a 19-year-old opera singer, Hollywood history/vintage beauty copywriter, travel writer, film blogger, and ballet writer. In 2016, she and her sister founded the Pure Entertainment Preservation Society, an organization dedicated to reforming the Motion Picture Production Code.

the stories, transforming physically as well as emotionally. Joyce Heath is an alcoholic actress who goes on the wagon when young architect Don Bellows (Franchot Tone) believes in her talent.

Later, angry that Don's attempts to help her are motivated by pity, Joyce decides to get even with him by capturing his heart and then humiliating him. However, her plan backfires when she finds herself truly falling for him.

Julie is a Southern woman of means who scandalizes antebellum New Orleans by barging into the exclusively male bank. When her fiancé, young banker Preston Dillard (Henry Fonda), scolds her, she defies him and societal standards by wearing red to an important ball, instead of the obligatory white for unmarried women.

Yet the joke is on her when Preston forces her to accept the humiliating results of her decision and then leaves her. Julie and Joyce both experience traumatic experiences before ultimately changing toward the end of their subsequent stories.

The More Feminine Woman

Most movies provide satisfying conclusions

by having the leading man and leading lady live happily ever after together. However, "Dangerous" and "Jezebel" challenge that formula by having the leading man marry a second woman partway through the film.

Ironically, Margaret Lindsay is the other woman in both films. How does the supporting actress's characters beat Bette Davis's for the men in these stories? While Joyce and Julie are hot-headed, rebellious, and manipulative, Lindsay's characters display feminine virtues.

Gail (Lindsay) in "Dangerous" is engaged to Don before he meets Joyce. When he falls under Joyce's spell, Gail kindly releases him from the betrothal, patiently believing that he'll return someday. In "Jezebel," Preston meets and marries Amy (Lindsay) after he leaves Julie. When he brings his Northern bride back to Louisiana, she is friendly, kind, and patient despite the hostility of her new husband's friends.

Like Bette Davis's two roles, Margaret Lindsay's characters in these films display very similar characteristics. Instead of reacting with possessiveness, harshness, and hostility, Lindsay's characters

MUSIC

Joyce DiDonato's Attempt at Schubert's 'Winterreise'

RAYMOND BEEGLE

On April 23, Erato, a sister company of Time Warner, released the video of a live performance of Schubert's "Winterreise," which took place on Dec. 15, 2019, at Carnegie Hall. The brilliant mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, accompanied by Yannick Nézet-Séguin, music director of The Metropolitan Opera, drew a capacity audience that included the writer of this article.

A Simple and a Complicated Affair

The first performance of "Winterreise" was a very simple affair. A few of Schubert's friends gathered, just weeks before his death, to hear him play and sing the yet unfinished cycle. "Simple," in the sense of "unadorned" or "sincere," is a key element of Schubert's works and strikes at the heart of his genius.

Two current celebrities sang and played the same notes 192 years later, but it was far from a simple affair. Of course, complications are sometimes unavoidable. For example, an English-speaking audience necessitated a large metal and glass appa-



ratus suspended above the stage, flashing translations of Wilhelm Müller's text.

Avoidable, however, was the reading not by the audience but by the artist that afternoon. As the public gazed at the suspended screen, the singer's eyes were fixed on a copy of the vocal score, leaving little hope that the mysterious union between poet, composer, performer, and listener would take place.

"Winterreise" was released on April 23.

Two current celebrities sang and played the same notes 192 years later, but it was far from a simple affair.

Other complications appeared. The first words flashed on the screen were not the words of Wilhelm Müller, but of an unidentified author who had penned "His journal arrived today." While the first notes of the cycle were sounded, the mind was distracted in wondering about the "journal." Who sent it? Was it a notebook in which poems appeared, or were these rhyming stanzas supposed to represent the journal itself?

Then there was the realization that Joyce DiDonato was not playing the role of the protagonist, but representing an entirely new character. Who is this new character, this lady in an elegant Biedermeier dress? She is in mourning, one gathers, as she wears black and sits by a little table covered in black pall.

She seems to be a person of standing, considering her magnificent attire. But is she the mother of the young journeyman, or perhaps his sister? No, he was of humble stock. Is she the woman who rejected him? No, she is clearly no young maid.

In the meantime, "Gute Nacht" had come and gone, and one observed the lady, now



Mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, accompanied by Yannick Nézet-Séguin, singing Schubert's "Winterreise."

sitting, now standing, reading the newly arrived journal. But how many times had she read it? During the well-known "Der Lindenbaum," she presses the book to her breast and sings as if the lines had been read more than once. At other times, when, as in "Rückblick," syllables and notes came

flying at a furious pace, her eyes were riveted to the page.

A Suspicious Affair

The idea of an additional character, a person in mourning for Müller's young journeyman, reading his poems as from a jour-

nal, is an ingenious one, giving the text a fresh new tone and making it reasonable that a woman rather than a man is singing the lines. But could this novel idea possibly be an elaborate means of disguising the fact that the artist had not done her homework, did not know her assignment well enough to recite it from memory?

Notwithstanding the artistry of Joyce DiDonato—her beautiful voice, her graceful phrasing, her intelligence and dramatic skill—there was an impression that she was sometimes close to sight-reading, that her lessons were only half learned, that her voice had not yet settled comfortably into the contours of the musical line, and that the emotions she professed were slightly postured.

The pianist, as well, notwithstanding his formidable musical mind and disciplined fingers, seemed not to have practiced the various technical passages proficiently: The leaves of the old "Der Lindenbaum" rustled with the greatest circumspection, the triplets in "Der stürmische Morgen" were murky, and the solo passages in "Mut" were insufficiently articulated.

Still, this was no thoughtless performance. It is no easy task to provide a compelling dramatic shape for this relentless hour-long litany of despair and dashed hopes, but intelligent and intuitive solutions had been found. For example, the

three pieces just before "Der Leiermann" were sung as a single unit, without pause, giving the cycle a slight thrust forward at just the right moment. The long silence that followed gave the 24th and final song remarkable emotional power. It is, after all, an epilogue, a resolution. Music appears: the great comforter.

Considering the gifts of both singer and pianist, even a first reading would reveal some of the majesty of this work. However, Erato, by releasing this performance, is endorsing the sale of bread prematurely taken out of the oven by two overly busy bakers. Joyce DiDonato and Yannick Nézet-Séguin are among the finest we have, but Schubert, great Schubert, demands more respect and more complete preparation.

Raymond Beegle has performed as a collaborative pianist in the major concert halls of the United States, Europe, and South America; has written for The Opera Quarterly, Classical Voice, Fanfare Magazine, Classic Record Collector (UK), and the New York Observer. Beegle has served on the faculty of The State University of New York-Stony Brook, The Music Academy of the West, and The American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. He has taught in the chamber music division of The Manhattan School of Music for the past 28 years.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

Modern Culture Invites Us to Take the Easy Way

IAN KANE

In the United States, we seem to have a renewed sense of hope—a light at the end of the tunnel after the recent turbulence of dark and dreary days. But many tend to forget that we've been through some challenging times before, at least in first-world terms, such as The Great Recession of 2007–2009.

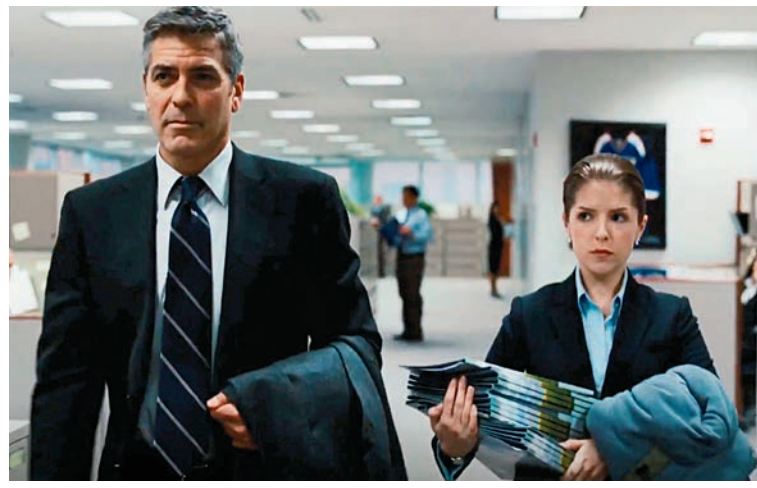
"Up in the Air," a film that was produced during that period of time, gives us a glimpse into one aspect of that world: corporate downsizing. Here, it is a consulting firm specializing in termination that is hired by company managers who lack the intestinal fortitude to fire their own employees. The film follows one of the firm's consultants, Ryan Bingham (George Clooney), as he travels via commercial airlines to handle his downsizing duties.

The film opens with scenes of Ryan boarding and disembarking from various planes, with some zippy quick-cuts of him packing and unpacking his trusty rolling luggage bag in an orderly fashion. In fact, we glean early on that his life is now routine, to mitigate the chaotic world of round-the-clock air travel.

While hanging out in a ubiquitous-looking hotel bar one evening, Ryan comes across a woman named Alex (Vera Farmiga). Both travel a lot for work. The two instantly hit it off and are soon drinking together and comparing their multitudinous travel credit cards. This begins a casual relationship in which they hook up whenever their busy schedules (and distance) permit.

Suddenly, Ryan's boss, Craig Gregory (Jason Bateman), recalls him to their headquarters located in Omaha, Nebraska. A young up-and-comer, Natalie Keener (Anna Kendrick), has convinced Craig that she can help their firm cut fat from its own budget—starting with what she describes as bloated travel allowances for employees.

Since Ryan likes to be on the move constantly, Natalie's proposal to cut back on employee travel upsets his entire life. Due to work, his traveling has allowed him to see different women, but outside of work, he doesn't



(Left) Ryan Bingham (George Clooney) is disconnected from his home life, and Natalie Keener (Anna Kendrick) is disconnected from those in her work life, in "Up in the Air." (Right) Bingham flies from one place to another, without an emotional home.

really have much of a social life. Besides an estranged relationship with his family, he has no one to rely on, and he's OK with that.

To make matters worse, Craig pairs up Natalie with Ryan so that he can train her. Natalie is a number-cruncher, and Ryan is more of a finesse type of person, so the two settle into an uneasy trainer-trainee relationship as they travel to separate people from their jobs.

We often take the easy way out when relating to others.

During one round of terminations, Craig rolls out Natalie's remote process to terminate employees and wants her to be the first to execute it. As Natalie sits in front of a computer screen, she commences to fire a man who had been working with a company for many years. As she struggles through it, the man can be seen through a frosted glass window sitting in the next room, much to Ryan's astonishment. Ryan prefers these dismissals to be personal, not artificial and distant.

Later, ironically, Natalie's boyfriend

breaks up with her via a cellphone text message. She's distraught, and Ryan and Alex (who had been trying to hook up at a hotel), instead attempt to console her. But later, after Alex leaves, Natalie chastises Ryan for not pursuing a more serious relationship with Alex, and Ryan fires back by criticizing how clinical and cold Natalie's termination methods are.

As much as Ryan is comfortable with the way things are, he suddenly has an epiphanal moment and abandons Natalie on their return trip to Omaha. His new destination—Chicago. He suddenly realizes that he wants to give a more substantial relationship with Alex a shot.

But will she see eye to eye with his new perspective?

A Disconnected Culture

I don't think I've ever seen Clooney give a bad performance and he doesn't disappoint here, but there's only so much you can do with a questionable script. The film's melodramatic narrative makes some parts feel like a glorified soap opera. However, it does manage to convey the turmoil that people were going through during The Great Recession fairly effectively.

And the film does reveal that in our fast-paced, technological culture, we often take the easy way out when relating to other hu-

man beings—some cheapen love relationships, some do that to work relationships—but the film doesn't go deeply enough into either.

Or it could be that our culture's problems feel trivial to me. Even though this film's main characters wax philosophic about marriage, modernization, and what it means to settle down, in my recent review of "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind," where people are dealing with much more immediate concerns such as basic survival (food, water, and shelter), I learned something. Things could be much worse than the first-world, existential dilemmas we see in "Up in the Air."

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

'Up in the Air'

Director
Jason Reitman

Starring
George Clooney, Vera Farmiga, Anna Kendrick

Running Time
1 hour, 49 minutes

Rated
R

Release Date
Dec. 23, 2009 (USA)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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