

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE



PD-US

For centuries, letter writing has left a record of individual lives. "Lady Writing a Letter With Her Maid," circa 1670, by Johannes Vermeer. National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Saving the Present for the Future: Preserving Our Correspondences

Will we leave a blank spot in history?

JEFF MINICK

On New Year's Day, mostly to amuse some restless grandchildren, I carried a drawer from the filing cabinet in the basement up the steps and into the kitchen.

The three younger kids and I gathered around the table and pulled some treasures from the drawer: the little bonnet their toddler great-great-grandfather had worn on the

What does the recent huge advance in technology mean for our recorded history?

ship from Ireland to America well over a century ago, the coins collected as a child by my deceased wife, including several silver dollars from the 1920s, and a few other odds and ends.

The kids delighted particularly in the coins, but I—I was stunned by the letters, birthday and Christmas cards, and notes I'd saved for over 60 years. Here were several hundred documents from my past: letters my mom had sent me when I was away at school in the early 1960s, more letters from family and friends in

my college days, holiday cards with long, handwritten notes or family newsletters, and wedding announcements. Some of these were in packets, like the ones saved by my mother, but most of them I had haphazardly jammed and ignored into the drawer over many years.

As I flipped through some of these messages from my past, pausing now and again to read a few lines, a thought struck me.

Continued on Page 4

What Our Readers Say (#31, part 2)



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CANDICE S CAIN



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BYRON CLAGHORN

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THE EPOCH TIMES
TRUTH AND TRADITION



Chopin at 25, by his fiancée Maria Wodzinska, in 1835.

MUSIC

Chopin's Preludes: Musical Windows on Human Feeling

KENNETH LAFAVE

Certain musical works speak of their time in a timeless fashion. Think of the heady Romanticism of Berlioz's "Symphonie Fantastique," or the naive musical picture-making of Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" concertos. Then there are compositions that seem to translate human feeling directly into musical language, works in which time itself falls away. Chopin's Preludes, Op. 28, belong to the latter category.

Frédéric François Chopin arrived on the Western art music scene at precisely the right time for an artist of his gifts and temperament. The piano was only a century old when he was born in 1810 in Poland to a French father and a Polish mother, and the instrument's expressive potential was only beginning to be comprehended. His parents arranged for piano lessons early, and by age 8, young Frédéric was giving concerts and composing his own pieces. He learned no other instrument and needed no other musical outlet. Alone among major composers, everything Chopin composed would include the piano in its scoring, from two piano concertos to a cello-piano sonata to 17 songs for voice and piano, and of course, dozens and dozens of solo piano pieces, among them mazurkas, waltzes, polonaises, études, nocturnes, ballades—and preludes.

The Elusive Prelude

As a musical form, the prelude is nearly indefinable. It began, logically enough, as the first piece in a set of two or more, as in Prelude and Fugue. While earlier composers, notably Muzio Clementi, had penned stand-alone preludes, it was Chopin's collection of 24 preludes in all the keys that gave the greenlight to future composers (Debussy, Scriabin, Gershwin, among other) to write short piano pieces with an improvisatory feeling and call them preludes. Beyond this description, it is impossible to pin down the prelude as a form.

Chopin's two dozen include pieces that resemble études (the rhythmic ostinato of No. 8 in F-sharp minor), mazurkas (tiny, effusive No. 7 in A major), nocturnes (the light and dark of No. 15 in D-flat major), and even the woeful tread of the funeral march (No. 20 in C minor). Technically, too, nothing unites Chopin's preludes. Some, such as No. 4 in E minor and No. 6 in B minor, lie well within the abilities of an intermediate student, while others (No. 12 in G-sharp minor, No. 16 in B-flat minor) demand steely technical command.

Chopin composed the pieces that came to be Op. 28 in the mid-1830s, finishing and assembling the set while on the island of Majorca, Spain, in the fall of 1838. He had left Poland in 1831, following the failure of an uprising there to stave off the



The first page of Chopin's Prelude No. 15, the "Raindrop," in his own hand.

country's absorption into the Russian Empire, and settled in Paris, where he became a celebrated figure among the intelligentsia. Sickly from childhood, Chopin developed tuberculosis as a young adult. The Majorca trip in the fall of 1838, in the company of consort Aurore Dupin (novelist under the pseudonym George Sand) and her children, was intended to assuage his persistent congestion, but the usual sunny clime of the island was replaced by incessant rain. Chopin nonetheless used the time away from Parisian social life to write the final preludes and collect them into a connected, if not precisely united, set. It was published in 1839 to great acclaim.

Chopin's Op. 28 validates the ability of the Western system of interlocking major and minor keys to suggest an infinity of expression.

Without Limits

It takes one hour to play both sets of Chopin's études, and two to play all 19 of his nocturnes. But Op. 28 requires only some 40 minutes at tempo. Within this small confine, 24 distinct musical experiences—averaging less than two minutes each—bloom in wild array. General terms only begin to suggest the emotional range: sorrow, delight, confusion, passion, rage, serenity, playfulness, resistance, surrender, simple joy, profound despair. Chopin's Op. 28 validates the ability of the Western system of interlocking major and minor keys to suggest an infinity of expression.

For his 1966 book, "The Infinite Variety of Music," Leonard Bernstein commissioned a mathematician to calculate the number of possible melodies conceivable within the Western tonal system. The answer: infinite, confirming what Chopin had demonstrated 130 years before.

But this answer insists on another

question: How does this expression arise from mere musical notes? A brief consideration of the most accessible Chopin prelude gives insight.

A Journey in E Minor

Prelude No. 4 is in E minor, yet most of its 25 measures are spent evading the finality of that key. It starts with a simple right-hand melody above a left-hand harmony of E minor's tonic triad (E, G, B), but in "first inversion," with the G as bass rather than E. The next 12 measures move slowly but firmly away from E minor, until the melody naturally returns to its beginning at measure 13. It all begins again, but this time the move away from E minor is faster, becoming desperate for three climactic measures that briefly whisk us away from the main melody. When the melody returns, the left hand does everything it can to avoid landing on a final E minor triad, twice supplying "deceptive cadences"—harmonization of the note "E" with a chord other than E minor. Then, a poignant, silent measure and at last a reluctant, sepulchral pronouncement of E minor in all its tragic finality. It was the one piece that Chopin requested be played at his funeral.

Multiply the power of this single expression by 24 and you will have some idea of the artistry of Chopin's preludes. The composer died at age 39 knowing that his music had found a place of distinction among his colleagues. While Chopin's enduring fame rests upon his expansive catalog, the preludes are ranked near, if not at, the top. His friend and fellow composer Franz Liszt said of them:

"The Préludes of Chopin are compositions which stand quite apart, in an order of their own. ... There is about them that freedom and grandeur which are the characteristics of works of genius."

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).

FINE ARTS

A US First: Hans Holbein the Younger's Portraits and More

A winter exhibition worth visiting

LORRAINE FERRIER

Preeminent 16th-century German painter Hans Holbein the Younger is best known for his nuanced portraits of English Renaissance greats. But visitors to the upcoming "Holbein: Capturing Character" exhibition at The Morgan Library & Museum will be able to see that Holbein created so much more.

The exhibition is the first major U.S. show dedicated to Holbein's entire career, from his artistic beginnings in the book trade in Basel, Switzerland, to the height of his career at King Henry VIII's court in England.

In addition to his myriad portraits, exhibition visitors will see that Holbein designed prints, printed books, personal devices (emblems with mottos), and even jewels.

Dear Portraits

In Holbein's portrait paintings, we see everything that the Renaissance held dear: Christian virtues, classical learning, and an appreciation of fine art and craftsmanship.

He excelled at creating portrait paintings that conveyed the physical attributes and personalities of his sitters,

whose often influential identities he reinforced by painting an array of objects and symbols—a visual language understood in the Renaissance.

Holbein's portrait of Simon George of Cornwall demonstrates this well. The Morgan chose this particular portrait to promote the exhibition. To us, George appears to be an English nobleman fashionably dressed in the Italian style, appreciating a red carnation. But back in the Renaissance, George's portrait revealed much more. He's a man seeking a wife, according to the pink carnation in his hand and the pendant of Leda and the Swan pinned to his hat. The circular composition, known as a tondi, nods to antiquity too, as in ancient times the circle was believed to be the purest geometric form.

The exhibition is a fascinating peek into how Holbein's subjects wanted to be seen and remembered, and how Holbein designed devices and objects to convey that message.

The "Holbein: Capturing Character" exhibition is at The Morgan Library & Museum in New York, from Feb. 11 through May 15, 2022. To find out more, visit TheMorgan.org



"Simon George of Cornwall," circa 1535-40, by Hans Holbein the Younger. Mixed technique on panel, diameter 12 3/16 inches. Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

STÄDEL MUSEUM, FRANKFURT AM MAIN



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"Abigail Smith Adams," 1810–1815, by Gilbert Stuart. Abigail Adams corresponded with many key figures of the American Revolution. Without these letters, our knowledge of this time and its people would be much diminished.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Saving the Present for the Future: Preserving Our Correspondences

Will we leave a blank spot in history?

Continued from Page 1

In my hands were not only memoranda from my personal history. No—these were also relics from an era that is rapidly disappearing. Years ago, the telegraph and telephone had undoubtedly eroded the art and practice of letter writing, but our more recent technology—emails, texts, and chats—have completely changed the way our written communications operate. The days of receiving letters in an envelope via a mailbox are at an end. And just as storing pictures on our phones has replaced the albums where we once kept our treasured photos, so have our machines become the repository of our letters, if we keep them at all.

Here's the question that occurred to me: Once we preserved our letters on paper and print like the ones in my hands. Will our electronic letters survive as documents of our lives, as records of our dreams, victories, and defeats?

Faster and Faster

Human beings have long sought ways to speed the delivery of their letters and documents.

To send mail and proclamations from one end of their vast empire to the other as swiftly as possible, the ancient Persians

developed a system of highways, expert riders, and relays of fast horses that prefigured America's Pony Express. Other ancient peoples also learned to use pigeons to carry messages, a practice that continued through World War I.

In the United States, the development of a national post office, the telegraph, and the railroads made for an efficient and ever speedier system of communication. Until 1950, for example, mail carriers had for years delivered packages and letters to homes in most cities twice daily and to businesses as many as four times a day.

Now, however, with the tap of a key on our laptop or phone, we can send messages across the country or around the world in a matter of seconds. No fuss, no muss, no stamps, no wait: Out that email goes, traveling faster than the speed of sound.

But what does this huge advance in technology mean for our recorded history? Are there cultural ramifications that we may be missing?

The Golden Age of Correspondence

From America's colonial days up until the recent past, people communicated over distances by means of words written by pen or pencil on paper. As a result, we have treasures like the correspondence between Abigail Adams and her husband, John,

and the letters exchanged with Thomas Jefferson by both of them. Abigail wrote hundreds of letters that remain extant, a correspondence that included many key figures of the American Revolution. Without these letters, our knowledge of these people, and of Abigail herself, would be much diminished.

By safeguarding and eventually sharing our pertinent emails, we can impart our own stories of hope to the next generation.

And like Abigail, those who once sat down to compose such letters to loved ones and friends often approached their correspondence as an art form. Some few of these letter writers were trained in the classics and many more were versed in the Bible, and these influences appear in their words, but nearly all those who had received an education were trained in the skills needed to write comprehensible, clear, and entertaining accounts of their

lives and their feelings. They believed that their words and the way they expressed themselves mattered.

As a result, the surviving correspondence of even ordinary people offers lessons in history and culture. From the American Revolution to the Vietnam War, for example, common soldiers have left us their impressions of their ordeals through the letters they sent home. Google "letters from American soldiers in Vietnam War," for instance, and dozens of sites will pop up.

In short, the letters that have survived the ravages of time have added much to our understanding of our past.

Collected Letters

In my medium-sized public library, we see evidence of this influence. Here we find dozens of books devoted to letters, some of them collections of correspondence by a single writer or a famous author or political figure, while others appear in compilations of different writers united by some sort of common theme.

On those shelves, for example, is "Posterity: Letters of Great Americans to Their Children" (Doubleday, 2004, 316 pages), wherein Dorie McCullough Lawson has compiled messages sent from almost 100 famous parents to their offspring. Thomas Jefferson writes to his daughter "Patsy": "I



"Pony Express Rider," circa 1865, by W.H. Jackson.



"Pigeon Post," 1843, by Miklós Barabás. The carrier pigeon was used for correspondence as late as World War I.



A mailman circa 1950. Until 1950, mail carriers delivered letters to homes in most cities twice daily.



Soldiers of the 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, at Fire Support Base Russell, Vietnam, in 1969. Letter reading and writing not only provided the men with a break but also provided history with a firsthand account of events of the time.

do not like your saying that you are unable to read the ancient print of your Livy, but with the aid of your master." Writer John O'Hara sends off a letter to his daughter, giving her advice on her entrance into a parochial high school. He ends by telling her: "You have come through childhood as a fine person, with wonderful prospects for a wonderful future. ... And I was born loving you." These few words give us an entirely new look at a writer often regarded as a crusty curmudgeon.

Also in my public library is "Letters of a Nation: A Collection of Extraordinary American Letters" (Broadway Books, 1997, 446 pages). Here are more than 200 letters written by Americans over 350 years of their history. Some of these correspondents—Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, Frederick Douglass—are familiar to us while others, like Hannah Johnson writing to Lincoln about the condition of black troops during the Civil War or Aline Bernstein writing to her former lover, the young novelist Thomas Wolfe, mean little to most people these days.

Yet every one of these voices from the past tell us a story, however brief, of their lives, and blended together, all these stories become ours. They belong to us. In a real sense, they define us as Americans.

Missing Pieces

The young Wylie, O'Hara's daughter, held his letter in her fingers as she read it. Now the rest of us can read his words in a book. Someone regarded this letter as worthy

of preservation.

But I wonder: Will the same hold true in our digital age, when the delete button erases in a stroke some long email and when so much communication occurs by texting on a phone? How might our descendants change their view of history if denied the personal views of their ancestors?

The pandemic of the last two years serves as the perfect example here. Someday our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will read of the scourge in a history book. Depending on the opinions of its authors, that book will tell a certain story. Those children may learn the barebones details of what transpired, but they may well miss the information that we might have imparted to them: our horrible sickness from the virus itself, our business closed forever by the lockdowns, our anger at the misinformation we were fed, and above all, the fierce hope that kept us moving forward.

With Deliberate Intent

If we wish to pass on some of our thoughts and the events in our lives, whether we are famous or a simple papa writing to his children, we must make the effort to preserve our correspondence. We must save and store those documents worthy of such a heritage, our letters and those to us, to keep them safe for posterity. And then, of course, if we choose to do so, we must find a way to share this correspondence with those who come after us.

The subheading for the "Inspired" sec-

tion of The Epoch Times is "Stories of hope that celebrate kindness, traditions, and triumph of the human spirit." By safeguarding and eventually sharing our pertinent emails, we can impart our own stories of hope to the next generation.

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.



Writer John O'Hara in 1945. In one of the author's letters to his daughter Wylie, he reveals his love for her. U.S. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.



Will our electronic letters survive as documents of our lives, as records of our dreams, victories, and defeats?

FINE ARTS

The Painterly Printmaking Technique You May Not Know About

‘Aquatint: From Its Origins to Goya’ exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington

LORRAINE FERRIER

In the mid-18th century, European artists, art admirers, and collectors were keen to view the finest artworks from across the continent, in the comfort of their studios, homes, and studies, respectively. Prints fulfilled that need, and as the demand for fine art prints grew, printmaking innovations blossomed.

One such innovation was a painterly printmaking technique that you’ve probably seen but maybe not heard of: aquatint. Aquatint is an intaglio printing technique (involving incisions applied to a metal plate) used in conjunction with etching, which allows artists to effectively mimic the subtle tones of ink, wash, and watercolor.

Rena M. Hoisington, curator and head of the department of old master prints at the National Gallery of Art, explains in a press video that the aquatint prints are made when rosin (pulverized pitch from tree sap) is applied across the surface of a copper plate. Heat applied underneath the plate causes the rosin to fuse to the metal. The plate is then placed in an acid bath and the acid eats away at the areas of exposed copper, but the rosin is left untouched. The rosin creates speckled areas which, when inked, appear as different tones.

Aquatint Innovators

In the 18th century, aquatint wasn’t new; artists in the Netherlands had discovered the printmaking technique in the 1650s. But 18th-century artists elevated aquatint to new artistic heights.

The National Gallery of Art’s exhibition “Aquatint: From Its Origins to Goya” is the first U.S. exhibition to explore aquatint’s development in France, England, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain. Exhibition visitors will be able to see over 100 aquatints from the museum’s collection and learn how the medium aided an increase in art publishing, art appreciation, leisure travel, and drawing instruction. Prints also promoted the neoclassical style emerging at the time.

18th-century artists elevated aquatint to new artistic heights.

One interesting aspect of the exhibition is that it introduces key artists from across Europe who refined the aquatint process: painter-printmakers François-Philippe Charpentier and Jean-Baptiste Le Prince in France, Paul Sandby in England; and professional printmakers Johann Gottlieb Prestel and Maria Catharina Prestel in Germany.

Aquatint prints were made by a variety of different makers. Painter-printmakers created prints from their own drawings and paintings, often refining them in the process, and professional printmakers excelled at imitating masterworks.

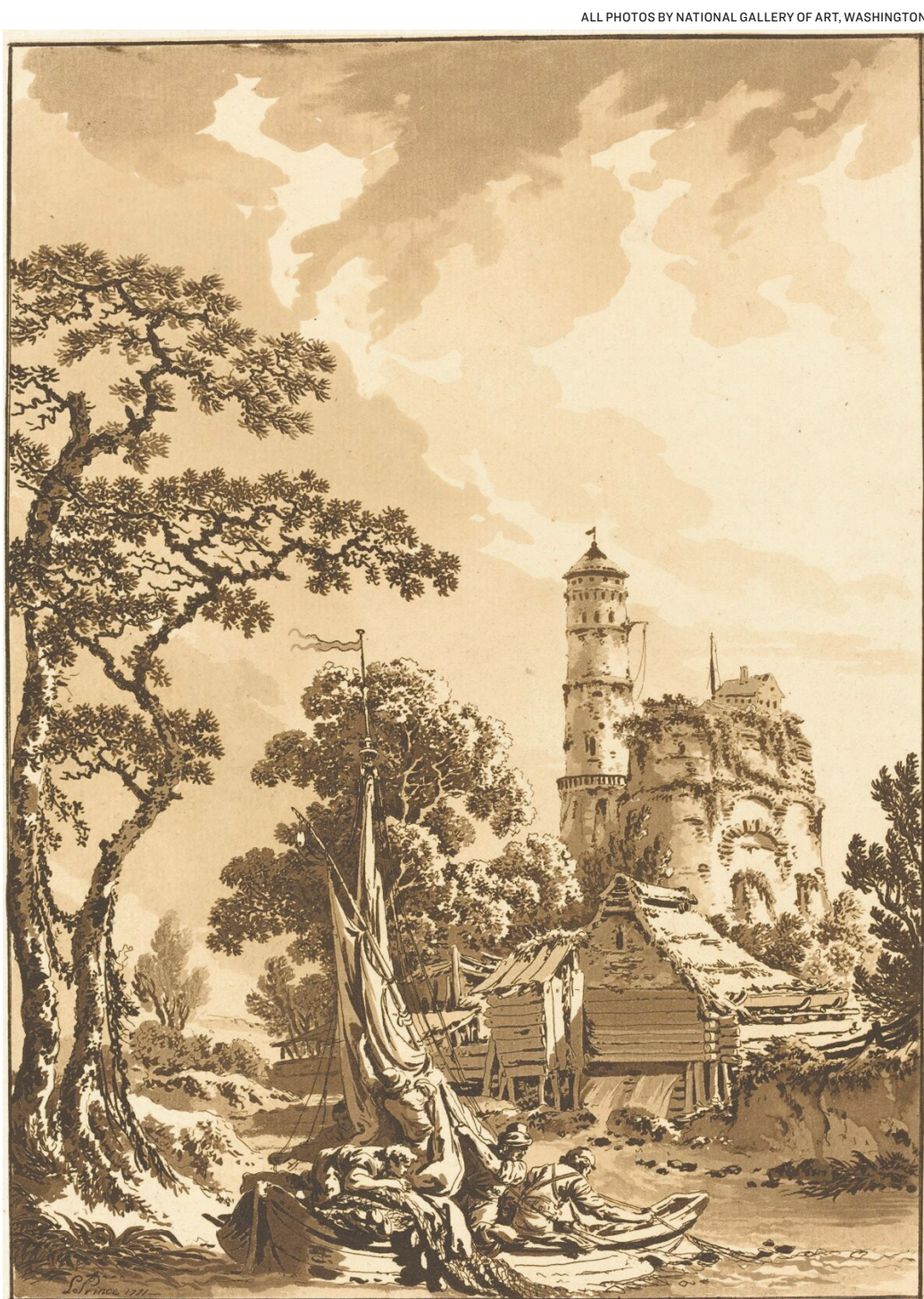
In addition, amateur printmakers made prints for pleasure, learning the aquatint technique to deepen their knowledge of art history by copying artists’ works. For them, learning the process meant connecting with artists whose work they admired and often collected.

France, the Epicenter of 18th-Century European Culture

In parallel to Charpentier, Swedish engraver Per Gustaf Floding (who went on to become the Swedish royal engraver) was also perfecting the process. Flooding developed his engraving skills at the French Academy when he was only 16 years old, and it was Charpentier who taught him.

In 1762, they placed a joint ad in a French journal that included six of their aquatint prints (three from each artist) to promote their new processes. One of those included in the ad was Charpentier’s aquatint of “Perseus and Andromeda.” The print, which is on display in the exhibition, imitates the famous mythological painting of the same name by French artist Carle Van Loo.

The two popularized aquatint. For instance, Charpentier demonstrated the process and also trained artists in the technique. One of his students was an amateur printmaker named Jean-Claude Richard, who was also known as the abbot of Saint-Non. Saint-Non gifted his prints to influential friends and acquaintances, such as diplomat and inventor Benjamin Franklin. Saint-Non even showed Franklin how to make aquatints and



“The Fishermen,” 1771, by Jean-Baptiste Le Prince. Etching and aquatint printed in brown ink; 12 11/16 inches by 9 1/8 inches. Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, National Gallery of Art, Washington.



“Caernarvon Castle (Night),” 1776, by Paul Sandby. Etching and aquatint printed in brown on laid paper sheet; 11 7/16 inches by 14 5/8 inches. Gift of Ruth B. Benedict, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

suggested he gift Saint-Non’s aquatints to his friends.

In the 1770s, Jean-Baptiste Le Prince “set the bar for European aquatint,” Hoisington said. She playfully calls Le Prince “the first aquatint celebrity,” who modestly exclaimed that he didn’t invent the technique—he perfected it. And as an artist-printmaker, Le Prince had full control of his prints, often perfecting his compositions and the aquatint process as he worked.

Le Prince used aquatint to transform his drawings and paintings—many of which were exhibited at the French Academy—into portable prints that promoted his works.

His aquatint prints were popular not only because of his artistic virtuosity but also because of their subjects. Having spent six years in Russia, he specialized in creating Russian scenes and subject matter, which quenched the public’s growing curiosity to see the Westernization of Russia.

A selection of Le Prince’s aquatint prints are in the exhibition, including “The Fisherman,” where fishermen in Russian dress are tending to the day’s catch. Le Prince expertly cre-

ated a crisp, clean landscape scene that could easily be mistaken for a watercolor drawing.

The Founding of Exquisite English Aquatints

A decade or so after Le Prince, influential English landscape artist Paul Sandby set about perfecting aquatint in England. Sandby was a founding member of the recently formed Royal Academy of Arts in London, and Hoisington counts Sandby as laying the foundation for aquatint in England.

Sandby found aquatint easier and more pleasurable than drawing, Hoisington explained. His artistic brilliance shows in his moonlit aquatint titled “Caernarvon Castle (Night),” which is believed to be the first aquatint of a nighttime scene. The Welsh castle exists but the scene is imagined. In this print, Sandby managed to convey the darkest of nights while carefully illuminating the imaginary scene with spots of fire, smoke, and moonlight.

German Printmakers Master the Process Meanwhile, in Germany in the 1790s, hus-



“The Triumph of Truth Over Envy,” 1781, by Maria Catharina Prestel, after Jacopo Ligozzi. Etching and aquatint printed in brown and gold leaf. Rosenwald Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington.



“Perseus and Andromeda,” 1762, by François-Philippe Charpentier, after Carle Van Loo. Etching and aquatint with roulette and burnishing printed in brown-black sheet (trimmed to plate); 16 inches by 19 15/16 inches. Pepita Milmore Memorial Fund, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

band and wife printmakers Johann Gottlieb Prestel and Maria Catharina Prestel and their apprentice were creating some of the most astonishing aquatints, imitating some of the most brilliant works held in German collections.

Hoisington calls “The Triumph of Truth Over Envy” by Maria Catharina as the epitome of Prestel’s works. She faithfully replicated the painting right down to the gold paint. The innovative print demonstrates Prestel’s intimate understanding of aquatint and her confidence in adapting the process to achieve astounding painterly effects.

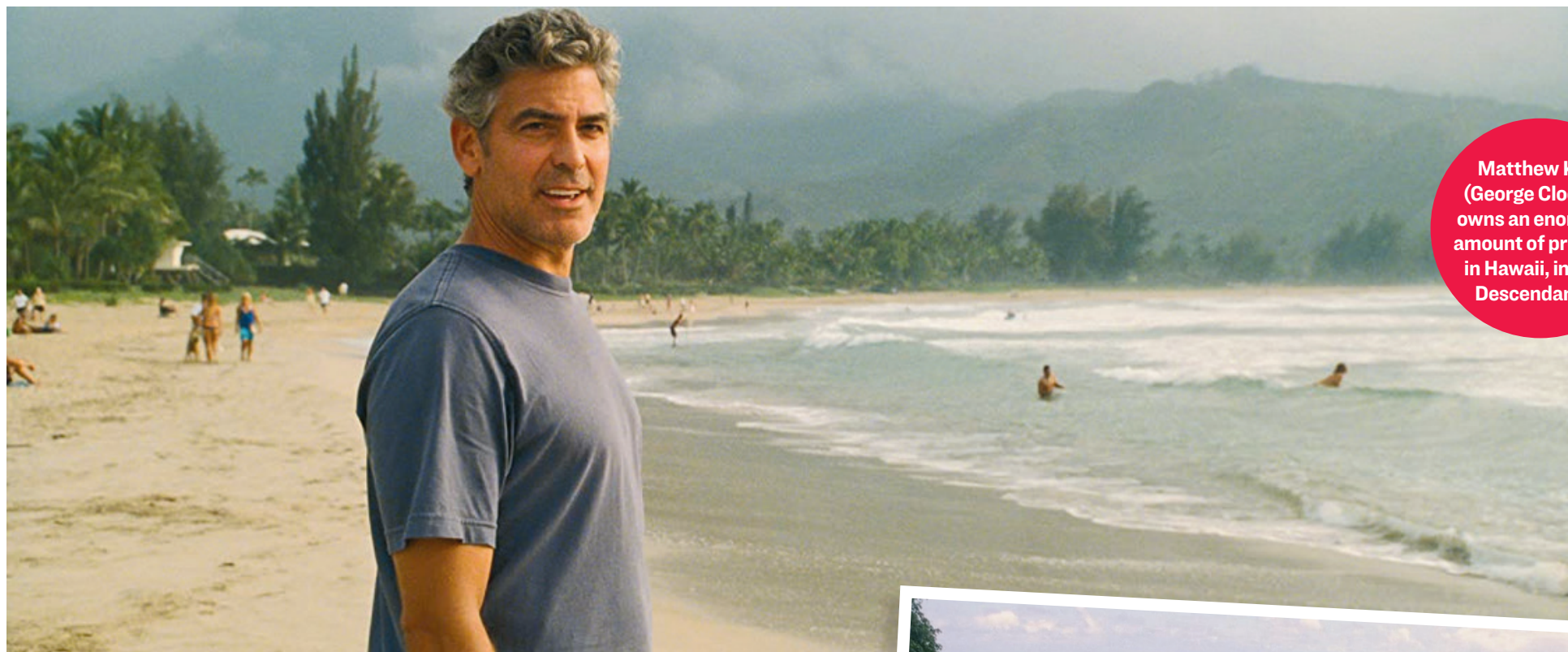
Hoisington explained how Prestel achieved such a work. Prestel used two different copper plates for the print. The first plate was etched and aquatinted and then printed in brown ink. Then that piece of paper went through the press again, but this time a different plate was applied that had been etched and had ochre ink applied to it. While the paper was still wet from the second pressing, Prestel sprinkled fine gold leaf powder over the print to mimic the gold paint in the original painting.

The NGA has a set of 36 of Prestel’s prints; these are the third series she made that were mounted and framed in albums. Hoisington loves imagining how these prints were enjoyed: On the back of each print is the name of the original painting and the printmaker, whereas previous prints had that information on the front, so viewers must have enjoyed guessing the original works.

By the 1790s, aquatint treatises and manuals further streamlined the process of making the prints. And in England, aquatint technique became commonplace in published works such as drawing books, travel books, and topographical maps.

Even today, artists and printmakers learn and use the aquatint technique to create marvelous, painterly prints. This centuries-old printmaking technique endures despite technological advances such as the internet, television, and the digitization of modern printing, which replaces the initial purpose of these types of prints—to disseminate fine art. Aquatint’s enduring appeal is testimony to the artists who refined and continued to hone the practice.

The ‘Aquatint: From Its Origins to Goya’ exhibition runs until Feb. 21. To find out more, visit NGA.gov



Matthew King (George Clooney) owns an enormous amount of property in Hawaii, in “The Descendants.”

FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON



Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

When George Clooney Proved He Could Do It All

MARK JACKSON

In “The Descendants” (2011), George Clooney demonstrated that he could do it all in terms of the art and craft of acting. Regardless of what you might think of his politics, Clooney is a man who excels at just about everything he does. How did that much good stuff get on one man’s plate? Looks, wealth, fame, influence, humor, style, acting talent, directing talent, excellent friends, generosity, a beautiful and classy wife—he’s got it all. But can he really act?

All actors are products. When the general public says “Actors sell themselves,” with the unspoken, often unconscious, subtle smear that this particular aspect of a business transaction is akin to prostitution, what’s not generally understood is that show business is a business, same as any other. Actors have brand recognition and packaging like any other product, and so Clooney hasn’t often ventured outside the zone of the product he’s selling, his niche, which people most enjoy buying from him: He generally plays debonair, smooth, cocky, confident, somewhat emotionally shallow men.

Clooney’s Matt King in “The Descendants” is still outwardly smooth and successful, but he’s self-aware enough to own up to the fact that he’s failed at the important things in life, namely being a good husband to his wife, Elizabeth, and a good father to his two daughters due to his workaholicism. Clooney opens his character Matt King wide for the public to witness a full range of complicated emotions, and make no mistake about it: The man can act. His opening voiceover monologue serves notice that it’ll be a bumpy ride: “My friends think that just because we live in Hawaii, we live in paradise. Like a permanent vacation; we’re all out here sipping Mai Tais, shaking our hips, and catching waves. Are they insane? Do they think we’re immune to life? How can they possibly think our families are less screwed-up, our heartaches less painful? I haven’t been on a surfboard for 15 years. Paradise can go (expletive) itself.”

The Story Matt King is a lawyer living in Honolulu. A descendant (hence the title) of Hawaiian

royalty, he’s also the sole trustee of a vast amount of pristine beachfront property (25,000 acres). Matt’s good with his money, but his numerous cousins have not been. And having largely squandered their inheritances, they pressure him with the moral dilemma throughout the movie of whether to sign all his land away for development to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars.

When his free-spirited wife, Elizabeth (Patricia Hastie), goes into a coma due to a water-skiing accident off Waikiki, Matt is forced to reassess his life. His grade-school and high-school-age daughters, both acting out due to the combination of their mother’s condition and their father’s heretofore lack of involvement in their lives, begin to turn up the dysfunction volume to get his attention. Scottie (Amara Miller), 10, bullies other kids. Alex, 17 (a star-making, Oscar-buzzing turn from then newcomer Shailene Woodley), away at a private boarding school on the Big Island, abuses substances.

Alexandra finally drops a bomb on dad, revealing that prior to her accident, her mom was cheating on him, which was the main cause of Alex’s misery. They team up to track down the adulterer, Brian Speer (Matthew Lillard), a real estate agent, and then fly to Kauai where he’s vacationing, to confront him.

Since it’s now clear that Elizabeth won’t be recovering and they’ll need to end life support, Matt finds it in his heart to let Brian know so he can also say his goodbyes. However, one of Matt’s cousins happens to mention that Brian happens to be the brother-in-law of the developer all the cousins want to sell their (Matt’s) land to, and this adulterer Brian will end up hugely wealthy from the sales commission.

There’s finally a big family meeting, where Matt overrules the majority vote of his cousins, and decides to keep the land and figure out a way to legally get around the ruling on perpetuities. Cousin Hugh (Beau Bridges) is shocked and threatens legal action. Matt doesn’t care. He’s become aware of the fact that his decisions are being scrutinized by all of Hawaii, and that his family’s self-interests in land development could hurt the island’s residents.

After Julie Speer (Judy Greer) learns about her husband Brian’s affair with Elizabeth,



Cousin Hugh (Beau Bridges, L) and Matt King (George Clooney) talk about whether Matt should sell his Hawaiian property so all his cousins who squandered their inheritances can benefit.



Alex (Shailene Woodley) and Sid (Nick Krause) are a teenage couple.



Julie Speer (Judy Greer) and Brian Speer (Matthew Lillard) are a married couple.



Descendants of royal Hawaiian heritage survey their estate.

Clooney opens his character Matt King wide for the public to witness a full range of complicated emotions.

she visits the hospital and has a talk with the comatose Elizabeth. Matt must also find a way to come to terms with the cheating and impending death.

Character Arcs

Director Alexander Payne is masterful at telling the story of the huge life transition. The film “Sideways” is one stellar example of this; “About Schmidt” is another. “The Descendants” is almost on the level of “Sideways,” with Clooney’s performance, while more understated, rivaling that of Paul Giamatti.

While the best dramas are offset with moments of comic relief, director Payne achieves a curious effect. The comedy in “The Descendants” is very stealthy. Right in the middle of a heart-wrenching dramatic scene, a comedic line gets laughs because of the sheer gall of putting that particular line in that particular place.

When I saw the movie when it was first released, it was hard to believe that Matt’s beautiful, whip-smart, and emotionally intelligent daughter would go for such an over-the-top level of cluelessness in a boyfriend—except, of course, in the time-honored tradition of having a dumb boyfriend to annoy daddy. On second viewing, however, it’s clear that, while a doofus, Sid (Nick Krause) has the courage to go where angels fear to tread and speak his mind at any cost—a form of strength that a teenage girl might find attractive. And as the film proceeds, Sid’s character arc is touching and ends up very much belonging.

Overall, it’s actually Elizabeth’s extramarital affair and not her tragic accident and impending death that feeds the emotional resonance of “The Descendants.” While there’s a bit too much about the stalking of Brian, this is the thing that forces Matt to come to grips with reality, to realize that he’s incredibly jealous, hurt, and angry. His confrontation with Brian reveals a man who did not reciprocate Elizabeth’s love and was possibly using her to get at Matt’s money. The easy story to tell is that of the cuckolded husband throttling the cheater, but director Payne has Matt treat Brian with pitying contempt, which is ultimately grounded in the compassion of offering Brian a chance to say his goodbyes. That’s a complicated cocktail of emotions to portray.

While we expect a top-flight character actor such as Paul Giamatti to handle this kind of scene with aplomb, leading-man Clooney served notice herewith that he could do comedy, dramatic vulnerability, action, and everything else equally well.

‘The Descendants’

Director: Alexander Payne

Starring: George Clooney, Shailene Woodley, Beau Bridges, Robert Forster, Judy Greer, Matthew Lillard, Amara Miller, Nick Krause

Running Time: 1 hour, 55 minutes

MPAA Rating: R

Release Date: Sept. 18, 2011

★★★★★



Winged Time points to Beauty and orders Old Age to touch her face. A detail of "Time Orders Old Age to Destroy Beauty," circa 1746 by Pompeo Batoni. Oil on canvas, 53 inches by 38 inches. The National Gallery, London.



Old Age stretches forth her hand as Beauty draws back. A detail of "Time Orders Old Age to Destroy Beauty," circa 1746 by Pompeo Batoni. Oil on canvas, 53 inches by 38 inches. The National Gallery, London.

REACHING WITHIN:
WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

A Beauty That Grows With Time

ERIC BESS

Social media is such a new phenomenon. Everything has its pros and cons, but we still don't know what the consequences of its excessive use will be.

To me, it seems like social media can inflate our sense of vanity. We may update our following with our successes and post altered photos for likes, or we might complain about our hardships in order to get sympathy. We might argue with strangers about politics. Social media gives us enough distance from the conflict itself to feel confident about our opinions.

Social media has become the way in which we might outwardly beautify ourselves to others, but does this prevent us from considering what it means to be truly beautiful, that is, to possess beauty within? I recently came across a painting by Pompeo Batoni titled "Time Orders Old Age to Destroy Beauty" that made me think about the divine nature of true beauty.

Batoni's Beauty

In "Time Orders Old Age to Destroy Beauty," Batoni painted three figures in a natural setting. The main character is Beauty. She stands to the left in the composition and holds her vibrant pink dress in one hand. The softness of her youth contrasts with the hardness of the rock wall behind her.

She is affronted by Time, who is depicted as a half-naked older man with angel's wings. Time sits on a rock, points to Beauty with one hand, and holds an hourglass with the other.

Social media has become the way in which we might outwardly beautify ourselves to others, but does this prevent us from considering what it means to be truly beautiful, that is, to possess beauty within?



"Time Orders Old Age to Destroy Beauty," circa 1746 by Pompeo Batoni. Oil on canvas, 53 inches by 38 inches. The National Gallery, London.

With his pointing hand, Time directs Old Age, depicted as an older woman also sitting on a rock, to alter the youthful face of Beauty.

In contrast to Beauty, Old Age's clothing is not colorful at all but is a dull, brownish earth tone. The wrinkled skin on her hands and face contrast with the soft luster of Beauty's skin. The two also have different skin tones: Beauty's skin still has the white alabaster glow of youth, whereas Old Age's skin has been darkened and weathered through the years. Old Age reaches for Beauty's face, and Beauty leans away.

Finding True Beauty Within

What wisdom does Batoni's painting provide for us today? On the surface, the meaning may seem pretty apparent: Beauty fades. The rock wall behind the figures sweeps from left to right and leads our eye from Beauty to Old Age. The way the natural setting is composed suggests that it is the way of nature for youthful beauty to fade into older age, but let's see if we can uncover a more nuanced interpretation of the painting using elements from the composition.

Let's start with Time. Time is the only character who is depicted with angel's wings, which suggests that Time is divine. A blue garment loosely covers him, and blue is a color closely associated with the heavens. Since he is divine, we can presume that Time is able to alter the course of things on earth by way of heaven. Time holds an hourglass in one hand, which represents the constant flux and change that he symbolizes. In other words, Time is closely related to fate, which in this instance is orchestrated by heaven. That hourglass is also a warning to all who see it. It suggests, "Your time is limited" and asks, "Are you making the best use of your fate?" Also, Time is the only character who is depicted nearly unclothed, which suggests something specific about the nature of time.

Time is always uncovering the naked truth or way of things. Our fates are the ways that our stories unfold, and if Time is divine, then the ways our stories unfold must have divine reasons. Does he point at Beauty to reveal a divine truth about her and her fate?

Time and Old Age are both sitting on rocks while Beauty is standing and facing the viewer. Time even points up to Beauty as Old Age reaches for her face. Why is Beauty standing while the others sit? Beauty is also the only one who fully shows herself to the viewer. Is Batoni suggesting that Beauty can lead to vanity, that is, to showing off? Is this why she is positioned higher than the other figures?

If Time is a divine figure, then he must not be ordering Old Age to destroy Beauty with malicious intent. Instead, he must be reminding Beauty not to waste her time elevating herself above others with her vanity.

To me, her truer purpose in regard to her fate is to elevate—that is, to beautify—the divine. In this way, she can develop a sense of beauty that cannot be destroyed by Old Age or Time. She can develop a sense of beauty that is divine, eternal.

What do you see in this painting? In this age of social media, how might we consider beauty that doesn't fade but grows with time?

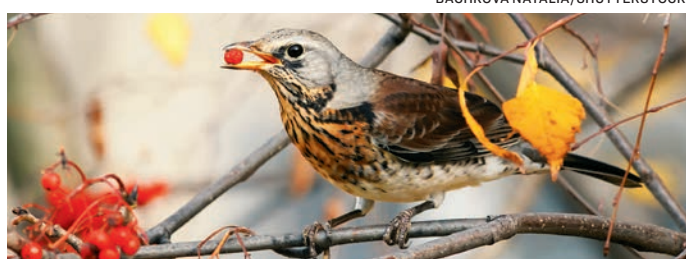
Have you ever seen a work of art that you thought was beautiful but had no idea what it meant? In our series "Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart," we interpret the classical visual arts in ways that may be morally insightful for us today. We try to approach each work of art to see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

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

WELL SAID

'The Darkling Thrush' by Thomas Hardy

I leant upon a coppice gate
When Frost was spectre-gray,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings of broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted night
Had sought their household fires.



"A thrush in winter."

Traditionally, poetry offers us a deeply felt and articulate point of view on our world.

GOLDEN ERA FILMS

Check In to 1945 With This Heartwarming Film

TIFFANY BRANNAN

"Week-End at the Waldorf" sounds like the title of a travel brochure, but it's actually the name of a highly successful classic movie. Featuring an all-star cast of MGM players, this wartime extravaganza was a remake of "Grand Hotel" from 1932, updated to the more relatable setting of New York during World War II.

This major MGM production was produced by Arthur Hornblow Jr. and directed by Robert Z. Leonard. The cast contained only MGM's biggest names, including Ginger Rogers as overworked movie star Irene Malvern, Walter Pidgeon as battle-weary war correspondent Chip Collyer, Lana Turner as enterprising stenographer Bunny Smith, and Van Johnson as wounded flyer Captain James "Jimmy" Hollis.

Smaller parts are played by Edward Arnold as scheming businessman Martin X. Edley, Keenan Wynn as comical newshound Oliver Webson, and Robert Benchley as columnist and narrator Randy Morton. Supporting actors Phyllis Thaxter, Leon Ames, Samuel S. Hinds, George Zucco, and Rosemary DeCamp round out the cast. Xavier Cugat and his band lend musical accompaniment.

How does a film blend such different characters into one compelling plot in only 130 minutes? This story works because it's not a complicated love triangle (or square) involving every character. At the start, the four main characters don't even know each other, and the two couples never meet. Through chance circumstances, their paths briefly cross, but only when passing in the lobby. These characters are bound together by one common factor: They spend a single weekend at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, after which their lives will never be the same.

Looking for Love

Although seven characters are listed above the title in this film's opening credits, the story is about four main characters: Irene, Chip, Bunny, and James. All four are searching for something when the weekend begins. They don't know what they are trying to find, but they all want to get away from their current existences. They don't realize they are all looking for the same thing: true love and a happy marriage with the right person.

Irene Malvern, a very successful movie star, is staying at the Waldorf for the New York premiere of her latest film. Her manager, Henry Burton (Ames), rejoices because she has no romantic involvement and thus no emotions, scandals, or attachments to interfere with her career. However, Irene is beginning to feel that she has no life. She knows that she needs rest, but the only relaxation in her schedule is four days on a train back to Hollywood. She is afraid that her weariness is beginning to show in her performances and that life is passing her by.

Meanwhile, Chip Collyer feels the same way about his writing after years overseas on the frontlines. The past weeks spent in the United States have been too hectic to afford him any rest. Now, his editor, Hi Johns (Charles Wilson), thinks he'll be ready to return to his European assignments after one weekend of rest. Chip feels completely burned-out, but Johns insists that he is the only man for the job. All he wants is to sleep, but shutting out the world might be the wrong solution for him.

Bunny Smith isn't tired; she's sick and tired. This enterprising young woman has greater ambitions than being a stenographer and notary in the Waldorf-Astoria lobby for the rest of her life. Having spent her whole life on 10th Avenue, she longs for the finer things, but she's wise to the intentions of lecherous businessmen like Martin Edley. She's remained an honest working girl so far, but she can't help being tempted when Mr. Edley offers her a questionable but lucrative job.

Jimmy Hollis is not tired of any one thing; he's tired of life because he feels he has nothing and nobody for whom to live. He has no family; his only friends are casual acquaintances from his hometown of Jasmine, California. His best friend, his navigator, was killed on an unnecessary flight that Jimmy encouraged him to take. Now, Jimmy has battle fatigue and a piece of shrapnel near his heart. He needs delicate surgery to survive, but it will only succeed if he has the will to live, which he hasn't got. With the surgery scheduled for Tuesday, this weekend in New York may be his last.

A Cinematic Journey

Visiting an old hotel that has retained its historic authenticity can feel like going back to another time. "Weekend at the Waldorf" brings viewers on such a journey to the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City, circa 1945. The hotel's current location opened in 1931 and has maintained its prominence in



The Park Avenue entrance to the Waldorf Astoria New York in 2013.



A publicity still of (L-R) Van Johnson, Lana Turner, Ginger Rogers, and Walter Pidgeon for "Week-End at the Waldorf."

'Weekend at the Waldorf' brings viewers on such a journey to the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City, circa 1945.

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The main registration lobby and foyer of Waldorf Astoria New York in 2010.

New York society ever since.

It's no exaggeration that the film shows such important people staying at the Waldorf-Astoria. Jay Clarke of the Knight Rider/Tribune News Service wrote in honor of the hotel's centenary: "It isn't the biggest hotel in New York, nor the most expensive. But when it comes to prestige, the Waldorf-Astoria has no peer. When presidents come to New York, they stay at the Waldorf-Astoria. Kings and queens make it their home away from home, as have people as diverse as Cary Grant, the Dalai Lama and Chris Evert. Some of them liked the hotel so well, they made their home there."

Along those distinguished lines, this movie shows the hotel hosting a Middle Eastern royal (Zucco), a movie star, and a famous war correspondent. A respected businessman (Hinds) and a nationally syndicated columnist (Benchley) call it home, like many wealthy and famous people who lived at the hotel for years. During the titular weekend, a fancy wedding takes place in one of the ballrooms. Orchestra leader Xavier Cugat leads the lavish floorshow in the hotel's iconic Starlight Roof every night in the film, which he frequently did in life, along with other famous musicians of the 1940s.

Like "Grand Hotel," "Week-End at the Waldorf" spends its entire runtime within the walls of the titular hotel. Unusual for the time, the production filmed interior and exterior shots of the hotel's beautiful art deco architecture. Most of the locations where the actors are present, such as the lobby, the Starlight Roof, and various hotel rooms, were sets on the MGM lot.

Interestingly, this movie was almost called "Palace in the Sky" and relocated to a San Francisco hotel because of legal disputes between the studio and the hotel management. One of the main issues was the Waldorf's insistence that the film be shot in Technicolor to better highlight the luxurious decor.

Thankfully, the disputing sides resolved their differences, and production commenced. This is fortunate, for even with the same great story and cast, this film would not have been the same without the sheer elegance that the very name of this legendary hotel exudes. From the entryway's floor mural to the ornate elevator doors, there are so many of the hotel's real-life details, which those who have visited will recognize and appreciate. It's no wonder that the film is still proudly played on a small screen in the hotel's lobby at all times.

A Classic, American Style

It's rare for the remake of a popular film to be successful. "Week-End at the Waldorf" managed to defy these odds by becoming 1945's sixth largest grossing film. What was the secret to its success? It could have been the star-studded cast of major box office attractions like pinup girl Lana Turner, heartthrob Van Johnson, and beloved stars Ginger Rogers and Walter Pidgeon. It could have been the inclusion of compelling music, provided by the well-known Xavier Cugat. It could have been the glamorous setting at the Waldorf-Astoria, which transported viewers to a luxurious weekend. It could have been the fabulous costumes worn by Irene. However, there is another reason for the movie's success, which is less obvious.

Some remakes are merely copies of an earlier film with a new cast. Every line and scene is the same, perhaps with the addition of musical numbers. Unless the new performers bring something very special to these tried-and-true elements, audiences are bound to unfavorably compare them to their predecessors.

There was an added challenge in remaking "Grand Hotel." The dark content and immoral relationships that were accepted in pre-Code films were taboo by 1945, when the Production Code Administration ensured that all Hollywood films followed the Motion Picture Production Code's decency standards. MGM could have tried to tone down the original's questionable elements, including suicide, murder, and illicit affairs galore. Instead, it decided to turn the basic outline into a completely Code-compliant film without any of the off-color content.

The result is a truly American film. Set in New York instead of Berlin, it celebrates one of the most famous hotels in the United States. The European ballerina is translated to the more American celebrity of a movie star. Two of the men are involved in war service. Instead of an old man with a terminal illness, the character facing death is a young, wounded veteran. Exotic melodrama was traded for American optimism.

The results are so delightful that you'll want this weekend to never end!

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 Preservation Society, an organization dedicated to reforming the arts by reinstating the Motion Picture Production Code.



(L-R) Crown Prince Olav of Norway, Princess Juliana of the Netherlands, Eleanor Roosevelt, Crown Princess Martha of Norway, and Thomas J. Watson at the Waldorf Astoria in 1944. As in the 1945 movie, the hotel has catered to society's elites. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

Director Howard Hawks's Timeless Screwball Comedy

IAN KANE

If I'd have known that the 1938 film "Bringing Up Baby" was a screwball comedy that moves along at a breakneck pace, I probably would have better prepared for it. But perhaps it's a good thing that I didn't, since the result of being taken along on this uproarious ride is akin to an unexpected roller-coaster ride of laughs rolling up and down one's funny bone—each situation that its main characters find themselves in keeps amplifying to goofier and zanier heights.

Therefore, everything begins on a relatively calm note. Doctor David Huxley (Cary Grant) is a nerdy and somewhat socially awkward paleontologist who has almost completed the construction of a humongous Brontosaurus skeleton within the Stuyvesant Museum of Natural History. The only thing he's waiting on is one final dinosaur bone—the intercostal clavicle—and the exhibit will be complete.

He's engaged to one of his work colleagues, Alice Swallow (Virginia Walker), a woman with a stony countenance who seems to be more passionate about the dinosaurs on display than about David. She chides him for displaying anything that she considers juvenile or peripheral to the scientific work at hand. She deems that even a honeymoon would take away from more serious matters and dismisses the possibility of one, outright.

One of the matters that David has to attend to is trying to persuade high-powered corporate attorney Alexander Peabody (George Irving) to donate a million dollars to the museum.

On a golf course with Mr. Peabody, David learns that the top-flight attorney isn't the donor, but rather a wealthy woman named Elizabeth Random (May Robson) whom he represents. David believes that if he can impress Mr. Peabody, the latter will put in a good word for him and the money will be donated.

Hawks's direction is perfectly matched with the cast's spot-on comedic timing.



"Baby" enjoying some music, in "Bringing Up Baby."

'Bringing Up Baby'

Director: Howard Hawks
Starring: Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, Charles Ruggles
Running Time: 1 hour, 42 minutes
Not Rated
Release Date: Feb. 18, 1938

★★★★★



Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant in the screwball comedy "Bringing Up Baby."

Things take quite a dramatic turn when clumsy heiress Susan Vance (Katharine Hepburn) shows up on the golf course and nabs David's ball—mistaking it for her own. As David attempts to explain her error, she ends up jumping into his car and attempts to drive off with it (also supposedly by mistake). Increasingly irritated, David is led further and further away from Mr. Peabody, and in the end comes off as somewhat crazy.

David attempts to follow up with Mr. Peabody at a ritzy dining establishment, but he encounters Susan once more—this time the hijinks reach such a feverish (and physical) pitch that both David and Susan end up with frayed clothes. And once again, Mr. Peabody witnesses the unfolding chaos on hand and regards David as an oddball.

Susan soon discovers that David is engaged to marry his fiancée the very next day, and as she has begun to fall in love with him, she concocts an elaborate plan to prevent him from showing up for the wedding. This includes luring him over to her place to attend to the titular "Baby," a domesticated leopard that Susan's brother has sent to her while he's down in Brazil.

Although I've seen some screwball comedies in the past, I don't think any of them could quite match the peppy pace

this film exhibits. Hawks's direction is perfectly matched with the cast's spot-on comedic timing, which dazzles with its nonstop barrage of over-the-top antics. At breakneck speeds, we're transported from one ridiculous situation to the next—one chaotic setting to the next—typically escalating in magnitude.

Amazingly, this film was a commercial flop when it debuted. Although Grant had been trained in comedy, Hepburn hadn't and therefore received the brunt of the blame for its failure. (She later recovered, however.) Throughout the decades, though, it has become much more appreciated over time and is even considered to be the pinnacle of all screwball comedies by some.

Those who appreciate a riotous (and sometimes bawdy) comedy with a dollop or two of romantic tension should definitely see this raucous piece of screwball cinema, "Bringing Up Baby," if only for the cheering up of spirits in these sometimes melancholically odd modern times.

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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