

THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN

If you don't believe military history is important, consider what our country would be if the Civil War had ended differently. Civil War Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Maj. Christian Fleetwood. Library of Congress.



HISTORY

## Lessons From the Battlefield: *Literature and War*

JEFF MINICK

**T**he signature catchphrase of comedian Rodney Dangerfield was “I don’t get no respect.” Military historians in our universities might justifiably lay claim to that same line.

The academic world has long regarded military historians as outliers. In 2008, for example, U.S. News and World Report writer Justin Ewers wrote a column titled “Why Don’t More Colleges Teach Military History?” He reports: “For years, military

historians have been accused by their colleagues of being, by turns, right wing, morally suspect, or, as Lynn puts it, ‘just plain dumb.’” Lynn was John Lynn, a professor of history at the University of Illinois, who had written a 1997 essay titled “The Embattled Future of Academic Military History,” an earlier jeremiad against the demise of military history in academia. As Ewers points out, other subjects—gender, class, race— attracted more professors of history than did war and diplomacy.

But here’s a strange contradiction in that decline. Ewers writes what many readers

**What’s the point? Why read military history and fiction?**

know: “Publishers have been lining bookstore shelves with new battle tomes, which consumers are lapping up.”

This interest by readers in warfare is longstanding, as may be seen in the social sciences section of my moderately sized public library, which contains more than 400 books about the military and war. The history section offers an even greater selection of such books, ranging from accounts of Alexander the Great to our conflicts in the Middle East.

*Continued on Page 4*



Ying and Yang by Sandra Kuck

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MUSIC

# What's Behind the Magic of Live Music?

MARIUSZ KOZAK

For months, fans were relegated to watching their favorite singers and musicians over Zoom or via webcasts. Now, live shows—from festivals like Lollapalooza to Broadway musicals—are officially back.

The songs that beamed into living rooms during the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic may have featured an artist's hits. But there's just something magical about seeing music surrounded by other people. Some fans reported being so moved by their first live shows in nearly two years that they wept with joy.

As a music theorist, I've spent my career trying to figure out just what that "magic" is. And part of understanding this requires thinking about music as more than simply sounds washing over a listener.



The Blackfeet in North America use the same word to refer to a combination of music, dance, and ceremony. A dancer at Heart Butte Indian Days Powwow in Heart Butte, Mont.

### Music as More Than Communication

Music is often thought of as a twin sister to language. Whereas words tend to convey ideas and knowledge, music transmits emotions.

According to this view, performers broadcast their messages—the music—to their audience. Listeners decode the messages on the basis of their own listening habits, and that's how they interpret the emotions the performers hope to communicate.

But if all music did was communicate emotions, watching an online concert should've been no different than going to a live show. After all, in both cases, listeners heard the same melodies, the same harmonies and the same rhythms. So what couldn't be experienced through a computer screen?

The short answer is that music does far more than communicate. When witnessed in person, with other people, it can create powerful physical and emotional bonds.

giving it a shape.

On the one hand, music encourages people to make specific movements and gestures while they dance or clap or just bob their heads to the beat. On the other, music gives audiences a temporal scaffold: where to place these movements and gestures so that they're synchronized with others.

### The Great Synchronizer

Because of the pleasurable effect of being synchronized with people around you, the emotional satisfaction you get from listening or watching online is fundamentally different from going to a live performance. At a concert, you can see and feel other bodies around you.

Even when explicit movement is restricted, like at a typical Western classical concert, you sense the presence of others, a mass of bodies that punctures your personal bubble.

The music shapes this mass of humanity, giving it structure, suggesting moments of tension and relaxation, of breath, of fluctuations in energy—moments that might translate into movement and gesture as soon as people become tuned in to one another.

### A 'Mutual Tuning-In'

Without physical interactions, our well-being suffers. We fail to achieve what the philosopher Alfred Schütz called a "mutual tuning-in," or what the pianist and Harvard professor Vijay Iyer more recently described as "being together in time."

In my book "Enacting Musical Time," I note that time has a certain feel and texture that goes beyond the mere fact of its passage. It can move faster or slower, of course. But it can also thrum with emotion: There are times that are somber, joyous, melancholy, exuberant, and so on.

When the passage of time is experienced in the presence of others, it can give rise to a form of intimacy in which people revel or grieve together. That may be why physical distancing and social isolation imposed by the pandemic were so difficult for so many people—and why many people whose lives and routines were upended reported an unsettling change in their sense of time.

When we're in physical proximity, our mutual tuning-in toward one another actually generates bodily rhythms that make us feel good and gives us a greater sense of belonging. One study found that babies who are bounced to music in sync with an adult display increased altruism toward that person, while another found that people who are close friends tend to synchronize their movements when talking or walking together.

Music isn't necessary for this synchronization to emerge, but rhythms and beats facilitate the synchronization by

**The emotional satisfaction you get from listening or watching online is fundamentally different from going to a live performance.**

This structure is usually conveyed with sound, but different musical practices around the world suggest that the experience is not limited to hearing. In fact, it can include the synchronization of visuals and human touch.

For example, in the deaf musical community, sound is only one small part of the expression. In Christine Sun Kim's "face opera ii"—a piece for prelingually deaf performers—participants "sing" without using their hands, and instead use facial gestures and movements to convey emotions. Like the line "fa-la-la-la-la" in the famous Christmas carol

A study has shown that babies who are bounced to music in sync with an adult display increased altruism toward that person.



Live music is back!

"Deck the Halls," words can be deprived of their meaning until all that's left is their emotional tone.

In some cultures, music is, conceptually, no different from dance, ritual, or play. For example, the Blackfeet in North America use the same word to refer to a combination of music, dance, and ceremony. And the Bayaka Pygmies of Central Africa have the same term for different forms of music, cooperation, and play.

Many other groups around the world categorize communal pursuits under the same umbrella.

They all use markers of time like a regular beat—whether it's the sound of a gourd rattle during a Suyá Kahran

Ngere ceremony or groups of girls chanting "Mary Mack dressed in black" in a hand-clapping game—to allow participants to synchronize their movements.

Not all of these practices necessarily evoke the word "music." But we can think of them as musical in their own way. They all teach people how to act in relation to one another by teasing, guiding, and even urging them to move together.

In time. As one.

Mariusz Kozak is an associate professor of music and music theory at Columbia University in New York. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.



There are limitations to listening to and learning music via Zoom.

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Warfare will not disappear just because we choose to ignore it. "Gassed," 1919, by John Singer Sargent. Imperial War Museum London.

HISTORY

# Lessons From the Battlefield:

## Literature and War

Continued from Page 1

### 'Only the Dead Have Seen the End of War'

Though the tag "Only the dead have seen the end of war" is falsely attributed to Plato, the words ring true. In the last 70 or so years, for example, the United States has fought major wars in Korea, Vietnam, and the Middle East, as well as participating in smaller conflicts in places like Grenada, Lebanon, and Panama.

Such wars often have enormous consequences. At the end of his book "A History of Warfare," preeminent military historian John Keegan (1934-2012) notes:

"The written history of the world is a history of warfare, because the states within which we live came into existence largely through conquest, civil strife or struggles for independence."

If we accept Keegan's thesis as true—such is certainly the case with the United States, which came into being through our own struggle for independence—it should be apparent that all of us might do well to familiarize ourselves with the history of warfare. To study world-changing battles like Salamis, Hastings, Gettysburg, and Pearl Harbor, and to cautiously apply the lessons learned from those investigations to

our present circumstances would, if nothing else, help our leaders and our citizens understand the consequences of taking up arms.

### Nonfiction

Several of the historians who have contributed works to library shelves and bestseller lists have written brilliantly on battle and the arts of war. John Keegan, for example, put out more than 20 histories on warfare, including "The Face of Battle" in which he examines the battles of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme. This book stands out because of its blend of strategy and tactics with vivid details of the battles themselves. Keegan describes each battle—the terrain, the troops who fought there, the sway of combat—and then extends his observations to contemporary conflicts.

Like Keegan, Victor Davis Hanson, an American classicist and today a respected commentator about contemporary culture and politics, never faced an enemy on the battlefield. He has, however, written several books on warfare, including "Carnage and Culture," which is regarded by critics and military experts as an important addition to the history and understanding of warfare.

Though some of Hanson's observations in the book now seem dated—he seems to have underestimated the growing

**To remain ignorant of the costs, the sacrifices, the horrors, and the consequences of war is dangerous.**

power of the Chinese Communist Party and its military machine—he does end his book with this profound statement: "We may well be all Westerners in the millennium to come, and that could be a very dangerous thing indeed," meaning that Western nations and those who have adopted their practices of warfare, like Japan and China, may find themselves on a high-tech battlefield pitted against a foe in a horrific war.

Other historians, many of them not associated with universities, have given us riveting accounts of combat and of the costs of war both to individuals and to the nation as a whole. Stephen Ambrose, Rick Atkinson, and others have researched and written rich accounts of American GIs in World War II, with a focus on the heroism and suffering of individuals on the battlefields.

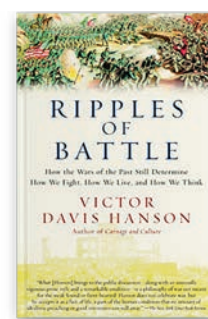
### War Stories

We can also gain a feeling for combat by reading fiction.

In Michael Shaara's "The Killer Angels: A Novel of the Civil War," the author puts himself into the minds of important figures at the Battle of Gettysburg, leaders like Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet and Union officers like John Buford and Joshua Chamberlain. From these men and others, we gain a sense of the thought processes of upper-echelon officers, the triumphs and defeats embedded in the decisions of those at the top, and the awful burdens borne by those whose decisions will truly affect the future of their cause and their governments.

Novelist Anton Myrer's "Once an Eagle" gives us a close-up view of the horrors and costs of war. Here, protagonist Sam Damon enlists in the Army just before World War I, loses his best friend in that conflict, and emerges with the Medal of Honor. He remains in the peacetime Army and then becomes a general during World War II, leading his men in combat against the Japanese. Damon comes across as a man of honor and integrity, a figure to be emulated. Reading about him, most of us would only hope that our own military leaders would display his same virtues.

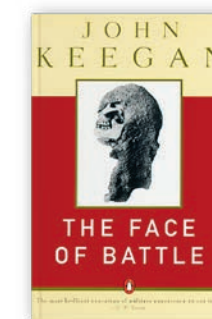
In "The Leader's Bookshelf," retired Adm. James Stavridis and writer R. Manning Ansell have compiled a list of 50 books, all with detailed descriptions, recommended by military personnel. "The Killer Angels" and "Once an Eagle" are Nos. 1 and 2 on this list.



Writer Victor Davis Hanson proposes that war accelerates history.



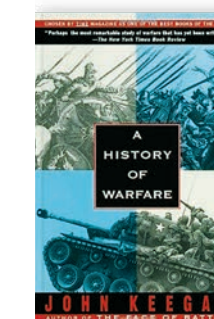
Anton Myrer's book gives an account of the costs of war.



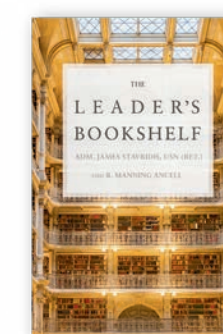
In "The Face of Battle," John Keegan examines the battles of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme and sheds light on more current conflicts.



American classicist Victor Davis Hanson looks at the connection between culture and war in his "Carnage and Culture."



One of John Keegan's many books on warfare.



"The Leader's Bookshelf" has descriptions of books recommended by military personnel.

U.S. Army helicopters airlift members of the 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment to a new staging area in a search and destroy mission conducted by the 25th Infantry Division, northeast of Cu Chi, South Vietnam, in 1966. National Archives and Records Administration.

Other novels, from Stephen Crane's "The Red Badge of Courage" to Steven Pressfield's "Gates of Fire," his account of the Battle of Thermopylae, cast light on what it means to face an enemy on the field of battle and to be willing to sacrifice oneself for comrades and country.

By now, some readers may wonder: What's the point? Why read military history and fiction? Why not leave such reading to armchair warriors or our military? How does this affect my own life?

Winston Churchill provides some answers to these questions.

"Great battles," he once remarked, "change the entire course of events, create new standards of values, new moods, in armies and in nations, to which all must conform."

In another of Victor Davis Hanson's books about war, "Ripples of Battle: How Wars of the Past Still Determine How We Fight, How We Live, and How We Think," Hanson cites this line from Churchill and then proceeds to show how battles like Delium, Shiloh, and Okinawa haunt us even today. We may be unaware of those ghosts, but they are with us, apparitions of Western culture that refuse to disappear. To ignore them is a grievous mistake. As Hanson writes: "Battle is the raucous transformer of history because it accelerates in a matter of minutes the usually longer play of chance, skill, and fate."

Churchill would have agreed with Hanson. Churchill participated in a cavalry charge at the Battle of Omdurman, witnessed combat in arenas ranging from Cuba and South Africa to World War I, and guided Britain to victory in World War II. He studied the wars of the past, wrote about them, and learned the lessons taught by the men who had fought them.

Like the historians and novelists cited here, Churchill understood war—its glory, its ugliness, and its necessity. He once stated:

"If you will not fight for right when you can easily win without blood shed; if you will not fight when your victory is sure and not too costly; you may come to the moment when you will have to fight with all the odds against you and only a precarious chance of survival. There may even be a worse case. You may have to fight when there is no hope of victory, because it is better to perish than to live as slaves."

During the Battle of Britain, when that tiny island nation fought the Nazis, Churchill and his fellow citizens faced that moment of "only a precarious chance of survival."

### 'Carnage and Culture'

The title of Hanson's book "Carnage and Culture" serves as a succinct reminder of the connection between conflict and culture. Throughout history, we see that a people who cannot protect themselves from their oppo-

nents may find their culture either at risk or abolished. From ancient Rome to modern-day China, we see civilizations erased by enemies both foreign and domestic.

To remain ignorant of the costs, the sacrifices, the horrors, and the consequences of war is dangerous. Our universities should teach more military history. Our young people should be familiar with such ideas as to how the Revolutionary War brought our country into being, how and why World War II left us a superpower, and what caused our failures in places like Vietnam and Afghanistan.

"You may not be interested in war, but war is very much interested in you." That chilling admonition, often mistakenly attributed to Russian Marxist Leon Trotsky, reminds us that in order to assess the decisions of leaders who want to send American soldiers into conflicts overseas, as they are wont to do, and to be prepared should an enemy ever launch an attack on our country, we need to understand the rudiments of warfare.

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.



U.S. Army 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment troops conduct area reconnaissance in Syria on Feb. 18, 2021.



PUBLIC DOMAIN



U.S. Army soldiers of 1st Platoon A Co. 1st Bn ABN/508th Infantry, 82nd Airborne Division on patrol on Grenada in October 1983.

## FILM

# Top 10 Plus 5 Best Movies of 2021

Film critic Michael Clark's picks

## MICHAEL CLARK

Beginning in early spring every year, I start assembling my Top 10 film list since I maintain the belief that not all great Oscar contenders are released in the fall. That's when studios inundate critics with screenings, online links, and the occasional hard-copy DVDs in the 11th hour hoping that what we watch last will be what we remember most. This approach apparently works to some degree, as I didn't see my top pick until late November and my No. 2 until Dec. 1.

For the first time in 26 years as a critic, I'm including two separate lists: one for Top 10 live-action films and another for Top 5 documentaries. I'm a sucker for documentaries and find that comparing them to live-action productions is an apples and oranges thing.

## Top 10 Live-Action Features

## 1. 'Licorice Pizza'

Writer and director Paul Thomas Anderson's ninth feature is second in quality only to "There Will Be Blood," but it is far and away his most audience-friendly. Newcomers Alana Haim and Cooper Hoffman (son of Philip Seymour Hoffman) steal the show from the likes of Bradley Cooper, Sean Penn, and Tom Waits in one of the best coming-of-age comedies ever produced.



Cooper Hoffman stars in "Licorice Pizza," set in the 1970s.

## 2. 'Nightmare Alley'

Director Guillermo del Toro and his wife Kim Morgan's adaptation of the 1946 novel by William Gresham is a psychological thriller masterpiece. Containing elements of "Citizen Kane," "The Great Gatsby," and "Elmer Gantry," it stars Bradley Cooper as a circus carry-turned mentalist whose reach eventually exceeds his considerable grasp.

## 3. 'Passing'

Actress Rebecca Hall makes an auspicious directorial debut in adapting the 1929 novel by Nella Larsen. After years apart, childhood friends Clare (Ruth Negga) and Irene (Tessa Thompson) reconnect in Harlem where one "passes" as white only infrequently while the other does so full-time. Deftly making the movie about class and not race, Hall never provides easy answers in this hauntingly brilliant think piece.

## 4. 'The Many Saints of Newark'

The hotly anticipated prequel to the HBO series "The Sopranos" delivers lots of "fan-service" content while not confusing newcomers who've never seen the show. The late James Gandolfini's son Michael plays the younger version of Tony growing up in Newark, New Jersey, during the late 1960s riots while being mentored by his uncle Dickie (Alessandro Nivola). As with the show, the movie includes some passages

of graphic violence, more than earning its "R" rating.

## 5. 'Belfast'

Basing the script on his own childhood during the unrest in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in the late 1960s through the '80s, writer and director Sir Kenneth Branagh has delivered the finest movie of his career. Seen from the perspective of the preteen Buddy (Jude Hill), "Pa" (Jamie Dornan) and "Ma" (Caitriona Balfe) must choose whether or not to stay put or relocate.

## 6. 'The Unforgivable'

Adapted from the 2009 British TV miniseries "Unforgiven," producer Sandra Bullock and German director Nora Fingscheidt's bare-bones morality play is a gripping and jaw-dropping mystery thriller. Released from prison after serving 20 years for murder, Ruth (Bullock) attempts to put her life in order and gets thwarted at every turn.

## 7. 'Nobody'

Bob Odenkirk ("Better Call Saul") becomes an unlikely senior action hero in this "John Wick"-inspired crime thriller. Recalling Bruce Willis's stone-faced turn in "Red," Odenkirk's Hutch is an unassuming family man and office drone who

reluctantly revisits his dark past.

## 8. 'Free Guy'

Turning in a chipper take on his deadpan "Deadpool" character, Ryan Reynolds stars as a bank teller who isn't aware that he's part of a video game. Jodie Comer plays dual roles: programmer Millie and gamer Molotov Girl who is both Guy's enemy and his salvation. Despite its upbeat audience-friendly presentation, the movie is a scathing indictment of artificial intelligence and gaming addiction.

## 9. 'A Quiet Place Part II'

The biggest surprise of writer and director John Krasinski's prequel to the immensely entertaining original wasn't how great it turned out, but how it was able to do better at the box office in the time of COVID-19. Ending in a manner that suggests a third and final installment, "AQPPII" was a sublime treat.

## 10. 'The Tender Bar'

After surprising everyone with his turn as a cad in "The Last Duel," Ben Affleck plays the affable and wise (cracking) bar owner and the uncle and stand-in father figure for budding writer J.R. (Tye Sheridan). Directed with unfussy ease by George Clooney, it was written by William Monahan, adapting the memoir by J.R. Moehringer.

## Top 5 Documentary Features

## 1. 'Kurt Vonnegut: Unstuck in Time'

In a manner not unlike that of Peter Bogdanovich and Orson Welles, director Robert B. Weide spent over three decades interviewing his idol: the iconoclastic writer Kurt Vonnegut. This is a rare "warts-and-all" projects that lives up to its pre-release hype.

## 2. 'The Sparks Brothers'

The brothers here are Ron and Russell Mael, Southern California baby boomers who

formed the art-rock band Sparks. Forever operating outside of the mainstream, the Maels have released 25 albums over 50 years and in the process amassed a huge cult following, many of them other musicians.

## 3. 'Roadrunner: A Film About Anthony Bourdain'

This is a film that serves established fans well and gives reason for the uninitiated to investigate further. With the noted exception of Julia Child (who also had a great bio-doc made about her released this year), the troubled Bourdain was perhaps the highest profile TV celebrity chef of all time.

## 4. 'Becoming Cousteau'

This thorough film covers the life of Jacques Cousteau, a French scientist and conservationist who parlayed his love of the sea into multiple TV series and dozens of films, three of which won Oscars. Director Liz Garbus does a splendid job in culling from still photos, news reels, and interviews to produce a seamless whole.

## 5. 'The Lost Leonardo'

Equal parts history lesson and mystery thriller, this enthralling procedural goes into the in-depth history of the "Salvator Mundi," an alleged lost painting by Leonardo da Vinci. After its "rediscovery" in 2005, it changed hands multiple times until a final (?) sale in 2017, yet has still not convinced many in the know that it is authentic.

*Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has written for over 30 local and national film industry media outlets and is ranked in the top 10 of the Atlanta media marketplace. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a regular contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles.*



The film shows that faith healing does not come without a cost. Sara Hopkins (Austyn Johnson) prays for Mark Miller (Paul-Mikél Williams) to be able to walk again, in "The Girl Who Believes in Miracles."



Sara Hopkins (Austyn Johnson) has a deep and abiding faith in God.



## A Faith-Based Film About Faith Healing

## MARK JACKSON

Do you believe in miracles? If so, "The Girl Who Believes in Miracles" will work for you. If you don't, this won't be the film to convince you that Jesus saves. Why? It's not based on a true story. Even based on true stories, faith-based films, such as "Heaven Is for Real," have a difficult time convincing anyone in the atheist and agnostic camps that faith has merit.

And why is that? A couple of reasons. The non-faithful hear it all as preachy and spewing nonscientific claims with zero proof, which grates on their nerves. My faith is hard-won; it took me 40 years of turning over every stone of research to reach my current level of rock-solid faith, so I do understand nonbeliever frustration.

Most people aren't interested enough to put in however much time it takes to gather enough information to the point where common sense begins to override "scientific proof." Or to study enough philosophy to understand that modern human science is itself a religion founded on its own particular brand of "I can't explain it, I just believe it" faith. Or to become aware that many great scientific thinkers, like Einstein, went down the rabbit hole of science only to reemerge in the realm of religion.

Secondly—and this is my pet peeve with all religious and spiritual communities—the zealous enthusiasm to spread the truth as interpreted by that community often overwhelms the appreciation of the inherent level of difficulty involved in the art of storytelling, that is, in acting and directing. Most people think that acting is easy, and directing even more so.

So when I hear that one of the film's producers, 98-year-old Laurence Jaffe, with no prior storytelling experience decides to up and produce a faith-based film, not based on a true story, while part of me

says "Good for him!" the rest of me knows there's a deep lack of understanding here.

It's this kind of "how hard could it be?" cluelessness regarding what it takes to achieve quality in film that results in the often hackneyed, amateur-hour productions that give the genre a bad name. "The Girl Who Believes in Miracles" has an impressive cast, and on paper director Rich Correll has an impressive résumé, which just goes to show how tricky it is to get a movie to work properly and speak to a wide audience. Which is what quality storytelling is capable of and ultimately supposed to do. And the whole point of making movies about religious topics is to spread the word and make it a gem of truth with the power to open people's eyes, not just preach to the choir. But all in all, if you go to church regularly, you won't have a problem with "The Girl Who Believes in Miracles" whatsoever.

## The Story

Little Sara Hopkins (the extremely cute Austyn Johnson), while in church, takes to heart a sermon that states that if someone truly believes in God and his infinite power, then anything is possible and true faith can move mountains. Whereupon she soon discovers that she bears the gift of doing miraculous healings via prayer.

She brings a sparrow back from the dead. Her older brother Danny (Luke Harmon) felt no heartbeat and declared it dead. Sara prayed, looked across the lake, saw Jesus (in a T-shirt and jeans no less), and the little bird jumped out of her hand and flew away across the lake.

Then, Sara attends Danny's high school soccer game and prays to God that Danny's team wins. The other team does, however, and so she's confused as to why her victory prayer wasn't answered. Her granddaddy Sam Donovan (Peter Coyote) explains that prayers, while always answered,

**It's tricky to get a faith-based movie to work properly and speak to a wide audience.**

sometimes don't get answered within our projected time frames or in the exact ways we imagine.

Then Sara heals her wheelchair-bound friend, Mark (Paul-Mikél Williams). One thing leads to another, and soon her miracles are stacking up like pancakes that the local press is eager to gobble. Cue media circus.

However, the more people Sara heals (oh, and there's a run-over dog brought back to life), the weaker and sicker she gets. I knew a yoga instructor who once told me of a man who would go around healing the Park Avenue crowd for a pretty penny, using some kind of laying-on-of-hands technique. Apparently this person got weaker and sicker, too. Apparently this is a thing that happens. And so all that healing by Sara might explain why she eventually passes away. Is that a spoiler? No. Jesus figures heavily into this narrative, so there are still surprises and an abundance of miracles.

Suffice it to say, the highly skeptical local doctor (Kevin Sorbo) says Sara has a brain tumor. Cue massive grief and an 11th-hour attempt to kidnap Sara out of the hospital (masterminded by her Vietnam-vet granddad) and transport her in a rainstorm back out to the lake to see what Jesus might say—all of which is highly reminiscent of Doc Brown's last-minute hectic attempt to get Marty McFly to the clock tower in time to trap lightning in the flux capacitor, generating 1.21 gigawatts of electricity and boomeranging the DeLorean back to the future.

## Worth the Time?

The glaring problem here is that Sara basically stands in for Jesus, which can be confusing for children (and adults) because it's positing that a human can faith-heal on par with the biblical Son of God. This could stymie a lot of kids' budding faith if they sit around for hours trying to heal their dead gerbils and guinea pigs and experience a major fail.

Then again, for a strictly faith-based audience, it's a perfectly fine story to tell as long as children understand that Sara's story is an instance of higher powers demonstrating what humans with massive amounts of faith are capable of. Those extremely rare individuals who have that profound level of faith and purity can help facilitate the miracles of God.

Science is slowly catching up; quantum physics has demonstrated that atomic particles can emerge into existence out of nowhere by humans merely thinking about them. If that's not a miracle, I don't know what is.



A movie poster for faith-based film "The Girl Who Believes in Miracles."

ROB YOUNGSON/FOCUS FEATURES



The characters of "Belfast" enjoying a movie.

CNN/FOCUS FEATURES



Anthony Bourdain stars in Morgan Neville's documentary "Roadrunner."

PARAMOUNT PICTURES



(L-R) Marcus (Noah Jupe), his sister Regan (Millicent Simmons), and their mother, Evelyn Abbott (Emily Blunt), must stay quiet to survive hostile aliens, in "A Quiet Place Part II."

KIMBERLEY FRENCH/NETFLIX



Sandra Bullock stars in "The Unforgivable."

CLAIRE FOLGER/AMAZON CONTENT SERVICES LLC



Ben Affleck (L) and Tye Sheridan star in "The Tender Bar."

KIMBERLEY FRENCH/NETFLIX



Irene (Tessa Thompson, L) and Clare (Ruth Negga), once high school friends, have chosen very different paths in life, in "Passing."

TWENTIETH CENTURY STUDIOS



Ryan Reynolds plays a fictional character in the "Free City" video game. He falls for Molotov Girl (Jodie Comer), in "Free Guy."



Dr. Ben Riley (Kevin Sorbo) is at a loss to explain the occurrence of supernatural events.



Mark Miller (Paul-Mikél Williams) looks at a picture drawn for him by Sara Hopkins.



(Second row, L-R) Alex Hopkins (Burgess Jenkins), Bonnie Hopkins (Mira Sorvino), Sam Donovan (Peter Coyote), Sara Hopkins (Austyn Johnson), and Cindy Kramer (Tommi Rose) attend Danny Hopkins's soccer game.



(L-R) Theresa Casillas (Stephanie Cood), Father Alonzo Alvarez (Ricardo Hinoja), Maria Casillas (Marisol Vera), and Sara Hopkins (Austyn Johnson). Theresa thanks Sara for curing her cancer.



Fearing mistakenly that the Winfield women need rescuing, William Sherman (Gordon MacRae) rushes in to save them. A lobby card for "On Moonlight Bay."



Doris Day and Gordon MacRae appear as sweethearts in both films. A lobby card for "By the Light of the Silvery Moon."

#### GOLDEN AGE FILMS

## 2 Delightful Family Films for the Holidays From October Through December

TIFFANY BRANNAN

Beyond the most popular classic Christmas movies, like "It's a Wonderful Life" and "White Christmas," there are countless less-famous older movies with equally heartwarming holiday stories (not limited to Christmas) that fulfill our longing for family and our nostalgia for times gone by. "On Moonlight Bay" from 1951 and its sequel, "By the Light of the Silvery Moon" from 1953, are charming family films that feature great holiday scenes—including Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

Although made in the 1950s, these two Warner Bros. movies are set in World War I-era America, in the idyllic Midwestern town of Milburn, Indiana. Both are musicals, but they feature famous songs of the set period rather than original '50s compositions.

The stories, which are loosely based on Booth Tarkington's collection of "Penrod" sketches, focus on the Winfield family. In the films, the family consists of father George (Leon Ames), mother Alice (Rosemary DeCamp), their 17-year-old daughter Marjorie (Doris Day), and their mischievous 12-year-old son Wesley (Billy Gray).

The household also includes their sarcastic maid, Stella (Mary Wickes). And there are Wesley's pets: Max the dog and, in the second film, Gregory the turkey. The other lead character is Marjorie's beau, William Sherman (Gordon MacRae).

**The Story in "On Moonlight Bay"**  
Although "On Moonlight Bay" focuses on Marjorie and her romance, it also introduces us to the Winfield family as they are moving into a new neighborhood, much to the chagrin of everyone except Mr. Winfield. Although Alice thinks that her husband just wants to be closer to the bank where he is vice president, he insists that his motive is to surround his children with young people from the right background. He is particularly interested in his eligible daughter's finding a husband, but she just wants to play baseball.

After Wesley reluctantly befriends the troublemaker who lives across the street (Jeffrey Stevens), a chance accident leads Marjorie to meet his older brother, college student William. Bill, as he prefers being called, invites Marjorie on a date, inspiring her to be feminine for the first time. As they begin going steady, Marjorie gives up baseball for good. Meanwhile, Wesley's mischief continues stirring up trouble for his family and, sometimes, the whole community.



The song that is also the name of the second film.

Tiffany Brannan is a 20-year-old opera singer, Hollywood history/vintage beauty copywriter, film reviewer, fashion historian, travel writer, and ballet writer. In 2016, she and her sister founded the Pure Entertainment

The Winfields prepare Thanksgiving dinner together. A lobby card for "By the Light of the Silvery Moon."



#### Holiday Touches

Much of this story takes place during the holiday season. It features scenes around Halloween and then Christmas. After Bill has returned to college, we see Wesley making mischief in his schoolroom, which is accented with charming, old-fashioned Halloween decorations. Bored during class, he compares the appearance of his teacher (Ellen Corby) to the jack-o'-lantern and witch on the walls.

One of the film's climactic scenes takes place on Christmas Eve. The peaceful evening descends into chaos when one of Wesley's tall tales brings Bill bursting in, unannounced, having come to rescue Marjorie and Mrs. Winfield from Mr. Winfield, who has been rumored to be a "drunken beast."

When Wesley realizes that his teacher has repeated his dramatic, silent-film-inspired excuse for falling asleep in school, he flees the house. Before Mr. Winfield can give the young rascal a taste of his razor strap, the Winfields hear angelic voices. Wesley has joined the little Christmas carolers after all, happily donning Marjorie's old petticoat, remade into an angel costume which he hated earlier.

This winter scene concludes with Doris Day and Gordon MacRae singing a charming but obscure Christmas song, "Christmas Story" by Pauline Walsh. Like "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" from "Meet Me in St. Louis," this song made its debut in "On Moonlight Bay." However, it failed to achieve the same fame. It was the only original song featured in either "On Moonlight Bay" or "By the Light of the Silvery Moon."

#### The Story in

**'By the Light of the Silvery Moon'**  
"By the Light of the Silvery Moon" depicts the further adventures of the Winfield family and the other friendly folks of Milburn. Featuring the same great cast and characters, this story resumes a little over a year after the last one ended. Bill is just returning home from the war, so the Winfields hear wedding bells for him and Marjorie.

Little do they know that the matrimony-shy soldier, who had finally decided to marry Marjorie by the end of the last movie, is getting cold feet again. His stint in the Army has convinced him to establish a career before marrying, but he fears that his fiancée and future in-laws won't understand.

Thankfully, Mr. Winfield has a simple solution: He sets Bill up with a job at his bank. However, Marjorie is soon the one shying away from the altar when a family crisis arises. Wesley, Marjorie, and Stella mistake dialogue from a play for a love letter from their father to French actress Renee LaRue (Maria Palmer), and they suspect the worst. As Mr. and Mrs. Winfield's 25th wedding anniversary draws near, the children and faithful housekeeper scheme to rekindle the couple's romance before it's too late.

#### Holiday Touches

This movie is one of few that feature Thanksgiving. The holiday figures prominently in the plot from the opening. This time, Stella, as narrator, sets the scene by speaking directly to the audience and reacquainting us with the familiar characters. As opening narrator, she introduces us to a new member of the Winfield family: Wesley's pet turkey, Gregory. It's not long before we realize the bird's purpose in life.

Like the other families in Milburn, the Winfields got a turkey a year earlier, with the intention of fattening it up for the holiday meal. Wesley even selected this particular bird because it had the biggest drumsticks. However, during the year, Gregory has become Wesley's beloved pet. The boy is furious when his father mentions the bird's fate on Thanksgiving Eve and decides to swap Gregory for another unfortunate turkey. Later, Mr. Winfield invites the bank's president (Howard Wendell) and his family to share the Winfields' Thanksgiving meal after the president's turkey mysteriously disappears.

While there are dozens of Christmas movies, few films depict the wonderful, uniquely American holiday that begins the season. This movie, however, is a wonderful reminder of its old-fashioned pleasures. It shows a truly joyous family celebration, complete with everyone pitching in and singing in the kitchen while preparing the meal.

After the turkey incident, a charming winter scene begins. Snow covers the ground, and the Winfields prepare for a romantic ice-skating party to commemorate Mr. and Mrs. Winfield's wedding anniversary. The frozen pond, historic skating clothes, and horse-drawn sleigh are straight out of a Christmas postcard.

#### Homespun Charm for the Holidays

These movies serve up heaping helpings of homespun charm. The wholesome pictures of family life are more appealing now than ever before. Films made and set in the 1950s are now very nostalgic, but "On Moonlight Bay" and "By the Light of the Silvery Moon" were charmingly reminiscent when first released, since they were set almost 40 years earlier.

Both of these films are great choices as introductions to classic films. Since the filmmakers assumed that many wouldn't remember or know a lot about World War I, the script doesn't take knowledge of events for granted. Thus, people who've had limited previous experience with old movies can enjoy this wholesome entertainment without any confusion, and perhaps learn something about American history at the same time.

At your next holiday get-together with friends and family, why not suggest one of these movies to create a festive spirit? Some may find such fare overly sentimental, but calling old-fashioned romanticism sappy is nothing new. Bill begins "On Moonlight Bay" as a freethinking college student who calls romantic songs silly and doesn't believe in marriage. However, once he falls for Marjorie, he quickly abandons his radical ideas for the traditional values of home, marriage, and family. In the same way, these movies make traditional family life look appealing enough to convince even the most devoted cynic. This holiday season, I invite you to join the Winfields in lovely Milburn, Indiana, USA, for a taste of traditional Americana.

#### SACRED MUSIC

## J.S. Bach's 'Christmas Oratorio' Captures Many Aspects of the Holiday

KENNETH LAFAVE

The purpose of music composed for holy days is to remind us of the very meaning of those days. English speakers are blessed to have Handel's "Messiah" as a magnificent reminder of Christmas. Though Handel wrote only a portion of his famous oratorio for Christmas (the "Hallelujah" chorus is meant for Good Friday, and much of the rest for Easter), it has come to represent the majesty of the season.

But a second work, in German, deserves attention as a reminder of Christmas's span of twelve-plus-one days. "The Twelve Days of Christmas," irritating song that it is, at least gets the number right: There really are a dozen days of Christmas, plus a 13th (about which more later) that links Christmastide to the "ordinary time" that follows. That work is J.S. Bach's "Christmas Oratorio," a cycle of six cantatas celebrating half a dozen different aspects of Christmastide.

### The 'Christmas Oratorio' consists of arias, recitatives, orchestral sinfonia, and choruses.

#### The Real 12 Days of Christmas

Contrary to commercial interests, there are no "Twelve Shopping Days of Christmas" leading up to Dec. 25. Actual Christmas begins on Dec. 25, or the eve thereof, and lasts through Jan. 5. On Jan. 6 comes that 13th day, called "Epiphany," commemorating (in most traditions) the arrival of the three kings or Magi from the East. Bach's six cantatas that make up the "Christmas Oratorio" honor the first, second, and third days of Christmas, plus a fourth for New Year's Day, coinciding with the naming and circumcision of Jesus; a fifth for the journey of the Magi (first Sunday after the New Year); and finally, Epiphany itself for the adoration of the Magi.

Each reflects one characteristic of the Christmas season. The first is regal and majestic, as befits the heralding of a royal birth.

#### WHAT GOOD IS POETRY?

## Shakespeare's 'Winter' and the Hard Joys of the Season

SEAN FITZPATRICK

The world bound up in the snow and ice of winter is as fascinating as it is forbidding.

Hoary mountains, blinding blizzards, snowy deserts, solid waters, fluid fires of the aurora borealis, and air that stings to breathe all give the distinct impression that men ought not keep company with such inhospitable presences.

But how wonderful they are. There must be some mysterious reason why the holy places of Samuel T. Coleridge's pleasure-dome in "Kubla Khan" were savage caves of ice. It could also be the reason why Norse mythology imagines that the first man was fashioned out of a glacier instead of the ground. Might it be that the hostility of the polar elements is the very thing that makes them irresistible? Somehow their unmerciful aspect reflects majesty, even the divine. Old Man Winter is as charming as he is cruel.

Appreciating these qualities requires an experience beyond poetry, yet only poetry can give it expression. William Shakespeare's "Winter" from "Love's Labor's Lost" is a simple yet profound piece of poetry that captures something of why the icy seasons are natural occasions to grip a truth: Hardship leads to happiness for the hardy folk who happily embrace such wisdom.

When icicles hang by the wall  
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail  
And Tom bears logs into the hall  
And milk comes frozen home in pail,  
When blood is nipp'd and ways be foul,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
Tu-whit;  
Tu-who, a merry note,



(Above) The first page of the first part of the "Christmas Oratorio."

(Right) A portrait of J.S. Bach, before 1798, by "Gebel."

No. 2 is pastoral, painting a dual picture of the announcement to the shepherds and the holy calm of Mary and her child. No. 3 is joyously buoyant as the shepherds arrive and the general recognition of the Christ child grows. In No. 4, the childlike hope of salvation in the name of Jesus gently is cradled in the glow of



BACH/HAUS EISENACH/CC BY-SA 3.0

oboes and horns. With No. 5, the world enters the scene, as the Magi inquire after the whereabouts of the newborn King of the Jews, and Herod trembles at the thought. The music is the most dramatic of the six. The final cantata peals out in joy when the Magi find the Christ child and the victory over "devil and death" is realized. The last words of the concluding movement are "Bei Gott hat seine Stelle/ Das menschliche Geschlecht." ("With God is the place/ For the human race.")

#### Sampling the Larger Work

Like "Messiah" (and all other oratorios, for that matter), the "Christmas Oratorio" consists of arias, recitatives, orchestral sinfonia, and choruses. Among the latter in the "Christmas Oratorio" are many superior examples of a form of which Bach was absolute master: the chorale. This is a precomposed hymn tune harmonized for maximum expressivity. In the chorale, what is familiar (the hymn) is exalted in a simple way.

If you have never heard the "Christmas Oratorio," I suggest two excerpts to sample the depth of artistry in the two and a half hours of Bach's monumental score: from No. 2, the 10th number, which is an extended, exquisite alto solo that evokes Mary holding the baby; and the fourth entry of No. 4, the sublime "Echo" aria, in which a soprano searches for answers from God about the meaning of the baby's birth, and receives them from an echoing soprano. The entire "Christmas Oratorio" is well represented on YouTube and elsewhere.

#### Bach's Gifts to the World

The "Christmas Oratorio" is sometimes dismissed by critics who point out that three of the cantatas are "parody" works, incorporating music from earlier cantatas. This is ingratitude on stilts. The treasures that J.S. Bach left for us are immeasurable. This man, whose earthly span was 65 years, who had to work his entire life through as a teacher and church musician, who sired and supported 20 children (only 10 survived to maturity) by two wives, somehow managed to find the energy and time to give us a catalog of works indispensable to the keyboard artist ("The Well-Tempered Clavier," "Goldberg Variations," and so on), to Christian liturgy ("Mass in B Minor," two settings of the Passion, and others), to the discipline of polyphony ("The Art of the Fugue"), and to the early traditions of orchestral music (the "Brandenburg Concertos").

To these add the "Christmas Oratorio," a work largely ignored by English speakers, but one which speaks directly to the heart through music that proclaims, rejoices, and sings in wonder at the message of Christmas, a holy feast that stretches well beyond Dec. 25.

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's the author of three books, including "Experiencing Film Music" (2017, Rowman & Littlefield).



While greasy Joan doth keel the pot,  
When all aloud the wind doth blow  
And coughing drowns the parson's saw  
And birds sit brooding in the snow  
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,  
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
Tu-whit;  
Tu-who, a merry note,  
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

Working in the chill of winter proves our mettle.

Though the poem jingles with an almost nursery quality, it is bustling with the work of men and women moving through its chilled scenes with cheer. And though these scenes seem to come from a child at a frosty window, they are of the workaday winter world that stamps and toils through this meditation with heavy boots, woolen scarves, and wintry darkness. Frostbitten men blow on their fingers as they traverse the treacherous paths from barn and shed. Greasy women rub their running noses as they keep the scullery blazing.

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.

birds and wise old owls. The sounds share a single, communal, merry note, which is a keynote of culture. Life and labor are given a new spark in this song as they are set against elements that make the going harder. There is nothing like a bit of winter for human households and whole societies to assert themselves. The smallness of men and women struggling in the dead of winter is precisely what makes mankind great.

But the silver, frigid night is an occasion to realize that though man is the lord of nature, he is subject to it at the same time. The frozen elements that glare from expanses of storm cloud and snowbank and frozen lake suggest with white and wise silence that we, the frailer members of creation, may have little to no business clinging in their crags.

Surviving against the winter is hard work, true, but it's a kind of joy as well. A merrier jest and a merrier note there cannot be for the cold can invigorate as well as it can kill, and the snowy peaks and snow-choked alleys may call out human civilization as a flash in the pan—but a mighty flash it is. The tenuous tenacity of the human race has always merited reward. So it has been and still is. The indifferently powers that be must endure us as we build up fires, shovel out roads, and shield our shelters down to crack and cranny from winter's icy intrusion.

We all know those exertions and their consequent feelings, and the clear, crisp sounds on a winter's night that make us glad to be alive. We can only thrill in life when it is being threatened, even in a small way, and Shakespeare's wintry vignettes rejoice in both the thrill and the threat, intoned by the merry notes that proceed from living and working and eating and surviving in the teeth of bitter weather.

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Peter O'Toole plays the brilliant, complex, and controversial T.E. Lawrence.

ICONIC FILMS

# A Searing Biographical Epic of an Eccentric Hero

IAN KANE

As a lifelong fan of cinema, it was hard to admit that I couldn't remember much of director David Lean's 1962 masterwork "Lawrence of Arabia." It is one of those films that I'd seen bits and pieces of with family members many years ago but, due to circumstances, wasn't able to enjoy many of the details of the production—and, boy, there are an incredible number of details to take in. The epic requires watching without any distractions in order to assemble meaning.

Based on the life of British Army Col. T.E. Lawrence during World War I, the film starts with the titular character's death via a motorcycle accident. This surprising start compelled me to re-check the film cast's credits to see if it was indeed the main character meeting his end on a verdant English country road—or perhaps someone playing one of the character's subsequent relatives.

At the time of T.E. Lawrence's unfortunate end in 1935, he was a well-respected war hero but also a controversial figure—as evidenced by the back-and-forth dialogue among attendees at his funeral. Director Lean then flashes back to the beginning of Lawrence's

career as a young army lieutenant.

When the Ottoman Empire sided with the Germans during World War I, the Arabs rose up in defiance against the Central Powers, which also included the Austria-Hungary Empire and Bulgaria. Lawrence was stationed in Cairo, Egypt, at the newly minted intelligence organization, used to counter the Central Powers, known as the Arab Bureau.

From his initial interactions with his military fellows, as well as his senior officers, we can see that young Lt. Lawrence is quite eccentric—and that's putting it mildly. Although relatively new to his unit, he's already established a reputation for being insolent and somewhat dismissive of others.

Due to his arrogance, Lawrence is threatened with arrest for insubordination by his unit's commander, but a Mr. Dryden (Claude Rains) of the Arab Bureau spares the young man by getting him sequestered for a mission. Lawrence is tasked with traversing lengthy swaths of the Arabian Desert to reach Prince Faisal (Alec Guinness), a notable Arab leader who is sympathetic to the British war effort. After locating the prince, Lawrence is to assess Faisal's ability to assist the British against the encroaching Turkish army.

**'Lawrence of Arabia' is an intensely captivating biographical portrait.**

**'Lawrence of Arabia'**

**Director:**  
David Lean

**Starring:**  
Peter O'Toole, Omar Sharif, Claude Rains, Alec Guinness, Anthony Quinn, Jack Hawkins, Arthur Kennedy

**Running Time:**  
3 hours, 48 minutes

**Not Rated**

**Release Date:**  
Dec. 10, 1962

★★★★★

*Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality. To learn more, visit [DreamFlightEnt.com](http://DreamFlightEnt.com)*

Lawrence is assigned a guide, Tafas (Zia Mohyeddin), a Bedouin tribesman whom he befriends as they travel across the scorching sands. However, the Englishman soon learns a great deal about local rivalries and blood feuds when he and his guide run into Sherif Ali (Omar Sharif) and conflict ensues.

Lawrence eventually meets up with friendly forces, including Prince Faisal, who takes the former under his wing. This affords Lawrence a tremendous amount of latitude and thus begins his journey to unite the various quarreling Arab tribes under a united cause. This also sets into motion Lawrence's fascinating odyssey of self-discovery, the apex of his powers and influence, and subsequent troubles.

**A Fascinating Nearly 4 Hours**

As this film clocks in at almost four hours of runtime, I feared that it might begin to crumble under its own weight. However, its taut screenplay by Robert Bolt and Michael Wilson is trimmed of nearly any shreds of fat. Indeed, the only slower parts are designed to be that way because of their formidable impacts, such as cinematographer Freddie Young's sumptuous long shots of the sweeping deserts, or the many subtle hints of emotion that play across the characters' faces.

Although the action scenes are likewise well-handled, the war effort and back-and-forth among the various military generals, politicians, and tribal leaders serve as a tapestry for the central force of the narrative: Lawrence's trajectory, his struggles with his own cultural and national self-identity, and eventual issues with his mental health.

"Lawrence of Arabia" is an intensely captivating biographical portrait of a brilliant and controversial figure whose character develops over the backdrop of World War I. It's a must-see for any film buffs, as well as those who enjoy fascinating character studies by outstanding filmmakers.



T.E. Lawrence (Peter O'Toole, L) and Prince Faisal (Alec Guinness) join forces, representing the British and Arab nations.

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