

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE



"Madonna With Child," also known as the "Madonna of the Book," circa 1482–1483, by Botticelli. Tempera on wood; 22 7/8 inches by 15 5/8 inches. Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan.

SACRED ART

Beyond Botticelli's Venus: Transcendent Classical Beauty

A glance at the 'Botticelli: Artist and Designer' exhibition in Paris

LORRAINE FERRIER

The graceful figure of Venus poised in her shell, as depicted by Renaissance master Sandro Botticelli, is so synonymous with beauty that even those unfamiliar with art can recognize her, such is her fame. What is less well-known are his paintings of the Madonna that share similar

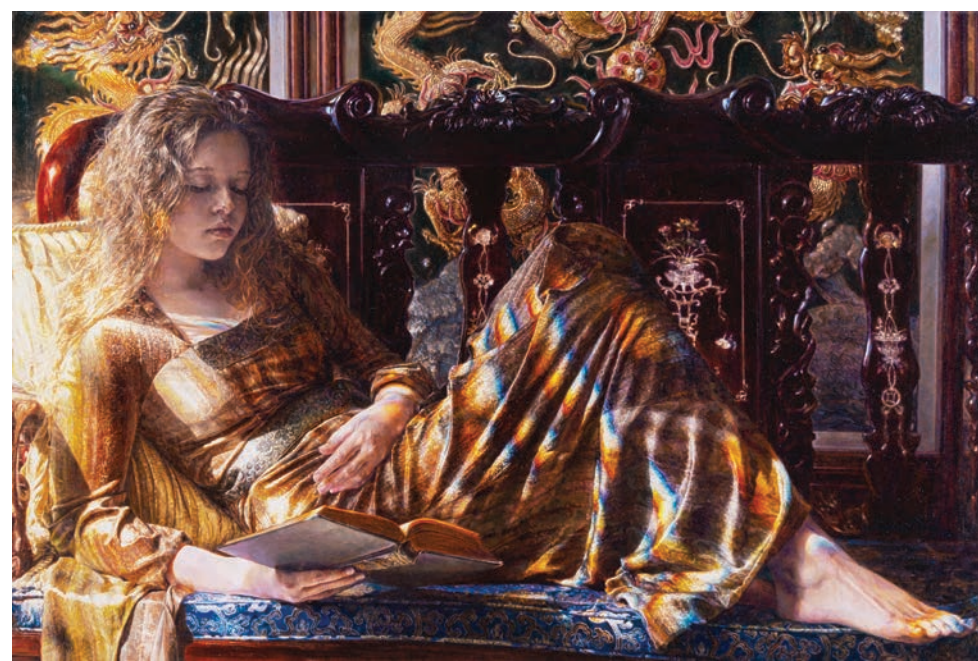
qualities of classical beauty.

Throughout the Renaissance, artists referenced the ancient classics. Art historian E.H. Gombrich writes in his book "The Story of Art" that people were "so convinced of the superior wisdom of the ancients that they believed these classical legends must contain some profound and mysterious truth."

In "The Birth of Venus," Alessandro Filipepi, commonly known as Botticelli (circa 1445–1510), based Venus on the ancient statue Aphrodite of Knidos (Venus to Italians) by the Greek sculptor Praxiteles.

In Botticelli's time, such earthly beauty was equated with the divine.

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HISTORY

American Place-Names: Ties That Bind

JEFF MINICK

Long ago, when I first met my sister-in-law-to-be, a student in her early 20s, she asked me where I'd grown up. I told her that I'd spent my elementary school years in Boonville, North Carolina, and that we'd moved to Winston-Salem when I was in high school.

She pondered my remarks for a moment and then said, "Those are strange names."

Her comment nearly made me burst out laughing. We were speaking in the den of her family's home in Milwaukee, near a community called Wauwatosa and a short distance from the Menomonee and the Kinnickinnic rivers.

Talk about strange names! Like her, most of us are accustomed to the place-names surrounding us, so familiar in our ears that we rarely pause to reflect on their origins or meaning. In my case, I knew that Boonville was so named because Daniel Boone once spent a couple of nights there while exploring the Yadkin River Valley and sometimes spelled his name Boon.

The significance of the names of some other places I've lived, like San Diego (Saint Didacus of Alcalá), Charlottesville (named after the wife of England's King George III), and Front Royal (origins debatable), I knew because I investigated them. But until now, I had no idea that Staunton (pronounced "Stan-ton" by the natives), Virginia, where I once spent two years, was named for Lady Rebecca Staunton, the wife of a colonial governor.

Though we may be ignorant of the stories behind the names of our towns, cities, counties, rivers, and mountains, they often contain miniature lessons in history that can help us better understand where we live and those who came before us.

From delving into commonplace names like New York and Boston to gritty American handles like Frog Level, North Carolina; Bugtussle, Kentucky; and Hell, Michigan, we can learn about our ancestors and our broader history.

The Old Country

Early settlers in America often named their settlements after the places and people they'd left behind. New Hampshire, New Jersey, and New England reference the British Isles. Over time, as other pioneers pushed west, they saluted other European cities as well, like Paris, Texas; Florence, Alabama; and Berlin, Wisconsin.

Charleston in South Carolina, Virginia's Williamsburg, Baltimore, and

Raleigh were named for people rather than places. Surely these honorifics bestowed on kings and nobles also acted as lifelines for men and women so far from home, reminding them not only of the part they themselves were playing in empire-building but also of the leaders and rulers who stood behind them.

What's in a name? Just possibly, an entire book of people and events.

Classics, the Bible, and a New Nation The Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews influenced American nomenclature as well. Sparta, Athens, and Rome became American place-names, and settlements like Salem, Bethany, Bethel, Bethlehem, and Lebanon acquired their names from the Bible, which so many of these early settlers knew well and loved.

In the wake of their Revolution, Americans garlanded their towns with the names of their heroes. Today, for example, 88 cities and towns in the United States bear the name of our country's first president. The names of Founding Fathers like Jefferson, Monroe, and Madison also dot the countryside.

Other lesser-known personages were also honored in this fashion. An example: The town in the Smoky Mountains where I lived for 20-odd years, Waynesville, received its name from a Colonel Robert Love, who had served under "Mad Anthony" Wayne during the Revolution. Another example: Virginia's Warren County, which I currently call home, pays homage to Dr. Joseph Warren, the man who sent Paul Revere on his famous night ride and who gallantly died fighting the British at Bunker Hill.

Hundreds more places around the country honor the memories of the patriots who founded our nation.

Native American Names

Of our 50 states, 27 bear the names of Native American tribes or the terms used by those tribes to describe a region. Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, the Dakotas, Tennessee: These and others are Indian words adapted into English.

In addition, many of our rivers have retained the names bestowed on them by natives. Cities, too, like Tucson and Tuscaloosa, pay their respects to the tribes who once lived there or to famous warriors and Native American statesmen. By their names, national parks like Nez Perce and Sequoia salute Native American culture.

Homespun Poetry

Sometimes geographical features, business establishments, or whimsy come into play. In North Carolina, for instance, we have Bat Cave, Flat Rock, Chimney Rock, and Kill Devil Hills down on the coast, where the Wright Brothers first launched their airplane. Tennessee has Pigeon Forge; and Hershey, Pennsylvania, is so called because of Milton Hershey and the chocolate company he established there.

The unincorporated town of Whynot, North Carolina, provides a perfect example of the breezy way we sometimes crown a place with a name. Legend has it that when citizens of this town were arguing over a name, asking "Why not this one?" and "Why not this one?" an exasperated man stood up and said, "Why not name the town Whynot and let's go home?"

New Versus Old

In this swift run through American place-names, we might pause and notice a remarkable circumstance common to all these places.

Americans named their communities, cities, and states. Think about this for a moment. In the old countries from which these people emigrated, the ancient places of their birth had long borne the names by which we know them today. Canterbury, Hampshire, London, Marseilles, and Naples received their identities in the mists of time.

But in this "New World," the explorers and settlers themselves chose the names of places, like Adam and Eve naming the animals in the Old Testament. The names chosen might be as stately and



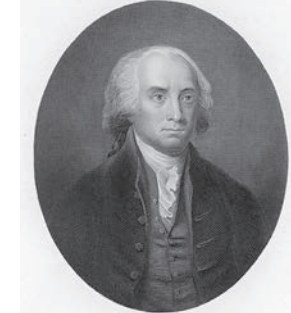
historically significant as Washington, D.C., or as straightforward and blunt as Deadwood, South Dakota, so named because someone found dead trees in a gulch. But whatever the case, Americans are the inventors of these names.

As a result, these names and their origins tell us much about the history of our country. Nearly every one of them contains some nugget of the past that, if investigated, can lead us to hidden pockets of gold.

Tracking the Stories Behind the Names

Suppose, for instance, you're a high school student living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. You wonder about the origins of the name of your city. You Google "Pittsburgh" and find that the

HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES



Numerous cities and towns are named after our Founding Fathers. A portrait of James Madison, circa 1810, the fourth President of the United States and one of the authors of the Federalist Papers.

name derives from a British prime minister, William Pitt the Elder, 1st Earl of Chatham. You read a bit about him, and then discover that a General Braddock and his subordinate Major George Washington fought and lost a disastrous battle near your city during the French and Indian War. You read on, learning about the Whiskey Rebellion, the glass industry, steamboats, the Great Fire, the Underground Railway, and the steel industry.

What's in a name? Just possibly, an entire book of people and events.

Belonging

Our American names are part of the glue holding us together as a people, even when we pay them no attention. Atlanta, San Antonio, Los Angeles,

Culpeper, Corpus Christi, Deadhorse, Greasy Corner, Bear Dance: Behind such names is the tale of a place and a people that have shaped us and defined who and what we are.

We can find poetry in these names. We can find history. And most of all, we can find home.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust On Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

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The chocolate company is responsible for the name of Hershey, Pa.

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Mississippi, one of the 27 state names originating from a Native American word, welcomes you.

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The library in Boonville, N.C., proudly boasts the town's unusual name, which comes from the American folk hero Daniel Boone.

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(Left) "Virgin and Child," also known as the "Campana Madonna," circa 1467–1470, by Botticelli. Tempera on poplar wood; 28 3/8 inches by 20 1/8 inches. The Museum of the Petit Palais in Avignon, France, on permanent loan from the Louvre Museum, 1976.

(Right) "Virgin and Child," circa 1460–1465, by Filippo Lippi. Tempera on poplar wood; 30 1/4 inches by 21 1/4 inches. Alte Pinakothek, Bavarian State Painting Collections, Munich.



"Madonna and Child With the Infant St. John," circa 1505, by Botticelli. Tempera and oil on canvas; 52 3/4 inches by 36 1/4 inches. Palatine Gallery, Pitti Palace, Uffizi Galleries; Florence, Italy.

PHOTOGRAPHIC OFFICE OF THE UFFIZI GALLERIES



"The Madonna of the Magnificat," 1490s, by Master of Gothic Buildings, believed to be Jacopo Foschi, after Botticelli. Tempera on wood; 45 1/8 inches in diameter. Fabre Museum of Montpellier Mediterranean Metropolis, on permanent loan from the Louvre Museum, 1979.

FREDÉRIC JAUMES/FABRE MUSEUM OF MONTPELLIER MEDITERRANÉEN METROPOLIS



"Coronation of the Virgin With Saint Justus of Volterra, Blessed Jacopo Guidi da Certaldo, Saint Romuald, Saint Clement, and a Camaldolese Monk," circa 1492, by Botticelli and Domenico Ghirlandaio. Tempera and oil on wood transferred onto canvas; 106 inches by 69 inches. Donated by John & Johanna Bass, Collection of the Bass Museum of Art; Miami Beach, Fla.

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SACRED ART

Beyond Botticelli's Venus: Transcendent Classical Beauty

A glance at the 'Botticelli: Artist and Designer' exhibition in Paris

Continued from Page 1

"Over the course of the 15th century, beauty rapidly became an important feature of devotional paintings and almost a requisite in iconography; this reached its full development in Botticelli," curator Ana Debenedetti writes in her book "Botticelli: Artist and Designer."

The exhibition "Botticelli: Artist and Designer" at the Jacquemart-André Museum in Paris explores Botticelli's artistic genius through around 40 of his artworks. These works—including portraits, altarpieces, private devotional paintings, and even decorative arts such as tapestries—are displayed in the exhibition alongside his contemporaries' works, demonstrating links between his works and contemporary culture, and the fluid exchange of artistic ideas and styles between the mainly Florentine artists.

Right from the outset of his career, Botticelli used earthly beauty as a conduit to the divine. In his Virgin and Child paintings, for instance, one can clearly see the Virgin as being both of the earth and heaven. As Debenedetti writes: "[T]he idea that divine love

is first stirred in human hearts by terrestrial beauty ... was a major poetic theme in the Renaissance."

Over the course of the 15th century, beauty rapidly became an important feature of devotional paintings.

Ana Debenedetti, curator

is first stirred in human hearts by terrestrial beauty ... was a major poetic theme in the Renaissance."

Learning From the Master

The exhibition begins with Botticelli's apprenticeship with Fra Filippo Lippi (circa 1406–1469), best known for his devotional paintings. Lippi was renowned as a leading master of the early Renaissance. From him, Botticelli learned to create sweet Madonnas in his Virgin and Child paintings. Exhibition visitors can see how similar Lippi's "Virgin and Child" (circa 1460–1465) is to Botticelli's "Virgin and Child," also known as the "Campana Madonna" (circa 1467–1470).

Both artists endearingly depicted the mother-child bond that instantly connects us to the paintings' subjects. Lippi depicted the Christ child trying to grab his mother's attention, while Botticelli's Christ child indicates that he wants to be nursed by grabbing for a piece of his mother's clothing. In both paintings, the idealized Virgin and the halos over the figures affirm that these are more than mere family scenes: These are specifically created to lead the viewer closer to God.

The artists' Virgin figures almost mirror one another, except that Lippi's Virgin is on the left side of the composition, while in Botticelli's painting she is on the right. In the 1400s, inclining, reversing, and swapping over a model-type was common practice in Italian workshops to avoid obvious repetitions. Debenedetti wrote, "Artists copied the motifs, figures, and even compositions of other artists, especially in sacred paintings where the same stories were depicted and the opportunity to vary the composition was limited."

One fascinating aspect of Botticelli's work is how his style of painting in his devotional works changed over time. On display is his "Madonna With Child," also known as the "Madonna of the Book," which he painted around 1482. The painting still shows the mother-child bond, but compared to his earlier works, the scene is saturated with color. Gone is the heavy architectural background seen in his "Campana Madonna" to be replaced by a simple window and a small hill. Botticelli added religious symbols to the scene—an open prayer book, the crown of thorns—to encourage the viewer

to engage in contemplation and prayer.

The artist elevated the Madonna to her heavenly realm in the glorious altarpiece commission "Coronation of the Virgin With Saint Justus of Volterra, Blessed Jacopo Guidi da Certaldo, Saint Romuald, Saint Clement, and a Camaldolese Monk." Botticelli painted the top half of the painting, while artist Domenico Ghirlandaio painted the lower part. The celebratory scene depicts the Virgin entering heaven to a symphony of angelic music heralding her coronation. Five devout, earthly figures witness the scene. In the lower-right corner, the Camaldolese monk offering up his prayer is believed to be a portrait of the donor who commissioned the altarpiece.

The Magnificent Tondi

The artist and his workshop specialized in painting "tondi," circular paintings or reliefs made for private devotion, which were popular in Florence at the time. Debenedetti writes that the "circular form [was] most appropriate to represent the foundation of the Christian faith as, since antiquity, it represented the perfect geometrical form."

Perfect as the form may be mathematically, the circle is a complex compositional shape to master, yet Botticelli excelled at it. Like many of his works, some tondi were copied by his assistants to create a series.

In the exhibition, there are several examples of these series of paintings. A tondi of particu-

lar note is "The Madonna of the Magnificat" by Botticelli's assistant, known as the Master of Gothic Buildings, believed to be Jacopo Foschi. In the painting, two angels crown the Virgin as she sits on her heavenly throne writing. Christ sits on her lap as he looks up to heaven, with one hand on his mother's, almost guiding her to write, and the other hand touching a pomegranate, symbolic of the Passion.

Throughout his career, Botticelli and his workshop created many devotional paintings for important institutions and patrons. He painted frescoes in Prato Cathedral as part of his apprenticeship, completed myriad commissions from the ruling Medici family, and created three scenes in the pope's private chapel, later known as the Sistine Chapel. The impact of Botticelli's sacred works was far-reaching, as many of his paintings were replicated in series for private devotional use.

Thus, although Botticelli's paintings of Venus capture the attention of many art lovers, his devotional works featuring the classical beauty of the Madonna and Child bring us closer to transcendent truths.

The exhibition "Botticelli: Artist and Designer" at the Jacquemart-André Museum in Paris is curated by Victoria & Albert Museum curator Ana Debenedetti and chief heritage curator Pierre Curie and runs until Jan. 9, 2022. To find out more, visit Musee-Jacquemart-Andre.com

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

How Author J.R.R. Tolkien Put His Family First

LORRAINE FERRIER

Great artists converse with our hearts without uttering a word. They animate the greatest and most tragic moments in life, from battlefields that appear gut wrenchingly real to divine jublations that make our souls sing. But seldom do we celebrate the way these artists lived in the world: the values they lived by, how they overcame challenges, or how they treated their fellow man. Yet these stories are as inspiring as the artworks these artists made.

Author J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973) led a full life, yet he always put his family first. For over 70 years, he created Middle-earth complete with its own geography, time, languages, and history. Alongside his writing, his vivid illustrations bring his visions into our world.

Besides his fiction, Tolkien was an Oxford don (similar to a U.S. professor) and renowned scholar of Old and Middle English. But perhaps most important to Tolkien was that he was a father.

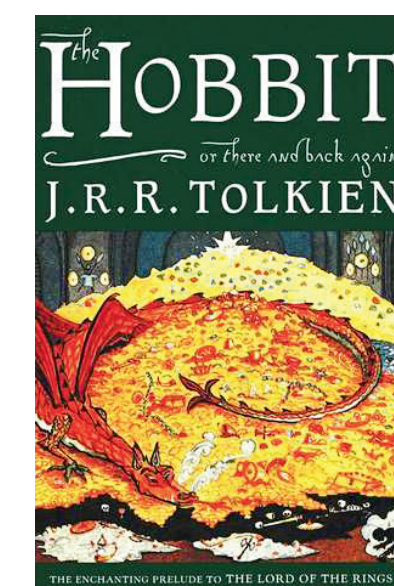
Orphaned at just 12 years old, he always made time for his wife and their four children. He worked from home marking papers, writing lectures, seeing students, and creating Middle-earth.

He originally wrote "The Hobbit" for his children and read it to them in installments.

For 23 years, Tolkien designed Christmas cards and stories from Father Christmas for his children. As the years went by, the content of those tales darkened to stories of goblins and elves, perhaps in line with the development of "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy. Tolkien firmly believed that children should have access to stories similar to what adults read, except that the vocabulary should be scaled down for younger readers.

He originally wrote "The Hobbit" for his children and read it to them in installments when they would gather in his study at night. But after his friends and colleagues read the work, they urged him to publish the manuscript. It was never intended for publication, and his children were none too happy that their very own bedtime story was to be shared with the nation.

Tolkien excelled in his career while putting his family at the forefront of his life. His children delighted in hearing their father's tales long before he thought about publishing them. Perhaps, without the inspiration provided by his children, Tolkien's fantastical creations would have never become his legacy.



On the front cover of this edition of "The Hobbit," by J.R.R. Tolkien, is a watercolor illustration painted by the author himself.



By the time Alexander invaded India, his character had already degenerated. "Alexander and Porus," 1673, by Charles Le Brun, depicting Alexander and Porus (Puru) during the Battle of the Hydaspes in India.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

How Alexander the Great Became Great, Part 3

The precipitous decline of a virtuous leader

EVAN MANTYK

Based on the earliest surviving historical source on Alexander the Great, Diodorus Siculus (90–30 B.C.), we have seen the defining characteristics that made Alexander great over the course of most of his short life. These were his characteristics of building a brotherhood with his men, displaying good manners—even to those he conquered—and having faith in the gods. Now, we will see how these characteristics played out in the final chapters of this hero's extraordinary life.

We learn from most of Alexander's life of the virtues of brotherhood, good manners, and faith.

The Decline and Death of Alexander
Alexander died at the age of 32, not long after returning from his conquests. There is a great deal of significance in his early demise. It was as if he had been sent to earth for the purpose of these conquests, completed his mission, and departed at an age very similar to that of Jesus Christ, who also died around age 32 or 33.

Most importantly, Alexander's death perfectly correlates to his violation of all three of his noble virtues: his embracing of brotherhood, good manners, and faith. Once he defeated the Persian Emperor Darius III and effectively conquered the Persian Empire, Alexander's character gradually changed for the worse.

Alexander had bent his whole life to this one purpose—conquest of the world—and with that purpose complete, he saw no reason not to relax and enjoy himself. The only problem was that there seemed to be no compelling

reason to stop enjoying himself.

The brotherhood he had with his fellow Macedonians and Greeks was violated when he decided to go conquering farther into India, amassing greater glory for the Persian Empire that he now ruled, but also taking his men farther from their homes.

He also touted his new title, "Son of Ammon," meaning "Son of God," which had no significance to his men but only to the Persians.

Diodorus explains: "The Macedonians had not only mutinied when ordered to cross the Ganges River but were frequently unruly when called into an assembly and ridiculed Alexander's pretense that Ammon was his father."

In this example, too, we see an excess of good manners in pleasing his now fawning Persian public.

These excesses demonstrated the warping of Alexander's character and were, in effect, like the overgrowth of cancer cells or the growth of mold—that is to say, a nega-

tive increase. He had gone from exercising good manners and respecting the customs of those he conquered to finally adopting them as his own and throwing away those Greek customs that had nurtured him for most of his life. Diodorus makes the changes clear, from taking on the Persian dress to promoting Persians over Greeks, to adopting 360 concubines to expend himself upon:

"It seemed to Alexander that he had accomplished his objective and now held his kingdom without contest, and he began to imitate the Persian luxury and the extravagant display of the kings of Asia. First he installed ushers of Asiatic race in his court, and then he ordered the most distinguished persons to act as his guards; among these was Darius' brother Oxathres. Then he put on the Persian diadem and dressed himself in the white robe and the Persian sash.... He distributed to his companions cloaks with purple borders and dressed the horses in Persian harness. In addition to all this, he added concubines to his retinue in the manner of Darius, in number not less than the days of the year and outstanding in beauty as selected from all the women of Asia. Each night these paraded around the couch of the king so that he might select the one with whom he would lie that night.... Many, it is true, did reproach him for these things, but he silenced them with gifts."

Sinking into boundless leisure and what must have seemed degeneracy to his men, Alexander now faced conspiracies and sharp criticism from within. At one point, in a drunken rage, he killed an old soldier named Cleitus who had once saved his life early on. Cleitus had been openly criticizing Alexander for his recent mismanagement.

The situation became so bad that Alexander adopted an army of 30,000 Persians, just in case he needed it to counter his own Macedonians.

Loss of Faith

Finally, Alexander's faith and piety was previously warped and effectively lost in the end. At the end of his journeys, his closest friend Hephaestion died, and he decided to hold an incredibly extravagant funeral that concluded with his commanding everyone to sacrifice to Hephaestion as a god, something which he was able to get approved by a local priest:

"Alexander ended by decreeing that all should sacrifice to Hephaestion as god coadjutor. As a matter of fact, it happened just at this time that Philip, one of the Friends, came bearing a response from Ammon that Hephaestion should be worshiped as a god. Alexander was delighted that the god had ratified his own opinion, and was himself the first to perform the sacrifice."

Notice that Alexander was already in the midst of declaring his friend a god to be worshiped when news arrived that the declaration was approved. A close reading reveals



At the end, Alexander did not honor the gods of his youth. The Persian epic poem "Shahnameh" (written between circa 977 and 1010) describes Alexander the Great in Persia. In this 16th-century edition of the book, he is praying at the Kaaba.

that he didn't really care if there was approval or not. Alexander had now discarded almost any shred of humility in the face of the divine forces he had previously revered.

When approaching the great city of Babylon at the end of his long journey, Alexander was advised by the Chaldaeans that if he did enter the city, he would die there. The Chaldaeans were known for their skill in reading omens. Alexander originally took this very seriously:

"When Alexander, accordingly, learned from Nearchus about the Chaldaeans' prophecy, he was alarmed and more and more disturbed, the more he reflected upon the ability and high reputation of these people. After some hesitation, he sent most of his friends into Babylon, but altered his own route so as to avoid the city and set up his headquarters in a camp at a distance of two hundred furlongs."

However, Alexander eventually was persuaded by Greek philosophers, likely catering to convenience and public sentiment, to enter Babylon where he indeed died.

Diodorus suggests most strongly that it was poisoning by those who hated Alexander's rule that was the real cause. If it was a mosquito carrying malaria that killed him, then we should also note that it was the excess drinking and feasting that likely debilitated his immune system and left him so likely to die from it despite being so young and strong.

At any rate, taken as a whole, we learn from most of Alexander's life of the virtues of brotherhood, good manners, and faith. These powerful traits can lead people into regions previously unthinkable and can plant pillars beneath the roof of a magnificent civilization.

In the last quarter of Alexander's life, after he achieved his goal, we observe clearly a foil to his earlier life. By tragically displaying the inevitable outcome of violating the virtues of brotherhood, good manners, and faith, the virtues themselves are further illuminated and exalted.

Looking at Alexander's life in this way gives the fullest and most coherent picture of who he was and how he became great. This, though brief, is the story of Alexander the Great.

All quotes are from Diodorus Siculus.

Part 2 of "How Alexander the Great Became Great" looks at Alexander's virtues.

Evan Mantyk is an English teacher in New York and President of the Society of Classical Poets.



FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON

FILM REVIEW

Should College Student Athletes Unionize?

MARK JACKSON

"National Champions" is a crackling, high-voltage, testosterone-intensive sports drama about college football, where nary a down of football is played, and yet you can't look away for the entire two-hour runtime. That's a pretty neat trick.

So what's the premise? Unionization. A recent presidential hopeful wanted to double union membership in America, while the more conservatively inclined know unions to be one of the many insidious tools of communism.

Is there ever a time when organizing is a good thing?

History has demonstrated that protected union workers become prone to the temptation of exploiting the system and getting lazy. But what about the idea that college student athletes are an endless supply of free labor, who line the pockets of management, coaches, and commissioners with multibillions but who themselves (albeit rewarded with valuable scholarships) see not a dime of it?

And what about the vast majority of college sports also-rans who don't get to go to the NFL, NHL, MLB, or NBA and can easily end up spending the rest of their lives with debilitating injuries? What about health insurance for them?

As mentioned, there's zero gridiron action in this film; it's all about the interactions between the players, coaches, sports journalists and anchors, behind-the-scenes mega-wealthy boosters, cold-blooded freelance fixers, and likewise heartless NCAA Grand Poobahs in the lead-up to the fictitious Snickers College Football Championship.

There's tangible clock-ticking suspense. And although it's a conventional message movie, it raises genuine issues that beg vigorous debate, and coaches them in the context of a solid drama that can be enjoyed even by non-football fans who don't know a double-reverse from a mascot dance or what position Tom Brady plays.

Clock Starts Ticking

A national title war is set to take place between the undefeated Wolves (a fictitious Missouri university team) going up against the 13-1 Cougars at the New Orleans Caesars Superdome. Three days before the big game, the Wolves' Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback LeMarcus James (Stephan James) pulls a quick smoke-and-mirrors trick to avoid team bed check (facilitated by his roommate with whom he's in cahoots), exits the massive Hyatt Hotel where he and his fellow Wolfpack are staying, and drops a bomb into collegiate football as we know it.

He issues a call to arms, a challenge to revolt—first via social media and then through well-timed interviews, to his teammates and their opponents alike. The call? To boycott the championship game, unless the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) agrees to begin the practice of compensating players as university employees and not as "amateur" athletes.

LeMarcus, a blue-chip NFL prospect and classic hero figure, moves with the supreme confidence and self-possession of the top-flight quarterback and leader that he is, bristling with intelligence, media savvy,

and well-thought-out tactics consistently a few steps ahead of those scrambling to play catch-up ball.

He speechifies like an urban Henry V doing a union-recommending version of "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more; Or close the wall up with our English dead." He references biblical passages, repeatedly hammering away at the injustice inherent in the system, and quickly winning over collegiate football players nationwide, not to mention an already overwhelmingly sympathetic public.

And because it's abundantly clear that LeMarcus is putting a potential multimillion-dollar career on the line (due to being a shoo-in as a top-ranked NFL draft pick), he's all the more persuasive as a selfless martyr for the cause. Which of course makes him his coach's and the NCAA upper echelon's worst nightmare.

Where Is He???

A large portion of the movie is concerned with the 11th-hour, pulling-their-hair-out, frantic scrambling by Coach Lazor and his assistant coaches to locate LeMarcus and his roommate Emmett Sunday (Alexander Ludwig), a mediocre tight end with little to lose. Emmett functions as LeMarcus's cohort and aide-de-camp, as the two instigators displace quickly from one strategic location after another while LeMarcus spreads his gospel of unionization in person or via the internet.

However, simultaneously running storylines show us the other characters who stand to lose a lot (billions). These include, in addition to Coach Lazor, his defensive coordinator Coach Dunn (Lil Rel Howery), who's offered an opportunity to coach the Wolves if Coach Lazor can't or won't; lecherous, predatory team booster Rodger Cummings (Tim Blake Nelson); and Katherine Poe (Uzo Aduba), a take-no-prisoners NCAA lawyer-fixer with ice water in her veins.

Poe's prepared to pull the grenade pin on character-assassinating evidence—real or manufactured—to take LeMarcus down if he doesn't back off, such as blackmailing him over an attempted murder case involving his half brother.

There's also a subplot affair between Coach Lazor's wife, Bailey (Kristin Chenoweth), and one of LeMarcus's professors (Timothy Olyphant). What's that professor teach? Marxism. Hmmm.

Performances

Stephan James offers a simmering, impulsive performance as LeMarcus, whose ultimate motive doesn't become clear until the last minute of the film. LeMarcus's bro-tastic as well as Bible-and-prayer-packed relationship with teammate Emmett suggests more than a little that there might be faith-based financing behind the making of "National Champions."

J.K. Simmons plays a coach who sympathizes with his quarterback's vision and mission but not enough to lend support, and whose character echoes various real-life, foot-in-mouth, racist faux pas by college coaches, not to mention NFL, MLB, and NBA team owners. He's a hot-tempered, foul-mouthed father-figure à la his lead role in "Whiplash,"

(L-R) LeMarcus James (Stephan James), Coach James Lazor (J.K. Simmons), and Richard Everly (David Koechner) in a fiery scene.



LeMarcus James (Stephan James) attempts to organize college football players, in "National Champions."

Is the premise of "National Champions" a valid beef?

"National Champions"

Director: Ric Roman Waugh
Starring: Stephan James, J.K. Simmons, Kristen Chenoweth, Timothy Olyphant, Alexander Ludwig, Tim Blake Nelson, Jeffrey Donovan, Uzo Aduba
Running Time: 1 hour, 56 minutes
MPAA Rating: R
Release Date: Dec. 10, 2021

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

but not similarly sadistic.

The movie is strewn with blockbuster monologues, the most poignant and complex of which is Uzo Aduba's, partially because like LeMarcus she's also black. Her normally cutthroat character at one point slams LeMarcus's take on college sports with a powerful defense of the NCAA system and a very different view of the various ways athletic scholarships can advance upward mobility.

A former track athlete herself, she calls into question how his vision might affect the funding of the less popular collegiate sports teams, such as swimming, track, field hockey, and so on, if colleges and universities were to wind up being forced into providing salaries and benefits to their entire football rosters. Which would immediately domino-effect into the high-profile college hoops programs as well, come to think of it.

Jeffrey Donovan of "Sicario" fame plays an often grinning but subtly menacing NCAA executive. Executive producer and Seattle Seahawks star Russell Wilson comes as himself, and there are a number of cameos by recognizable athletes and sports journalists also playing themselves.

Real Life

The film acknowledges the new NCAA policy that allows players to monetize their names, images, and likenesses, and profit commercially. So real-world change is actually already afoot. Is it good change? Also, the entire venture is uncannily well-planned; the real-life college football playoff championship game will take place in Indianapolis on Jan. 10, 2022.

So the question remains: Is the premise of "National Champions" a valid beef? Should there be a union for collegiate student-athletes? As we know, all things related to communism are capable of looking more or less innocuous on paper, but unless adhered to with impeccable morals and values, they immediately lead to a slippery slope that dead-ends in the basest instincts of the human race—which is exactly the outcome that Karl Marx designed it to achieve.

While the film is riveting, the utterly generic, titular blah-ness is unfortunate. This movie needed a really memorable title; it's an important issue that needs debating in America. So—to organize, or not to organize college sports. That is the question.



Emmett Sunday (Alexander Ludwig, L) and LeMarcus James (Stephan James) are college football team roommates.



Attorney Katherine Poe (Uzo Aduba) confronts NCAA bigwig Richard Everly (David Koechner) about funds that have disappeared.



Coach James Lazor (J.K. Simmons) cannot lend support to his quarterback's vision.



"Glory of St. Nicholas of Bari," 1653, by Mattia Preti. Oil on canvas. Capodimonte Museums and Galleries.

REACHING WITHIN:
WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

The Christmas Miracle of Generosity: *'The Glory of St. Nicholas of Bari'*

ERIC BESS

Every Christmas, we are bombarded with images of a man we call Santa Claus who has a long, white beard, red clothes, and happily brings toys to children who are well-behaved. But who is this patron of moral gift-giving? Where does the legend of Santa Claus come from?

St. Nicholas of Bari

St. Nicholas was a fourth-century bishop who lived in Asia Minor. It is believed that he was imprisoned and tortured for his faith by the Roman emperor Diocletian before being released by Constantine the Great.

St. Nicholas's kindness and generosity were what really came to define him. He was believed to have kindness so deep and great that he could perform miracles.

In one legend, St. Nicholas heard of a poor man with three daughters. During those times, a young woman needed a dowry to increase her chances of marrying. Without a dowry, she was unlikely to marry and could even be sold into slavery. Mysteriously, three balls of gold were tossed into their home and landed in socks that were laid out to dry. The gold provided the three daughters with the dowries they needed to marry and prevented their enslavement.

On another occasion, St. Nicholas appeared to a terrified boy who was kidnapped and enslaved. He comforted the boy and brought him back to his mother who had been without her child for over a year.

There are other stories of when young children were playing, got lost, and were captured and chopped up by an evil butcher. St. Nicholas prayed to God to have their lives restored and returned to their families. Stories like these made St. Nicholas the patron saint of children.

St. Nicholas's kind heart extended to saving people from famine and rescuing the innocent, all of which he did without expecting any reward in return.

'Glory of St. Nicholas of Bari'

The Italian Baroque artist Mattia Preti painted "Glory of St. Nicholas of Bari" in 1653. St. Nicholas is depicted in the center of the painting, standing on a cloud. His bright clothing adorned with Christian insignia make him stand out against the dark background. He looks up toward the heavens and stretches out his arms with open hands.

Childlike angels with wings surround him on all sides. One at the top right of the composition brings a bishop's miter to place on his head. Another under his arm holds the bishop's scepter. At the bottom right of the composition, a small angel presents to him a book on which sit three golden balls. The other putti-like figures watch as they emerge from the dark environment.

The Miracle of Sincere Gratitude and Generosity

What wisdom might we gather from St. Nicholas's story and Preti's painting? The title of the painting is "Glory of St. Nicholas of Bari," and the word "glory" might lead us to further insight. What is meant

by St. Nicholas's glory?

One of the first things that stand out to me in this composition is St. Nicholas's body language. He looks up with his arms outstretched and his hands open wide. We can presume that in looking up, he looks toward God, for it is God who provides his glory. But why does God give glory to St. Nicholas?

St. Nicholas's outstretched hands have a double meaning, suggesting both his willingness to receive God and his generosity. St. Nicholas does not simply receive God as one would receive a simple gift. The look of awe on his face suggests that he receives God with deep gratitude and sincerity.

Here the angelic children give back to St. Nicholas.

Is it the case that St. Nicholas receives God's glory because of his generosity and his deep appreciation of God?

Speaking of St. Nicholas's generosity, the figures around him, though depicted with angel's wings, are children. They are the very ones St. Nicholas gave gifts to and safeguarded. His generosity overflowed from God to the people and especially children. But why does Preti depict the children as angels?

Could it be that depicting the children as angels reiterates the idea of the innocence and purity of a child's heart and mind? Or maybe it suggests that St. Nicholas came to help those children who were

like angels because of their good and pure behavior?

Either way, here the angelic children give back to St. Nicholas: They present to him the items that represent both his generous spirit and his closeness to God. And isn't this also a way of glorifying St. Nicholas? He receives his glory from God and from those with whom he shares God's glory. It's almost as if God not only shares his glory from above but also shares it from the hearts of innocent and pure human beings.

The question for us becomes: How might we serve as a conduit to share the glory of God? Might one way be—like St. Nicholas—to summon deep gratitude and a generous spirit?

For St. Nicholas, his generosity produced miracles in the world. This Christmas, with deep gratitude and generosity, we might be able to spread the glory of God to all of those around us. And who knows, we might even witness some miracles.

Have you ever seen a work of art that you thought was beautiful but had no idea what it meant? In our series "Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart," we interpret the classical visual arts in ways that may be morally insightful for us today. We try to approach each work of art to see how our historical creations might inspire within us our own innate goodness.

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

Do You Know 'A Christmas Carol'?

SEAN FITZPATRICK

Like a good many Christmas traditions and trappings, a fresh look at them may return luster to a dullness that can build up with time and custom. In fact, from a cultural perspective, such an exercise is part of the whole purpose of Christmas and the impending New Year.

It's a time to consider ourselves anew in a light of resolve and appreciation for our blessings. Serving as a means to accomplish this is a story that stands as largely unfamiliar, only because it is largely held as familiar: Charles Dickens's 1843 masterpiece, "A Christmas Carol."

This is a story that everyone knows yet few remember for what it truly is: a tale that sings out like a boisterous caroler pounding at the door on the night before Christmas. Its purpose? It's to awaken us to the reality of our common journey to the grave and the consequent need to love one another along our way.

"A Christmas Carol" is a ghost story in which Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserable old sinner and tightfisted financier, is haunted on Christmas Eve by his business partner, Jacob Marley, who's been dead as a doornail for seven years. Scrooge learns from Marley that torments await him in the afterlife for his misspent time.

To sidestep the terrible path that Marley's ghost treads, Scrooge accepts visitations from three spirits who come to offer him reclamation. They show Scrooge how his misery is self-inflicted and how much happiness he stands to gain by simply making others happy.

From his boyhood memories to his own chilling deathbed, the spirits conduct Scrooge on a difficult, merry, and disturbing journey through time and space to prove to him the profound purpose of every human life—one most clearly seen in the humane light of Christmas.

Christmas a Humbug?

Christmas is a time to remember the fact of our mortality and respond with merriment. It has no particular call to be a fluffy or sentimental affair. Neither is Mr. Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" a particularly fluffy or sentimental affair, though it is commonly denoted, and thus demoted, as such. This story often falls prey to a misplaced attitude of triviality that Christmas also suffers under; both have succumbed to the paradoxical curse of cliché.

As it turns out, Ebenezer Scrooge has proven a soothsayer of our times, for by and large, Christmas actually is something of a humbug these days. It preaches peace but breeds pressure. The ritual of Walmart has replaced the ritual of the wassail. Santa Claus is not really



St. Nicholas. The holidays are not really holy days. Christmas is a lost and long-forgotten mystery in need of a great awakening, which is the thundering and laughing message of Charles Dickens's carol.

"A Christmas Carol" is a story that "brews on a large scale," offering startling spirits for men to imbibe in misanthropic weather. With the thinning of air, thickening of fog, and icy sting and snap, the climate of Christmas presides majestically over this little ghost story, where a strong punch (in both senses of the word) is precisely the ticket.

Ebenezer Scrooge has proven a soothsayer of our times.

Opening Our Shut-Up Hearts

For this reason, "A Christmas Carol" is an important (if not an indispensable) voice at Christmas, and unlike the customary Christmas fare, it is anything but warm and fuzzy. There is nothing warm about the infernal furnaces that stir Jacob Marley's hair, or the heartbroken young Scrooge abandoned by his father at boarding school over the holidays, or the cold corpse of Tiny Tim surrounded by his family, or the frozen corpse of Ebenezer Scrooge himself alone and unloved with nightshirt and blankets torn away by his cackling charwoman to be sold in a greasy bone shop.

There is nothing fuzzy about the fulfillment of familial devotion, stout neighborly charity, or a equal heart—of which this book boasts in equal measure to its horrors. And it is at Christmas that people should face these realities for what they are, even if they are as disquieting as specters.

Christmas "is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices," remind the two gentlemen collecting for the poor in Scrooge's money-changing hole. And the heartbreaking happiness of Christmas resounds in their words, bringing in the dawn of Christmas be they as cold as Scrooge or as warm as his nephew.

His nephew salutes the season "as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time... in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys."

There could hardly be a more beautiful or unique expression of the Christmas spirit, and we shouldn't forget it for that distinction alone.

Getting to Know Ourselves

Scrooge's self-discovery and desire to retract his selfishness is the fruit of the Christmas season. With Scrooge, all can realize a need to purge before answering The Ghost of Christmas's booming call. "Come in! and know me better man," and discover the men and women sharing this earth with us, be they ever so lame and blind. And in the words

THEATER REVIEW

A Walk Down Nostalgia Lane

JUDD HOLLANDER

The York Theatre Company hits the ground running (and tapping) with its new musical revue "Cheek to Cheek: Irving Berlin in Hollywood." Conceived, directed, and choreographed by the sure hand of Randy Skinner, the show salutes the master tunesmith's contributions to the silver screen.

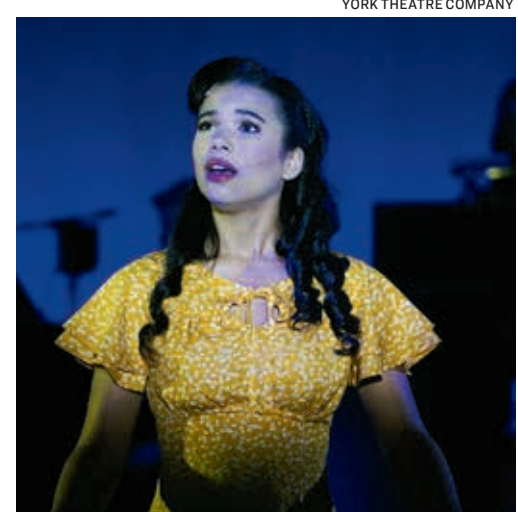
The impact of Irving Berlin (1888-1989) on American music cannot be underestimated. He wrote approximately 1,500 songs (music and lyrics) during his lifetime, many of which have gone on to become popular standards.

In addition to showcasing a wide range of Berlin's most famous film offerings, "Cheek to Cheek" includes movie numbers that have long since faded from the public consciousness—that is, unless you are quite the musical film buff.

Dance to the Music

Just as important as the music is the dancing that often accompanies it, which includes everything from slow, elegant waltzes to rousing tap numbers. Anyone remember the dance crazes "The Piccolino" or "The Yam," both of which were inspired by Berlin tunes of the same name? They first appeared in the films "Top Hat" and "Carefree," respectively.

The importance of dance is particularly evident when the company displays some of the



Victoria Byrd sings "Isn't This a Lovely Day?" in "Cheek to Cheek: Irving Berlin in Hollywood."

songs that Berlin wrote for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Berlin himself once remarked that while he originally wrote his music to be sung, with Astaire and Rogers he wrote the music to be danced.

Skinner and company more than step up to that challenge, particularly with "Let Yourself Go," "Change Partners," "Isn't This a Lovely Day?" and the title tune. Other especially enjoyable musical numbers presented include the comedic "My Walking Stick," the highly energetic "Drum Crazy," the very graceful "The Best Things Happen While You're Dancing," and the highly athletic "Back to Back."

A Musical Story

Linking the different numbers together is a narration that is both insightful and amusing. Barry Kleinbort's book offers a firm grasp of the material without making it seem either too dense or too repetitive. Kleinbort sums

up Berlin's influence as the new century was getting underway: "Over the next five decades, Irving Berlin produced an outpouring of ballads, dance numbers, novelty tunes and love songs that defined American popular song for much of the century."

Cast members take turns imparting various information, all of which helps to explain just who Berlin was, along with the challenges he faced and the very shrewd business sense he developed. An important example of his business acumen is how once, instead of signing with a major film studio, he offered his services to a less prestigious one for less money up front in return for significant creative control as well as other financial incentives.

Other interesting bits of trivia include how Berlin came up with the premise for the 1942 film "Holiday Inn." This was also the movie that introduced his song "White Christmas," a tune that would earn Berlin his only Academy Award out of nine nominations and that is still ranked as the most popular song of all time.

In a particularly nice touch, "Cheek to Cheek" also contains one relatively unknown Berlin number: "I Used to Play It by Ear." Written in 1965, the song was from his final and ultimately unfinished Hollywood effort. The project was partly autobiographical, and he worked on it for six years. A management shakeup at the studio in question (MGM) coupled with the changing tastes of audiences caused the project to be abandoned.

Cast Standouts

The six-member cast all acquit themselves well. Among the particular standouts are Phillip Attmore and Jeremy Benton in "My Walking Stick," Kaitlyn Davidson and Benton

"Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim," from "A Christmas Carol," circa 1920, illustrated by Harold Copping.

of Tiny Tim, remember the one "who made lame beggars walk and blind men see."

The remarkable power of this story is that it is about everyone, awakening memories of who we are and why we are. But to live the lesson of examination and transfiguration presented by Mr. Dickens is a lofty test. We share the journey with Ebenezer Scrooge: the call to unclench tightfisted hands and lift noses from grindstones begins.

We, with Scrooge, move away from the "squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner" and see past our bed curtains into a larger world; we shiver helplessly in our nightshirts and face eternity.

'God Bless Us Every One'

"A Christmas Carol" is a song of preparation, passage, and praise. It is indeed a Christmas carol, and the process it initiates is not an easy one. Everyone knows in their own way that it is a steep path fraught with difficulty. But as the ghostly mentors of Scrooge held up a mirror to him rigidly, relentlessly, and sometimes reluctantly, so too must we face our own pasts, presents, and futures, our own inward conversions and cleansings.

Many, hearkening to this call, swear to lead a changed life that will honor the spirit of Christmas and try to keep it all the year by living in the past, the present, and the future. When, suddenly, we watch our fetters melt away into so many insignificant bedposts, may we all laugh with Ebenezer Scrooge.

And though all the world may laugh at such merriment, "let them laugh," Mr. Dickens says, for "nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter."

Let the spirits come. Let them start us from slumber. They are harbingers of a greater apparition—an apparition of glory and gladness. "A Christmas Carol" prepares men and women not only for Christmas Day but also for every day: for Life, in all its dignity and dirt. And may it inspire every one of us to cry with every chamber of the heart, "God bless us every one!"

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.



We may think of Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" as a sentimental favorite, as this illustration hints at, but its meaning goes much deeper. The first edition frontispiece and title page, illustrated by John Leech.

in "Cheek to Cheek," Attmore, Benton, and Joseph Medeiros in "Drum Crazy," Melanie Moore in "Isn't This a Lovely Day?" and Medeiros and Victoria Byrd in "Count Your Blessings (Instead of Sheep)," the last from the 1954 movie "White Christmas," which would turn out to be Berlin's last completed film.

The accompanying orchestra is also on point, although only Louis B. Crocco on percussion really gets a chance to stand out, thanks to his work on "Drum Crazy." Credit must also go to Fred Lassen for his vocal arrangements and orchestrations, as well as to David Hancock Turner for his work as musical director and for providing additional orchestrations.

From start to finish, "Cheek to Cheek" makes for a very scintillating and altogether fun experience.

"Cheek to Cheek" can currently be seen at the York's temporary home at Theater at St. Jean's.

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

'Cheek to Cheek: Irving Berlin in Hollywood'

Theater at St. Jean's
150 E. 76th St.
New York

Tickets
212-935-5820 or YorkTheatre.org

Running Time
1 hour, 30 minutes (no intermission)

Closes
Jan. 2, 2022

ICONIC FILMS

Standing Up for What's Right

IAN KANE

Was there a movie when you were younger that was so stirring that it became indelibly lodged in the back of your mind and soul the first time you saw it? “On the Waterfront” (1954) was such a powerful cinematic experience for me that, the first time I watched it, it instantly became one of my favorite movies. Despite that fact, I’ve forgotten many of the film’s finer details.

I’m sure I’m not alone in this sort of “memory lapse” of highly admired films. That’s why for the entire past week, I’ve been looking forward to watching this film once again—to see if it held up through the years and could still deliver that same ol’ magic feeling that once stirred me. Happily, it surprised me by surpassing both my lofty expectations and fuzzy recollections.

At the time of the film’s production, Marlon Brando was enjoying his prime as one of the most (rightfully so) important actors of his generation—perhaps more influential than any of them. His performance here influenced acting as a whole for generations to come. He’d already earned three Oscar nominations for Best Actor—1951’s “A Streetcar Named Desire,” 1952’s “Viva Zapata,” and 1953’s “Julius Caesar.”

In this film, Brando stars as a washed-up, former prize fighter named Terry Malloy. He is a simple and somewhat idealistic man who has found work through his older brother, Charley (Rod Steiger), as a dockside worker. Terry has more or less accepted his lot in life as a has-been. On the other side of the equation is the ironically named Johnny Friendly (Lee J. Cobb), a mean-spirited, constantly glowering criminal who runs the longshoremen’s local.

Johnny manipulates Terry into getting another dockworker to meet him up on a rooftop. Thinking Johnny’s men just want to have a chat with the dockworker in question, Terry is shocked when the man is thrown off the roof by the henchmen. Terry takes the murder hard, believing that he’s had a hand in it—however unwittingly. Just as with Johnny’s many other seri-

This exemplary cinematic experience is something you have to see for yourself.

‘On the Waterfront’

Director: Elia Kazan
Starring: Marlon Brando, Karl Malden, Lee J. Cobb, Eva Marie Saint, Rod Steiger
Running Time: 1 hour, 48 minutes
Not Rated
Release Date: July 28, 1954

★★★★★



Marlon Brando stars as Terry, a union worker who stands up to a corrupt union boss, in “On the Waterfront.”

ous crimes, everyone is afraid to talk, so the crooked union boss’s criminal activities continue to plague the area unabated. Indeed, the murdered dockworker was scheduled to testify as a witness against Johnny’s outfit to the Waterfront Crime Commission, so everybody is reminded to keep their mouths shut, or else.

Terry soon links up with the deceased dockworker’s sister, Edie (Eva Marie Saint), who is an impassioned firebrand for justice. She’s so strong in her convictions that she manages to galvanize the local priest, Father Barry (Karl Malden), into scheduling a meeting with the dockworkers. Their goal is to inspire the men to stand up against the corrupt union and put an end to its criminal stranglehold, once and for all.

Unfortunately, things don’t go as planned, and Terry protectively escorts Edie away from danger. Things are touch-and-go for a while until Charley seems to present a way to ensure Terry’s safety. (The latter was seen by Johnny’s henchmen talking to an investigator.) But does Charley truly have his younger brother’s interest at heart?

I must say that during the film’s opening scenes, I was quickly reminded of why this film profoundly affected me.

From the immersive score, to Elia Kazan’s

crisp direction and gift of steadily building up both dread and tension, this exemplary cinematic experience is something you have to see for yourself—some of what makes it magical is beyond mere words.

Kazan had been a card-carrying communist for a brief time in the 1930s. But later, he famously (or infamously from the communists’ point of view) “named names” of various communist members to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), many of whom were later revealed to be Soviet agents.

As Kazan once commented: “To be a member of the Communist Party is to have a taste of the police state.” How timely.

With these factors in mind, “On the Waterfront” can be considered not only as one of the finest achievements in filmmaking, but also as Kazan’s metaphor for standing up for what’s right and calling out evil wherever one may find it.

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 see more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com

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