

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

COURTESY OF CODY SWANSON



American sculptor Cody Swanson stands next to his sculpture of Saint John. The sculpture is one of the Four Evangelists he's creating in clay, in preparation for it to be cast in plaster for the Chapel of the Holy Cross, Jesuit High School, Tampa, Fla.

## SACRED ART

# Serving God, Sculpture by Sculpture

The sacred art of Florence-based American sculptor Cody Swanson

## LORRAINE FERRIER

Some 18 years ago, Minnesota-born Cody Swanson arrived in Italy on a two-way ticket as a fresh-faced 18-year-old keen to discover more about traditional art. That he did. But his trip wasn't quite what he had envisioned. He's lived in Italy ever since, having never used his return flight.

Swanson settled in Florence, where he learned sculpture at The Florence Academy of Art. While there, he fell in love with the city—and a fellow student, whom he later married.

His Roman Catholic faith and family are most important to Swanson (the couple have five children), and his wife is one of a number of artists who help him in his studio, he said in a telephone interview.

After he graduated, Swanson taught at The Florence Academy of Art and also at the Sacred Art School in Florence, which focuses exclusively on serving the Catholic Church.

Now, Swanson concentrates solely on creating sublime sacred art in clay, bronze, marble, and plaster in his private studio. With each and every one of his sculptures, he has one aim: to serve God. To that end, he sincerely hopes that each sculpture brings people closer to God.

His sculptures in Europe can be found in Florence, Madrid, Rome, and London, to name a few cities. Among his major works in Italy are a silver processional cross for the Florence Cathedral and a 13-foot sculpture of St. Emygdios for Foligno Cathedral in the Umbria region of central Italy.

*Continued on Page 4*





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TRADITIONAL CULTURE

# Still Under Siege

## Armenians and the Churches of Nagorno-Karabakh

JEFF MINICK

In 1965, I was an eighth grader at Virginia's Staunton Military Academy, a school now long defunct.

One day a classmate, Thomas A., told me the story of his Armenian grandmother, how some Turkish troops had entered her village, how she had hidden away either in a cellar or under a bed (that detail has vanished from my memory) while neighbors and family members were either shot or bayoneted, and how she and a few others had escaped and eventually made their way to the United States.

I was too young and ignorant at the time to understand that Thomas was relating to me a detail of the Armenian genocide, when in World War I and afterward the Ottoman Empire murdered around 1.5 million Armenians. The reasons behind this genocide were both religious—the Turks were Muslims, the Armenians Christians—and political. In the latter case, the Turks feared that the Armenians might attempt to rebel against the empire as had some of its other subject peoples. By means of mass executions, death marches, and forced emigration, the Turks obliterated their Armenian subjects.

They also erased Armenian culture. Several thousand churches, schools, and libraries were destroyed—either leveled to the ground or converted to some extraneous use. The remains of the ancient monastery of Varagavank, for example, are now used as a shed for fodder for domestic animals.

And this destruction continues today.

A Brief History

In late June, the Museum of the Bible, an outfit with 430,000 square feet of exhibits and various collections in Washington, D.C., began featuring a virtual exhibition titled Ancient Faith: The Churches of Nagorno-Karabakh. Here we learn that Armenians have long claimed that two apostles of Jesus—Bartholomew and Jude Thaddeus—were the first to introduce Christianity in this region. The people fervently embraced this new religion, and in A.D. 301, Armenia under the rule of King Tiridates the Great became the first country to adopt Christianity as its state religion.

Over the next millennia, Armenians built thousands of churches, monasteries, schools, and scriptoria, which produced beautiful illuminated manuscripts. Sacred sites and khachkars, or “cross stones,” dotted the cities and the countryside.

Because Armenia was a crossroads between Europe and Asia, the land suffered from wars and invasions, with the most significant being the Muslim conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries. Even then, the

Armenians managed to practice their faith, surviving all of these assaults on their traditions.

Then the 20th century arrived.

The Slate Wiped Clean

From 1915 to 1922, the Armenian genocide and the destruction of many buildings and artifacts wiped out much of Armenian culture and religious practices. Later, in those areas under the thumb of the Soviet Union, authorities clamped down on Armenian Christianity, imprisoned some priests, and closed many of the remaining churches, allowing them to fall into disrepair.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought new conflicts to the region. The Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh held a referendum and declared that tiny country an independent state, breaking away from Azerbaijan. A bloody war ensued, leaving the Armenians in control of the region and holding parts of Azerbaijan. In 2020, war again erupted between the two countries, which resulted in the Azeris controlling about half of the Karabakh territory.

As the team of scholars who contributed to “Ancient Faith: The Churches of Nagorno-Karabakh” point out, this conflict has brought additional destruction of churches, monasteries, and religious shrines, with the Azeris apparently intent on eradicating all signs of Armenian culture. Holy Savior Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, for instance, though meaningless as a military target, was heavily damaged by missiles fired by the Azeris, as was Tigranakert, a city dating back to the Hellenistic period, where the ancient ruins were also targeted.

Meanwhile, in Azerbaijan itself, from 1997 to 2006, exhibition researchers have “documented the destruction of 89 medieval churches, 5,840 cross stones, and 22,000 tombstones. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, using satellite images to track the destruction of the sites, showed the phased disappearance of Christian monuments in the Djulf cemetery of Nakhchivan.”

Worthwhile Visits

When we take the virtual tour offered by the Museum of the Bible, looking at these buildings, many of them now tumble-down and broken by the ravages of time and war, we may experience several emotions: a wonder rising from the beauty of these structures and those long-departed men and women who gave their treasure and toil to create them, a sadness that the violence and turmoil of the last century has damaged or even eliminated them entirely, and anger that some people intend to continue this destruction.

If we open the link to the ancient monastery and cathedral at Dadi-



Khachkars of Noratus, an old cemetery. The oldest khachkars (Armenian cross stones) are from the ninth and tenth centuries, but most of them are from the 13th to the 17th centuries.

vank, for example, we find ourselves visiting a church “believed to have been founded at the end of the first century.” Here in the main church are frescoes from the 13th century, intricately carved khachkars in the bell tower that left me wondering how anyone ever crafted such marvels, and beautiful illuminated pages from the Bible. During your visit here, be sure to watch the video of the teenagers producing 3D images of the monastery.

Or take in the village of Tsar, “once home to a fortress, a vaulted cathedral, churches, cemeteries, and a medieval bridge.” Over time, vandals damaged many of these monuments. During the Soviet period, stones from some churches and headstones from graveyards were stripped for use in new buildings, including a school in which many of the tombstones embedded in the walls can still be read.

Our tour of the cathedral of Ghazanchetsots introduces us to a newer building, once a gem in the city until the bombing two years ago. The accompanying video gives us an introduction to the beauty of the land, but, even more, grants us a glimpse of the culture when we meet a young couple married in the cathedral just days after missiles hit the church. In the words and faces of the bride and groom, we find the tenacity that has so long sustained the Armenians through their many ordeals.

A Cultural Impoverishment

Human beings have a long history of iconoclasm, the destruction for political or religious reasons of monuments, libraries, houses of worship, statues, and shrines. The loss of the ancient library of Alexandria with its tens of thousands of scrolls, the sack of Constantinople in 1204 by the Crusaders and later by the Muslims in 1453, the attacks on artwork and statues during the time of the Protestant Reformation: These and many other assaults in the past have left our culture poorer.

Modernity has also wreaked havoc on art and culture. The Nazi book burnings, the Soviet Union's destruction of churches, Mao's Cultural Revolution in which the communists tried to sweep away all evidence of China's



PUBLIC DOMAIN



MARTIN TRABALK/SHUTTERSTOCK

past, the Khmer Rouge's wholesale attempt at demolishing ancient Cambodian arts: Modern totalitarianism is as capable of inflicting cultural ruin as any ancient warlord. Even in the United States, the last few years have seen statues of those we once regarded as heroes toppled or removed from the public square.

The rage behind some of this desecration is understandable. During the American Revolution, for example, New Yorkers tore down a statue of George III. And during the collapse of the Soviet Union, mobs tore down statues of Stalin.

But when some indulge in cultural genocide, seeking to wipe out an entire culture, they are destroying not just that culture but also a part of humanity's historical record, its great art, its books, and even its music.

Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church, recently issued this plea to the world: “I pray that the world will awaken to this call, standing up to protect this small piece of land and its significant contribution to universal human culture.” Agreed.

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

(Above) The ruins of Dadivank Monastery in the Kalbajar District of Azerbaijan.

(Above right) Ghazanchetsots Cathedral, a cathedral in the city of Shushi in Nagorno-Karabakh.

(Right) A beautiful “khachkar” or “cross stone” in Gyumri, Armenia.

**The destruction of many buildings and artifacts wiped out much of Arminian culture and religious practices.**



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“Saint Matthew,” one of the Four Evangelists, 2021, by Cody Swanson. Clay in progress. Chapel of the Holy Cross, Jesuit High School, Tampa, Fla.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF CODY SWANSON



“Saint Mark,” one of the Four Evangelists, 2021, by Cody Swanson. Clay in progress. Chapel of the Holy Cross, Jesuit High School, Tampa, Fla.



“Saint Luke,” one of the Four Evangelists, 2021, by Cody Swanson. Plaster. Chapel of the Holy Cross, Jesuit High School, Tampa, Fla.



SACRED ART

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The sacred art of Florence-based American sculptor Cody Swanson

“Saint Emygdus Baptizing Polisia,” 2012, by Cody Swanson. Plaster. Saint Felician, Cathedral of Foligno, Italy.



Continued from Page 1

In America, his work can be found in the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; the Cathedral of St. Paul in Minneapolis; and the Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians at Holy Hill, Wisconsin.

**A Classical Art Training Quest**

Swanson grew up on Maui, Hawaii, where his father worked as a pilot. In high school, he became interested in the Renaissance and also classical French academic art, that is, realist art defined by the traditions established by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

Keen to become a professional artist, Swanson first began drawing figures during high school, occasionally attending

figure-drawing sessions at an art center.

Initially, he looked to study art at a U.S. university but found there were no options available for studying classical figurative art. Disappointed, he began looking at learning opportunities overseas. “I thought that maybe the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris still maintained the traditions of the 19th century.” The school did still exist, but it wasn’t offering any classes that were traditional. “It was clear that I had to avoid the university system,” he said.

Then he discovered The Florence Academy of Art, a private school in Italy, which was founded by fellow American artist Daniel Graves in 1991. According to The Florence Academy website, the school specializes in teaching “the classical-realist tradition rooted in the 19th century” as exemplified by three French Academy teachers and master painters Jean-Léon Gérôme, Léon Joseph Florentin Bonnat, and Charles Auguste Émile Durand, also known as Carolus-Durand.

The school suited Swanson, so he applied to the academy’s painting program, only to be told there was a long waiting list. While waiting, he took the opportunity to travel to Italy with his high school, which offered educational tours to Italy and Greece. While in Florence, he said, he “just showed up at The Florence Academy [of Art].” Again, the academy staff told him there was a long waiting list—about a year for the painting program.

Swanson was interested in both painting and sculpture, so when the academy told him that he could circumvent the waiting list by entering the sculpture program, he applied straight away. “Well, once I started sculpting, I realized that’s what I wanted to pursue,” he said.

**Moving Closer to Christ**

Swanson has always been interested in serving God. “I was interested in Christian subject matter. But I became very interested in sacred art and much more interested in how I could serve God, as well, with my work,” he said.

“With my art, I would hope that I can uplift people, bring them closer to God, and inspire them. I think beauty is inspirational. I think that beauty is synonymous with truth. Truth and tradition are synonymous, and I think that tradition should be upheld. Beauty is synonymous with truth, and beauty has an origin; it doesn’t exist for its own sake,” he said.

“I became very interested in sacred art and much more interested in how I could serve God, as well, with my work.”

Cody Swanson, sculptor

**A School to Serve God**

After the three-year program, The Florence Academy invited Swanson to become a principal sculpting instructor, where he taught students for five years. All Florence Academy teachers are graduates of the academy, which allows the school to maintain unity in its standards, Swanson explained.

Through the academy he met Irish sculptor Dony Mac Manus, the creator behind the Sacred Art School in Florence, which Mac Manus founded with Swanson and

others in 2012. The two became friends, and Swanson became a principal instructor at the school.

Of the school, he said: “It was very simple. Our mission was to serve the church.” The school maintained the academic standards of The Florence Academy of Art, while introducing drapery, iconography, and of course, theological studies to the teaching repertoire, Swanson explained.

Swanson also taught idealization at the school, something that artists have done for centuries but that he believes is lacking in art education. Deities, for example, were normally idealized figures in the Greco-Roman tradition, he explained. “There was a theological reason, ... which in the light of the incarnation in the Catholic Church is very important, because Christ is the son of God, Our Lady was preserved from original sin. They shouldn’t look like any ordinary individual,” he said.

“Personally, I find it quite lazy that people don’t attempt idealization,” he said. Artists need to apply themselves to create idealized images. Swanson explains that it is not a case of replicating past masters, “because you can see in any museum or church where there is classical art that everybody idealized differently. It was actually very personal; it was very liberating for an artist to make aesthetic choices in that regard,” he said.

Swanson was involved with the Sacred Art School up until late last year, when he decided to concentrate on his private art studio work.

**Upholding Traditional Art**

Swanson said that artists need the foundational basics of art such as observing nature and setting up a live model, for ex-

ample. But he believes it’s by looking at the great masters of the past that you learn a lot about yourself and develop taste: “Taste is something that’s very important, and you’re not going to develop taste unless you’re really, really well-informed about what kind of art has been produced for many centuries.”

Following in the footsteps of the masters requires a whole lot of blood, sweat, and tears. A lot of very hard work, and dedication,” he said. For instance, it can take him between eight and twelve months to complete a monumental statue with the help of his assistants.

Swanson’s artistic goal is continuity with the past. He’s extensively studied the practices of past masters, and he’s specifically drawn to 17th-century art, because of its universal appeal. “I’m trying to not reproduce, but follow their process. Just as Bernini followed the processes of Raphael and Michelangelo, I’m trying to do the same and maintain that continuity, ... and continue their legacy,” he said.

“I think that the Greco-Roman language, which has been really prevalent in Europe for many centuries, is the most universal. ... It has a lot to offer all cultures. I think it’s very approachable. And certainly I find it beautiful. I find it very moving, very inspiring,” he said.

Essentially, art “should uplift people and take them beyond the fleeting superficiality of one period of time, and it should be something that is relevant and speaks to people in all periods of time,” he said.

**The Enduring Strength of Divine Beauty**

Swanson has been immensely influenced by 17th-century artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini. He was studying the history of the

Catholic Church and was astounded by the spiritual aspects of Bernini’s work, so much so that he sees Bernini as “a huge, huge inspiration.”

“It’s not just the aesthetic of Bernini but also what it’s connected to as well. As much as his work is so different from Michelangelo’s, he was very much connected to it,” he said. For instance, Bernini was one of the principal architects of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, a role Michelangelo once held in the 16th century. So Swanson said that Bernini’s work per se was a continuation of what happened in the Renaissance, of looking to the past for inspiration, and therefore his work was a continuation of 16th-century artists Raphael and Caravaggio, for instance.

“He brought it to another height. ... He certainly loved Christ and he wanted to serve the church as well. ... These artists were men of faith. These were things that they believed.”

Swanson finds the Counter-Reformation period fascinating. Of the artists during that time, he said: “They fought hard to defend their faith, and they were very good at it. And they did it with beauty. They did it with great, beautiful works of art.”

He finds the counter-reformation period similar to our current day—essentially the fight against atheism and secularism.

“And looking at people tearing down statues everywhere nowadays, ... I look at Bernini, and my response to that is I just want to use beauty to fight,” he said. “Just make beautiful statues, keep putting out beautiful statues, and just make as many beautiful statues as I can.”

To find out more about sculptor Cody Swanson’s work, visit [CodySwansonSculpture.com](http://CodySwansonSculpture.com)



TRADITIONAL MUSIC

# The Enduring Songs of America’s First Songwriter, Stephen Foster

KENNETH LAFAVE

Composer George M. Cohan bragged in a song that he was “born on the Fourth of July,” though in truth he missed that date by 24 hours. His most illustrious predecessor, however, was indeed born on that date in 1826. Stephen Foster, the USA’s first popular songwriter, and by most standards the first professional popular songwriter the world has known, was as American as his birthday.

Noncancelable?

So it is surprising that, except for the removal of a Stephen Foster statue in his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, little has been done to “cancel” him. And how would one go about canceling songs woven into the very fabric of American life—songs such as “Oh! Susanna,” “Camptown Races,” and “My Old Kentucky Home”?

To cancel Foster, one would have to scour the films and recordings of the last century and do some serious scrubbing. “Beautiful Dreamer” alone has been recorded by singers as disparate as Bing Crosby and Jerry Lee Lewis.

In other words, practicalities are against ridding American music of Stephen Foster, no matter how many woke folk might object to him. That’s lucky for us, because it means we get to keep the folksy strains of



STOCKSNAPPER/SHUTTERSTOCK

“Old Folks at Home,” known as “Way Down Upon the Swannee River,” and the decidedly un-folksy measures of what is arguably one of the 10 or 20 most perfect songs ever written, “Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair.”

The Music Matches the Lyrics

“Jeanie,” according to music professor Kurt Poterack, in Christendom College’s publication Principles, “approaches the level of a Schubert art song.” Its spacious, arching melody prompted no less than Pulitzer Prize-winning American composer Ned Rorem to shape his own arrangement, a version of “Jeanie” sung by classical singers side-by-side with those Schubert lieder referenced by Poterack.

The song’s music emulates its lyrics, which concern the beauty of a young woman’s hair floating “on the summer breeze.” The range is wide and airy—and octave and a fourth—and from note to note, the melody moves as if buoyed by the very breeze of the lyrics. The release or bridge, starting on the words “Many were the wild notes” and ending with “that warbled them o’er,” takes the listener to a new place, both musically and lyrically, leading to a fresh return of the main melody but with a twist at the end, known as an “extension.” Foster used it to take the tune to its highest pitch, magically underlining the words “floating like a vapor.”

▲ American songwriter Stephen Collins Foster (1826–1864). Engraving by unknown artist from Harper’s New Monthly Magazine printed in 1880.



PUBLICDOMAIN

► Stephen Foster wrote the wistful “Jeanie With the Light Brown Hair” when he was estranged from his wife.

WHAT GOOD IS POETRY?

## Robert Burns’s Immortal ‘A Red, Red Rose’

SEAN FITZPATRICK

So long as there are lovers in the world, there will be poetry. In fact, it might be argued that if lovers do not produce poetry, they are not really in love. And it is absolutely the case that poetry rejoices even in the earnest, ham-fisted poems written by smitten folks who are not gifted poets. One need not be Bill Shakespeare to write a sonnet of true love and true importance or a “woeful ballad to his mistress’s eyebrow.”

As G.K. Chesterton, a fine poet himself, wrote in his famous vein of anything worth doing is worth doing badly, “It is too often forgotten that just as a bad man is nevertheless a man, so a bad poet is nevertheless a poet.” There is nothing wrong with poetry that is born of love alone, for there is profound reason why the word “amateur” is rooted in the Latin word for love.

Poetry has shown us through the ages that love poetry has a special place in the poetic canon and the poet’s heart as a vehicle to immortalize, to grant never-ending life to a beloved creature. And, as it ever has been, it is more often than not that lovers take up the pen of po-

etic praise with terms of undying endearment and eternal passion. As the philosopher Josef Pieper’s essay collection is titled, “Only the Lover Sings,” the lover makes his or her love immortal in the poetic power of the love song. And it is the immortal, the ideal, that poetry seeks to gain, making life—or at least love—eternal.

The Ploughman Poet

Though the ploughman poet of Scotland, Robbie (or Rabbie) Burns (1759–1796) is a master, the Bard of Ayrshire was ever careful to give his poetry an amateur quality, infused with the colloquial Scottish burr (as opposed to the Irish brogue), the love of the land, and the happy rustic life where poetry finds its truest, tenderest tones. This is crystal clear in his poem of immortal love, promising eternity in the same breath as it longs for it.

O my Luvie is like a red, red rose  
That’s newly sprung in June;  
O my Luvie is like the melody  
That’s sweetly played in tune.

So fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in luvie am I;

The poet’s heart is a vehicle to immortalize, to grant never-ending life to a beloved creature.



▲ “O my Luvie is like a red, red rose ...” — Scottish poet Robert Burns. GRAEME DAWES/SHUTTERSTOCK

And I will luvie thee still, my dear,  
Till a’ the seas gang dry.

Till a’ the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi’ the sun;  
I will love thee still, my dear,  
While the sands o’ life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only luvie!  
And fare thee weel awhile!  
And I will come again, my luvie,  
Though it were ten thousand mile.

But, despite the dramatic vows and seemingly limitless energy of the lover, life is as fleeting as a red, red rose. But love, on the other hand, will never die, being the power that moves the stars, according to Dante. It is in that immortal, unearthly life of love that poetry seeks to participate in, giving poor mortals a taste and transport into a realm on high that is untouched by the ravages of time.

At its best, poetry celebrates the earthy ability to draw folks to realms beyond this earth. The pure, innocent love poetry of Robbie Burns, together with his bawdier pieces, is a happy rebellion against both puritanical fears and promiscuous perversity. The love poem,

Tellingly, it is Foster’s most personal song, written in 1854 for his estranged wife. (The two never reconciled, and Foster died alone.)

Most of his output was written for commercial use, often by the Christy Minstrels, a popular blackface show of the 1840s and 1850s. Blackface is now, understandably, condemned as racist in its mockery of African-American slave culture. But Foster’s songs transcend their origins. The so-called woke would call them “cultural appropriation,” but are they appropriation, or elevation?

A Feeling for “The Other”

The statue removed in Pennsylvania showed Foster next to and slightly above the figure of a black slave with a banjo. The woke saw this and thought, “white superiority.” The truly awake might rather think, “lifting up.” Foster visited the South only once, during his honeymoon, but a natural empathy compelled him to represent a people who had no representation in the outside world. Foster came from an abolitionist family, and his “My Old Kentucky Home” is explicitly antislavery.

Critical theorists complain that white culture lacks regard for “The Other,” yet this is precisely what Foster’s “blackface” songs such as “Camptown Races” contain: a regard for the enslaved and the disenfranchised, embodied by stylized musical expression.

Foster’s nonblackface songs, the best-known of which are “Jeanie” and “Beautiful Dreamer,” presage the popular love songs of coming eras. Before Foster, songs came either from the classical tradition or the world of “folk” music. Foster, though, was paid to write, making his songs the headwaters of modern popular music.

Alas, for him, the lack of intellectual property laws meant that his songs were easily and lawfully pirated. Foster died not only alone but also in poverty.

It might be argued that the artist’s job is to express an eternal truth in the particular mode of his time and place. Foster did exactly that, turning the feeling of hopeless love into “Beautiful Dreamer” or the urge to travel into “Oh! Susanna,” his first hit in 1848 and a song that became the unofficial anthem of the California Gold Rush. No matter how many statues are removed, Stephen Foster’s songs will never be canceled.

Former music critic for the Arizona Republic and The Kansas City Star, Kenneth LaFave recently earned a doctorate in philosophy, art, and critical thought from the European Graduate School. He is the author of three books, including *Experiencing Film Music* (2017, Rowman & Littlefield).

with all its glorious infatuation, not only emphasizes and celebrates authentic affection but also points out that the body and the heart are good that lead to the Good.

Beautiful amateur poems like “A Red, Red Rose” not only shimmer with the excitement of young love, but they also reach out toward the enduring immortality that all yearn for. The basis of all poetry—and all philosophy and theology, for that matter—is the inherent human desire to live and love forever, till a’ the seas gang dry and the rocks melt wi’ the sun.

The lover only finds comfort and some sighing satisfaction in making the ephemeral eternal. That attempt at expressing the inexpressible is called poetry—which is precisely what makes poetry the language of love.

Sean Fitzpatrick serves on the faculty of Gregory the Great Academy, a boarding school in Elmhurst, Pa., where he teaches humanities. His writings on education, literature, and culture have appeared in a number of journals including *Crisis Magazine*, *Catholic Exchange*, and *The Imaginative Conservative*.



ALL PHOTOS BY COLUMBIA PICTURES



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.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

## The Marines Who Stand Guard on the Wall

MARK JACKSON

“A Few Good Men” is a court-martial drama based on a true story: At the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, a Marine named William Alvarado informed on a fellow Marine who apparently fired shots into Cuba.

This rattling-out was responded to with a “Code Red,” which is Marine jargon for the time-honored military disciplinary ritual of hazing. In the traditional military, any situation involving wall-to-wall, natural-leader alpha males—each one of whom is highly confident that he could take over and run the show at any time—there needs to be painful, memorable hazing incidents to knock sense into the men’s heads and ensure they put team and country first. This is very enjoyable for all involved except the “hazee,” of course (until such time when he becomes the “hazer”). This is Man-World. Current wokeism would call it bullying. Let’s not go there.

In the movie (and the play from whence the movie came), the hazee, William Santiago, dies from choking on his own blood, to escalate the dramatic tension. In the real story, they whacked him a bunch of times and shaved his head, but noticed he was turning blue. So they quickly unbound and ungagged him, and tragedy was avoided.

Movie Version

After hazed Marine Pfc. William Santiago (Michael DeLorenzo) dies, the two Marines accused—Lance Cpl. Harold Dawson (Wolfgang Bodison) and Pfc. Loudon Downey (James Marshall)—are badly in need of a lawyer. At the Judge Advocate General’s Corps in Washington, internal affairs lawyer Lt. Cmdr. JoAnne Galloway (Demi Moore) recommends herself to be in charge of the litigation.

To her horror, insolent, charm-smarmy,

The movie pits Tom Cruise up against Jack Nicholson and lets them go at it.

(Below left) (L–R) James Marshall, Kevin Bacon, and Tom Cruise.

(Below right) Lt. Cmdr. JoAnne Galloway (Demi Moore) talks to hotshot lawyer Navy Lt. j.g. (junior grade) Daniel Kaffee (Tom Cruise), who’s more interested in baseball than justice.

(Bottom left) 2nd Lt. Jonathan Kendrick (Kiefer Sutherland, far R) chauffeuring the law team: (L–R) Navy Lt. j.g. Daniel Kaffee (Tom Cruise), Lt. Sam Weinberg (Kevin Pollak), and Lt. Cmdr. JoAnne Galloway (Demi Moore).

(Bottom right) Lance Cpl. Harold Dawson (Wolfgang Bodison, L) and Pfc. Loudon Downey (James Marshall, R) are accused of murder. Lawyer Daniel Kaffee (Tom Cruise) is assigned to defend them.



‘A Few Good Men’

Director  
Rob Reiner

Starring  
Tom Cruise, Jack Nicholson, Demi Moore, Kevin Bacon, Kiefer Sutherland, Kevin Pollak

Rated  
R

Running Time  
2 hours, 18 minutes

Release Date  
Dec. 11, 1992

★★★★★

(Top) Navy Lt. j.g. Daniel Kaffee (Tom Cruise) learns about honor, while (Left) Col. Nathan Jessep (Jack Nicholson), a seasoned officer, is taken to task, in “A Few Good Men.”

megawatt-smiling, arrogant Navy Lt. j.g. (junior grade) Daniel Kaffee (Tom Cruise) is assigned the case. Just out of law school and far more interested in plea bargaining than in defending anyone, he figures this case won’t be too severe a drain on his softball commitments.

But Lt. Cmdr. Galloway, caring very much about the well-being of all involved, rigs things so as to be allowed to accompany Kaffee (and his assistant, Lt. Sam Weinberg (Kevin Pollak) to Cuba. Ultimately, it’s a crack team. Better-on-paper Galloway’s got the compassionate heart, and rising legal star Kaffee’s got the sheer talent for courtroom fireworks.

Upon arriving at the Marine base, Galloway and Kaffee find out about the issue of Code Red. Word is, the base’s top dog, Col. Nathan Jessep (Jack Nicholson), instead of conveniently transferring “substandard Marine” Santiago elsewhere, decided to whip Santiago into shape. Jessep gave the order to a subordinate, 2nd Lt. Jonathan Kendrick (Kiefer Sutherland at his mean, fanatical best), who in turn ordered the two defendants to carry out the command.

Honor

The primary lesson embedded in “A Few Good Men” is that of the directionless, missionless young man (Kaffee) finally growing into his attorney father’s shoes, becoming a man, and discovering that ultimately, his heart resonates with the nobility of honor. But it’s a struggle: Though a plea could get the accused a piddling six months’ jail time, Lance Cpl. Dawson refuses to do anything other than stand up for the fact that he simply followed orders. At first Kaffee has a fit that this cockamamie, unwavering sense of honor precludes the easy way out, but Galloway soon motivates him to go all out with a full-on, full trial and do justice, justice.

“A Few Good Men” is probably riveting to watch onstage. One could go so far as to say that the movie version boils down to one thing: Its raison d’être is to put Tom Cruise up against Jack Nicholson and let them go at it. It’s the brash, hungry young

challenger against a seasoned silverback gorilla. As Col. Jessep relates, he doesn’t get nervous about a lawsuit because he eats breakfast every morning eyeball to eyeball with armed Cubans who’d love to eat him for breakfast. If you missed the fireworks this Fourth of July, the Cruise-Nicholson courtroom scene is not to be missed. That showdown immediately lit up our American cinematic archive of great lines, with Nicholson’s “You can’t handle the truth!!!” still reverberating all these years later.

It’s interesting that director Rob Reiner, who played Archie Bunker’s over-the-top libelball with armed Cubans who’d love to eat him for breakfast. If you missed the fireworks this Fourth of July, the Cruise-Nicholson courtroom scene is not to be missed. That showdown immediately lit up our American cinematic archive of great lines, with Nicholson’s “You can’t handle the truth!!!” still reverberating all these years later.

Watching all these years later, I have a new appreciation of Nicholson’s blend of humor and menace. His character’s a man who knows how to forge Marines and hold the line against communist Cuba. Yes, it’s wrong that he lied about the death of Santiago. But this is truly the man you want on that wall, or in his own words: “Deep down, in places you don’t like to talk about at parties—you want me on that wall, you need me on that wall.” Yessir we do. And the real-world William Alvarado didn’t die, and there wasn’t a cover-up.

Overall, “A Few Good Men” besmirches the U.S. military a bit, and while indirectly accusatory of Bible-thumping Marines like Kendrick, it ultimately makes the connection that those who thump that Bible also tend to be those with the courage and honor to stand guard on the wall separating America’s freedoms from the evils of communism (in this case, Cuban). “A Few Good Men” is suspenseful, powerful, and thought provoking, which landed it both Oscar and Golden Globe Best Picture nominations.





# Faith and Freedom: One Shen Yun Dancer’s Escape From China

His family was torn apart by the Chinese communist regime because of their spiritual beliefs

CATHERINE YANG

Zhao Jiheng’s life turned upside down when he was just 8 years old. “One day, I came home, and my parents had disappeared,” Zhao said. His parents, like tens of millions of others in China, had been targeted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) because of their religious faith. Overnight, the estimated 70 million to 100 million adherents of Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa, would go from being known to the general public as kind people who practiced meditation and followed “truthfulness, compassion, tolerance” to being branded enemies of the state in 1999.

Zhao’s father would be subjected to torture and then spend the next several years on the run, and his mother would be illegally arrested and detained for varying lengths of time, randomly and frequently. This meant Zhao could come home from school one day and find the door locked, only then realizing that the police had taken his mother again. Home life had been upended; Zhao stayed with his disabled grandmother at times and also, at other times, with any relative who could take him in.

The 8-year-old Zhao would ask, “Why is my mother gone? Why is my father gone?” “They didn’t tell me because I was so young and couldn’t understand,” Zhao said. “But slowly, I began to understand. It was because they stood up for the truth and dared to say ‘Falun Dafa is good’ that they were targeted by the state.”

Those who are unfamiliar with communist societies find Zhao’s story incomprehensible and shocking—that a nation’s supposed government could turn an entire people against a particular group of good citizens at the drop of a hat. As society started to repeat the CCP’s slander about Falun Dafa, Zhao started to face bullying and abuse in school, and the police began ransacking his house. The times when his mother was home, police would try to manipulate him into telling her that she was being cruel to him by not giving up her faith so that he could have an easier life.

The CCP utilized the entire state apparatus toward its goal of ruining the reputations, lives, and livelihoods of these spiritual believers, thinking it could eradicate a belief



Zhao Jiheng is a dancer with Shen Yun Performing Arts.

A performance by Shen Yun Performing Arts classical Chinese dancers.

“I knew it would be dangerous, but I don’t think I could have imagined what the experience would be like.”

Zhao Jiheng, dancer, Shen Yun Performing Arts



SHEN YUN PERFORMING ARTS

system within just a couple of years. But the truth and the kindness of the human heart has prevailed.

### 2nd Chance at Life

You wouldn’t know it today, but Zhao was a very sickly young boy. He was frequently ill, and he had a recurring condition of random seizures and blackouts that resulted in emergency room visits. At the hospital, confounded doctors suggested a lobotomy. When modern medicine failed to provide answers, Zhao’s mother turned to physicians of traditional Chinese medicine, who proved equally stymied.

Zhao’s miraculous turn toward health was one of his first encounters with Falun Dafa. The spiritual practice includes five meditative exercises in addition to adhering to the

principles of “truthfulness, compassion, tolerance,” and when it was introduced to the Chinese public in the early 1990s, it caught on like wildfire. There were mental, spiritual, and physical health benefits, and Zhao was one of many who reported that the illnesses that long plagued him all but disappeared. It certainly hadn’t been an easy life back when he knew that he could black out and hit his head on the ground at any moment. With sincerity, Zhao said, “Falun Dafa gave me a second chance at life.”

When his parents took up the spiritual practice, he did too, because the three principles of Falun Dafa made it clear to him that this was teaching people how to be good and kind. It made the sudden persecution of Falun Dafa practitioners all the more confusing and heartbreaking for Zhao. It’s not uncommon

for people in China to know someone killed by the CCP for practicing Falun Dafa, he added. Eleven of his mother’s friends have died this way.

“The CCP is an atheistic regime, and its motto is to struggle against heaven, struggle against the earth, and struggle against your fellow man,” Zhao explained. From its beginning, the CCP has tried to root out religion and spiritual belief. “It wants people to be materialistic and only self-interested. As a result, it’s made the morality of modern China very bad,” he said.

Because of their faith, Zhao’s family members were blacklisted and weren’t able to obtain passports. But in 2007, when he was 16, an opportunity to leave the country arose. His family followed a group of other people trying to get out of China and make their way into

Thailand, seeking their chance at freedom.

“I knew it would be dangerous, but I don’t think I could have imagined what the experience would be like,” Zhao said. In the dead of night, dozens of people packed into the back of a truck, lying flat under cargo, and would be dropped off in the middle of nowhere to wait for who knows how long for the next vehicle to pick them up. He should have been scared, Zhao acknowledged in retrospect, but he felt, somehow, that he was being protected by God. Even when he was waiting in the dark out in the wilderness, not knowing whether the next person he met would be the police or the smugglers, or if the next leg of the journey would proceed at all, he thought the risk was worth it. Life without the freedom to practice your faith is not life at all, he said.

The hours passed, and the journey continued. Zhao’s family and several others made it across the border and then into Thailand, ready to begin life anew.

### A Mission

In Thailand, Zhao would regularly go to the tourist attractions with fliers containing information about Falun Dafa, and tell visiting mainland Chinese the truth about the persecution taking place. He wanted them to know “Falun Dafa is good,” Zhao said, and every person who showed a spark of understanding gave him more hope.

It was in Thailand that Zhao had his first encounter with Shen Yun Performing Arts, the world’s premiere classical Chinese dance company, through a special New Year’s program of classical Chinese dance. There, he saw a storytelling dance about modern China.

Imagine the emotions Zhao felt when he saw a tale that could have been his own played out onstage.

In the story of a family who believed in truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance, and were torn apart by the CCP, the child was left without parents. Zhao wasn’t shocked at the similarities—he knew that the cruelty of the communist regime extended to families across China—but he was deeply moved that others were using art to tell the world the truth about this brutal persecution. To be part of this effort became Zhao’s goal.

Based in New York, Shen Yun is filled with artists whose stories are similar to Zhao’s. Many of them left China and made their way to America, pursuing the freedom to practice their faith and express their beliefs in life and art. And contrary to what one might expect, Shen Yun’s mission is not political. It is one of restoring traditional culture. The principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance guide the artists, and the dances and stories on the stage show China’s authentic culture, from back when the civilization was believed to be divinely inspired and society centered around the idea of harmony between heaven, earth, and humankind.

It was a culture with a saying that there are gods three feet above one’s head, Zhao said, meaning that the heavens are always watching, and thus people strove toward a high moral standard.

“From the music, to the style of dance and movements, to even the backdrops, the color coordination, the costumes—the production is rooted in traditional culture’s aesthetics,” Zhao said. “We present something bright

and filled with hope.”

“Traditional culture fosters a compassionate heart, and I believe these arts rooted in traditional culture do the same,” he said. “And this is also good for society.”

Today, Zhao is one of the dancers in Shen Yun’s seven touring companies, and he gets to perform all around the world, except in China, where Shen Yun and Falun Dafa are still banned.

He has even played a part in one of the storytelling dances that touches on the persecution of Falun Dafa practitioners in China—but not in a role resembling his own life.

“Actually, I played one of the bad police officers,” Zhao said lightly. The ones in Shen Yun portrayals are stock antagonists, he explained, and not nearly as evil as those he encountered in real life. By the time the role came around, he had long stopped harboring any ill will toward them. He talked about being able to help the female dancer portray a young girl who would lose a parent to the brutal persecution, sharing his own experience in hopes of contributing to the team.

There was a time when he did hate the police and CCP agents who tore his family apart, Zhao said. But the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance, and his encounter with Shen Yun turned that hate into something else, something beyond forgiveness. Zhao said he realized that these policemen who tried to pit him and his mother against each other, who ransacked his home and stole the money he carefully saved, and who harassed the family on holidays were themselves deceived. They’d been drowned in CCP propaganda and were just following orders, not knowing the truth of their situation. Zhao hopes deeply that these people can still encounter the truth. And if he could, he would invite them to see Shen Yun.

“Everyone has a good side in their hearts, which is just covered up by the evil CCP. When they understand the truth, I think they will wake up. They will not choose to do this kind of thing [the CCP’s bidding],” Zhao said.

“Audiences leave our performances with joy and an uplifted heart, because this divinely inspired culture shows something upright and full of beauty.”

NTD contributed to this report.

The Epoch Times is a proud sponsor of Shen Yun Performing Arts. For more information, please visit [ShenYunPerformingArts.org](http://ShenYunPerformingArts.org)

## THE STORY OF ART: WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE LIVES OF ARTISTS

### Michelangelo’s Perseverance: A Lesson in Achieving Greatness



ANTOINE TAVENEAUX/CC SA-BY 3.0

The Sistine Chapel ceiling, from 1508 until 1512 by Michelangelo. Fresco; 44.7 yards by 14.7 yards. Sistine Chapel.

#### ERIC BESS

Michelangelo Buonarroti is undeniably one of the greatest artists in history. He was born in 1475 and lived until the ripe age of 88. He considered himself primarily a sculptor, but he also produced some of the greatest fresco paintings, architecture, and poetry of the Italian Renaissance.

What made Michelangelo great? What was his secret to creating so many great works of art? I’m sure the answer to this question is quite complex, but we will look at an episode from Michelangelo’s life along with his own response to the question.

#### Michelangelo’s Work Ethic

Michelangelo is quoted as saying the following about his work ethic:

“If people knew how hard I had to work to gain my mastery, it would not seem so wonderful at all. ... If you knew how much work went into it, you wouldn’t call it genius.”

Michelangelo suggested that his mastery was not indicative of the type of genius based solely on innate talent. Instead, he referred to his “genius” as “eternal patience.” Genius is the ability to practice patience during the unavoidable difficulties that arise in working hard at one’s craft. In other words, the idea of genius appears to be synonymous with one’s ability to endure hardship for love of the art.

Giorgio Vasari, Italian Renaissance artist and author of “The Lives of the Artists,” was the first to write a biography of Michelangelo and did so while Michelangelo was still living. In fact, Michelangelo is considered the first artist to have a biography written while still alive.

Vasari wrote about some of the extremes

that Michelangelo would go through for the sake of his craft:

“Michelangelo told me that in his youth he often slept with his clothes on, just like a man who, exhausted by his work, does not bother to undress, since later on he must get dressed once again. ... As he grew old, he constantly wore boots fashioned from dogs’ skins on his bare feet for months at a time, so that when he later wanted to remove them his skin would peel off as well.”

**Michelangelo suggested that his mastery was not indicative of the type of genius based solely on innate talent. Instead, he referred to his ‘genius’ as ‘eternal patience.’**

Vasari’s story about Michelangelo is extreme and may even be apocryphal. Yet it shows that we must be willing to sacrifice our comforts and endure hardship if we wish to push ourselves to greatness.

#### Overcoming the Difficulties of the Sistine Ceiling

One of the works of art that reaffirms Michelangelo’s greatness is the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Michelangelo was working on sculptures for Pope Julius II’s future tomb when the pope decided that he wanted him to paint the ceiling instead. Vasari suggests that the artist and architect Donato Bramante, a friend of the young painter Raphael,

convinced the pope to have Michelangelo paint instead of sculpt.

Bramante swayed the pope in the hopes of preventing Michelangelo from creating more great sculptures. He also hoped that Michelangelo would fail at painting and show that Raphael was a superior painter and artist.

Michelangelo protested and claimed that he was a sculptor and not a painter, but Bramante had already convinced the pope. According to “Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man, and His Times” by William Wallace, Michelangelo expressed his discomfort with the paintings when the project was completed, signing the bottom of a sonnet expressing his displeasure with: “I’m not in a good place, and I’m no painter.”

The fresco itself also had its issues. Michelangelo didn’t know how to paint fresco correctly, so he requested other artists to come and help him. Mold grew on one of the frescoed areas, and Michelangelo had to repaint it.

To possibly sabotage the project again, Bramante suggested that Michelangelo should hang scaffolding from the ceiling. Michelangelo protested, claiming that the holes in the wall would have to be covered later. He had to invent a new type of scaffolding.

According to Vasari, the act of painting the ceiling was a very painful experience, to say the least:

“These frescos were done with the greatest discomfort, for he had to stand there working with his head tilted backwards, and it damaged his eyesight so much that he could no longer read or look at drawings if his head was not tilted backwards; his condition lasted for several months afterward.”

Not only did Michelangelo have to deal with the difficulties of painting and with his rivals trying to sully his name, but he also had family issues that never seemed to stop. According to Wallace, Michelangelo had to deal with the death of his brother, his brother’s wife suing for the return of her dowry, the disrespect of one of

his brothers, family illness, and, of course, money problems.

Wallace suggests that the pope’s payments for Michelangelo’s work were very irregular, and most of the money he received he sent to his family. He described himself as “barefoot and naked.”

Michelangelo described the whole event in multiple letters, which Wallace quotes and that can be summed up:

“I am living here in a state of great anxiety and of the greatest physical fatigue: I have no friends of any sort and want none. I haven’t time enough to eat as I should. So you mustn’t bother me with anything else, for I could not bear another thing. ... And thus have I lived for some fifteen years now and never an hour’s happiness have I had.”

#### Enduring What Is Unendurable

Can you imagine living like this? Can you imagine being assigned a project at work, and before you even get started, one of your coworkers tries to sabotage you by having your employer put you on a project on which you’re more likely to fail? Can you imagine, despite your protests, being assigned to this project for which you have no experience, and during the project, your coworker tries to suggest things that will compromise your success?

That’s not all. You work on the project so much that your body aches when you go home. And when you do go home, your spouse complains about money, your parents are sick and need your help, and your kids are disrespectful at school. You work such late hours that you barely have time to change clothes.

Such daily hardship is overwhelming to just imagine it, let alone live it.

But Michelangelo did live it and persevered through it. And this is why, at least in part, he was great. Because of his perseverance, he created some of the greatest works of art known to the world. He could’ve quit at any time, but he didn’t. He was only 37 years old when he completed the Sistine ceiling and would live another 51 years.

Sometimes, our struggles can make life



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Detail of “Michelangelo Buonarroti,” circa 1545, by Daniele da Volterra. Oil on panel; 34.75 inches by 25.25 inches. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was a trial for Michelangelo.



REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

# A Stirring Tribute to a Lesser-Known Theater of World War II

IAN KANE

As an Army vet, I’ve watched quite a few war movies. But as a land-lubber, I’ve never known much about the PT boats I’ve seen snaking through jungle rivers in movies about the Vietnam War. Director John Ford sheds light on their impact in one of his lesser-known movies, long before the Vietnam era. “They Were Expendable” (1945) is one of Ford’s many collaborations with actor John Wayne. Although the two usually worked together on Westerns, they occasionally did other genres, such as this fine war drama.

Interestingly, both director John Ford and actor Robert Montgomery served in the U.S. Navy.

The film begins with a U.S. Navy unit stationed in Cavite, Philippines. Lt. John “Brick” Brickley (Robert Montgomery) and his direct subordinate, Lt. “Rusty” Ryan (Wayne), lead newly founded Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron Three. Brickley hopes to show the value of his squadron, which consists of a number of PT boats, to a cadre of top brass, including overall commander Adm. Blackwell (Charles Trowbridge). A naval demonstration he performs culminates in a clever dispersal maneuver whereby the PT boats split up and become more difficult to be targeted. Blackwell voices his opinion of the newly designed vessels to Brickley: “Those boats of yours maneuver beautifully, but in war-

time I’m afraid I’d prefer something more substantial.” In other words, although they’re fast, they’re too small to engage larger ships. As the admiral departs with his driver, Brickley and Ryan stand in the car’s dust, utterly dejected. Ryan prefers larger craft, such as destroyers, and believes that the general lack of approval for the PT boats will cause him to miss out on any potential action that could break out in the region. After all, Japanese forces have been spotted in the area. Suddenly, the men get the word: The Japanese have successfully launched a devastating attack on Pearl Harbor, and they’re officially at war. At first, Blackwell assigns the squadron to light, noncombat duties, such as ferrying messages back and forth. But as the Japanese ramp up their assaults, the unit gets to show off some of its capabilities. When a detachment of Japanese planes attacks their base, Brickley’s squadron scrambles out to sea to face them. In one of the better naval warfare scenes I’ve ever witnessed, Brickley, Ryan, and their men duel a contingent of Japanese planes with their machine guns. Utilizing the scatter maneuver witnessed earlier in the demonstration, they manage to avoid taking damage and destroy the enemy’s planes. During the exchange, Ryan’s hand gets injured by shrapnel. After showing some of the fighting capabilities of the PT boats, Brickley and his men are soon tasked with a difficult mission—a torpedo run on a Japanese cruiser that has been shelling U.S. coastal targets in the area. Going up against a cruiser is a daunting task, but this is Brickley’s chance to prove his boats’ effectiveness, and Ryan and his unit finally get to see the battle action they crave. As Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron Three



The stars of “They Were Expendable” are Robert Montgomery (L) and John Wayne.



(L-R) John Wayne, Charles Trowbridge, and Robert Montgomery in “They Were Expendable.”

prepares for battle, Brickley discovers that Ryan’s hand injury has led to blood poisoning and sends a testy Ryan off to the local hospital. There, Lt. Sandy Davyss (Donna Reed), an Army nurse assigned to him, eventually manages to melt away his crankiness, and the two soon develop romantic feelings for each other. Meanwhile, Brickley’s boats destroy the cruiser. When Ryan returns, the unit is assigned to more combat missions and succeeds in sinking many Japanese naval targets. The Japanese war machine revs up, and Ryan is ordered to embark on a dangerous, top-secret mission. An Authentic Film Interestingly, both John Ford and Robert Montgomery served in the U.S. Navy, and

**‘They Were Expendable’**

**Director**  
John Ford, Robert Montgomery (Uncredited)

**Starring**  
Robert Montgomery, John Wayne, Donna Reed

**Running Time**  
2 hours, 15 minutes

**Not Rated**

**Release Date**  
1945

★★★★★

they lend authenticity to the way the film is shot and paced. This was Montgomery’s first film after returning from action in both Europe and the Pacific theaters. He is especially convincing as a stoic, reserved Navy hero in contrast to Wayne’s more braggadocious energy. The rest of the cast is excellent. It’s odd that “They Were Expendable” didn’t seem to garner as much fanfare as many other war films of the era. This is perhaps because of the film’s more somber tone that honors some who have been little acknowledged yet gave their lives for our magnificent country.

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



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