

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARCO MANCINI



Princess Rita and Prince Nicolò Boncompagni Ludovisi at Villa Aurora.

FINE ARTS

Roman Treasures: 'The Eternal City,' the Villa Aurora, and Princess Ludovisi

ELIZABETH LEV

Rome's serene skies and stately buildings often serve to salve the wounds of its history. Layers of monuments and ruins conceal centuries of struggles and triumphs. Through its many rebuildings, the Eternal City seems to declare "Tomorrow's another day."

Villa Ludovisi Aurora is a case in point. Tucked away behind the grand hotels of the Via Veneto on the Pincian Hill, this little oa-

In 2021, the villa was catapulted into the global spotlight.

sis shows little trace of the dramatic events and remarkable characters that have trod its grounds.

Yet in 2021, the villa was catapulted into the global spotlight when it was announced that the building, grounds, and its unique mural by celebrated Baroque artist Caravaggio would be put up for public auction.

Continued on Page 4

2022 NTD 8TH INTERNATIONAL CHINESE VOCAL COMPETITION



GOLD AWARD \$10,000 | **VOCAL.NTDTV.COM**
Merkin Hall-KMC
NEW YORK Sep. 2022
 REGISTER
 +1-888-477-9228
 VOCAL@GLOBALCOMPETITIONS.ORG



"In an American Inn," 1814, by John Lewis Krimmel. Library of Congress.

FOLK MUSIC

Stories in Song: American Ballads

JEFF MINICK

"Hang down your head, Tom Dooley
 Hang down your head and cry
 Hang down your head, Tom Dooley
 Poor boy, you're bound to die"

Roots of the Ballad

"A ballad," declares one online dictionary, is "a poem or song narrating a story in short stanzas."

That's about as succinct and brief a definition we'll find.

It was 1959 or 1960 when I first heard the Kingston Trio's "Tom Dooley" on the jukebox in Grady's Café in Boonville, North Carolina, population of around 600 souls. I don't remember what I was eating, who I was with, or why I was there, but I recollect perfectly sitting in a booth, staring into space, and being mesmerized by that song.

And so began my lifelong love affair with American ballads.

My siblings, my friends, and I were already learning ballads and folk songs in elementary school or from children's records. "I've Been Working on the Railroad," "Oh! Susanna," "On Top of Old Smoky," and "Erie Canal" are just a few of these classics I recall singing in class. When I was 11, just before I abandoned my piano lessons, I dressed up like a cowpoke and performed "I'm a Poor Lonesome Cowboy" to an audience in our school auditorium. Thank heavens no one recorded that screechy performance for posterity.

Since then, I have listened to songwriters and singers as famous as Johnny Cash or as little known as my brother deliver these stories in song. When my children were growing up, we listened to recordings like "Wee Sing America," and to this day they can still belt out some of the songs they heard. Hearing one or more of them sing the chorus to "Goober Peas" always brings a laugh.

Let's take a look at just a few of these songs, old and new, that have done so much to shape American culture.

The ballad is centuries old, going back to the minstrels of the Middle Ages. Rarely put into writing or print at that time, ballads were passed from generation to generation, an oral tradition also often practiced in America throughout the 19th century.

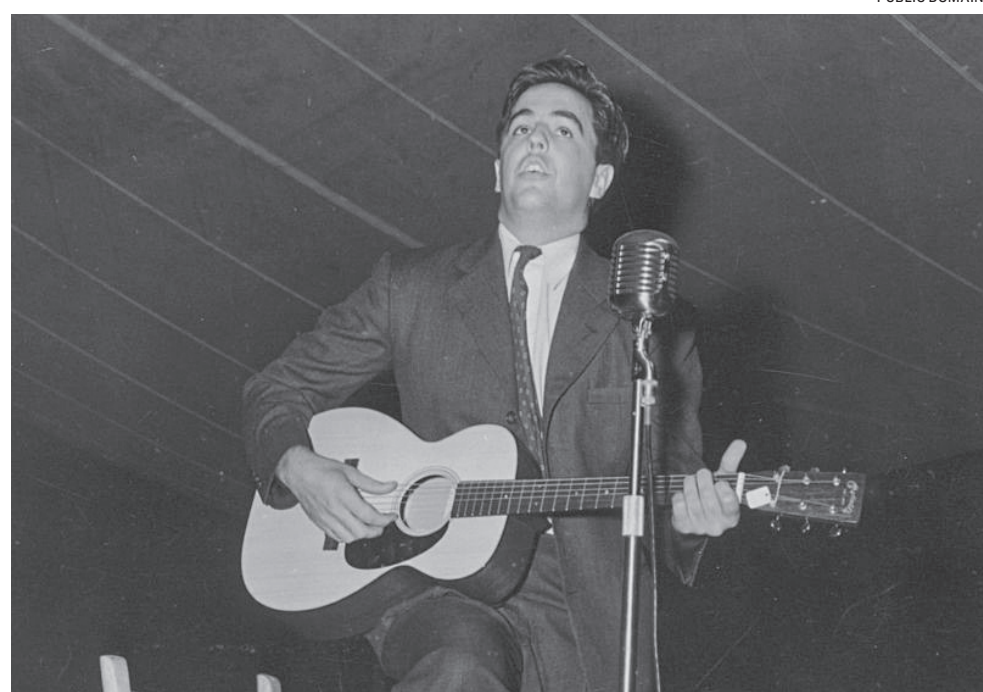
Settlers, particularly from the British Isles, brought these song-stories when they immigrated to America. "Danny Boy," "Annie Laurie," and other pieces have now become part of the American repertoire, and sometimes entire cities and regions reflected this heritage. In Southern Appalachia, for example, the Scots and Scots-Irish who made those mountains their home kept alive their music, and it remains popular to this day.

Here's another example of this trans-Atlantic cultural enrichment: Johnny Cash recorded "Sam Hall," the story of a convict on the gallows, and I've heard a couple of fellows roar out the words along with Cash. That rousing song comes to us from England.

Sometimes, too, the old country songs are dressed up in new clothing. The folk-rock group Steeleye Span, for instance, dug out some old British folk songs and ballads and put them to rock music. American musicians have also transformed old tunes and even the words of the songs.

American Originals

In their Introduction to "American Ballads and Folk Songs," John and Alan Lomax, who spent years seeking out sources and collecting this music, wrote this about the



Alan Lomax at the Mountain Music Festival in Asheville, N.C., between 1938 and 1950. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

they were lonely or sad or glad, and they sought diversion."

The Good Ol' Songs

And that quest for diversion gave us some wonderful American music.

The classic ballad "Streets of Laredo," its tune taken from an English folk song, describes a dying cowboy, his regrets for having lived a bad life, and his requests for his funeral:

"So, beat the drum slowly and play the fife lowly
 Sing the Death March as you carry me along
 Take me to the green valley,
 There lay the sod o'er me
 For I'm a young cowboy
 and I know I've done wrong."

Then there's John Henry, a black "steel-driving man" who pitted his muscles and hammer against a steam drill in a contest to see whether man or machine might drill deeper into stone. John Henry won the contest, but he died from exhaustion. One version of the song known by many Americans begins like this:

"Well, John Henry was a little baby
 Sittin' on his daddy's knee
 He pick up a hammer and a little piece of steel,
 And cried, "Hammer's gonna be the death of me, Lord, Lord
 Hammer's gonna be the death of me"
 In "Sweet Betsy From Pike," we meet a woman who displays the rugged spirit of the American pioneer.
 "Did you ever hear tell of sweet Betsy from Pike,
 Who crossed the wide prairies with her lover Ike,
 With two yoke of cattle and one spotted hog,
 A tall shanghai rooster and an old yaller dog?"

breeding grounds of the American ballad:

"The cowboy, the miner, the tramp, the lumberjack, the Forty-niner, the soldier, the sailor, the plantation Negro (and also his sophisticated city cousin) ... all have 'made-up' songs describing their experiences or detailing situations. ..."

This father and son team also observed:

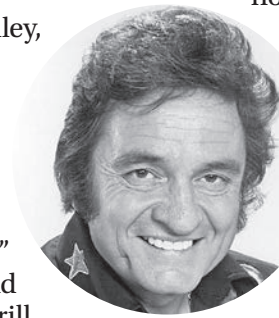
"A life of isolation, without books or newspapers or telephone or radio, breeds songs and ballads. The gamut of human experience has been portrayed through this unrecorded (at least until recently) literature of the people. These people had no literary conventions to uphold. But

divorces Betsy, she sends him off with a shout: "Goodbye, you big lummo, I'm glad you backed out."

The Tradition Remains Alive

Though we may think of these song-stories as part of an old America, musicians have continued to bring us ballads.

When I was a kid, if one of us sang out "Born on a mountain top in Tennessee," everyone within listening distance could join in that ballad about Davy Crockett. The television show, starring Fess Parker as Crockett, made coonskin caps and that music as ubiquitous as our childhood fantasies of living like that rugged pioneer.



Johnny Cash in 1977.

Written and performed by Jimmy Dean, "Big Bad John" became a huge hit in late 1961, and the following year won Dean a Grammy Award for the Best Country & Western Recording. This song tells the story of a big, quiet man who appears out of nowhere and sets to work in a mine. One day, when "a timber cracked and men started cryin'," Big John saves the miners' lives by grabbing the 'saggin' timber":

"And with all of his strength he gave a mighty shove
 Then a miner yelled out, "There's a light up above"
 And twenty men scrambled from a would-be grave
 Now there's only one left down there to save, Big John."

Johnny Cash popularized all sorts of ballads, both old and new. Along with Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and Kris Kristofferson, Cash made a hit out of Jimmy Webb's "Highwayman," the story of a rough man whose spirit goes down through the ages. One of Cash's early compositions was "Ballad of a Teenage Queen," the story of a girl who leaves her hometown and her boyfriend for Hollywood, where she wins fame but eventually gives up everything for love and returns home.

One humorous ballad, originally written by children's author Shel Silverstein, was raucously received when Cash first performed it at Folsom Prison. The song, which became a smash hit, tells the story

of a boy whose father, having decided to leave his wife and baby, names his son Sue so he'll be forced to grow up fighting and defending himself. Later the two men meet in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, where they get into a brutal, no-holds bar fight. After Sue is victorious, his dad explains:

"And he said, "Son, this world is rough
 And if a man's gonna make it, he's gotta be tough
 And I knew I wouldn't be there to help you along
 So I give you that name, and I said good-bye
 And I knew you'd have to get tough or die
 It's that name that helped to make you strong."

Folk songs have done so much to shape American culture.

Ballads are the rough-hewn face of our culture. Most of the ballads are about ordinary men and women: workers, drifters, outlaws, adventurers, the good, the bad, and the beaten-down. Knowing and singing these songs helps keep our past alive.

Teaching them to our children gives them pathways into history that they might never otherwise find. And from many of these songs, most of them easily memorized and sung, our young people will also deepen their understanding of the human spirit: hardship overcome, the strength and the fragility of love, and the beauty of aspirations and dreams.

But there's one more great reason to learn some ballads. They're just plain of fun to sing.

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.

DONATE YOUR CAR

To a media that stands for TRUTH and TRADITION

Your old vehicle can support The Epoch Times' truthful journalism and help us get factual news in front of more readers.

WHY DONATE TO US?

- Accept cars, motorcycles, and RVs
- Free vehicle pick-up
- Maximum tax deduction
- Support our journalists

Donate Now:
www.EpochCar.org
 1-800-822-3828

Our independence from any corporation or holding company is what ensures that we are free to report according to our values of Truth and Tradition. We're primarily funded through subscriptions from our readers—the stakeholders that we answer to, who keep us on the right track.

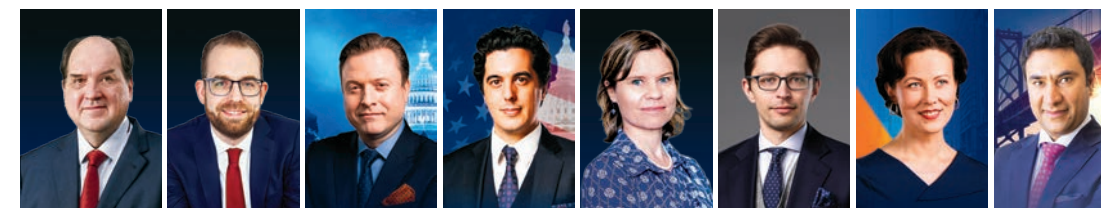
THE EPOCH TIMES

The Epoch Times Needs Your Help Because Everyone Deserves to Hear the Truth

One Book (published by The Epoch Times) + One Movement =

389,220,833 and counting!

As of December 2021, more than 389,000,000 people have realized the truth about the CCP and have taken a stand for freedom.



You've come to rely on The Epoch Times for news you can trust, stories censored else, presented without fear or favor.

- And because we're a nonprofit:
- We rely on you, our readers—not only for subscriptions, but also for donations.
 - Donations to The Epoch Times are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

With your generous, tax-deductible contribution, we can reach even more people in 2022.

Because everyone deserves to hear the truth.

As our way of saying thank you for any gift of \$100 or more, we'll send you a free copy of the bestselling book, Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party, which reveals Communist

China's secret strategy and what the free world must do about it before it's too late.

This blockbuster book is yours free with your gift of \$100 or more.

SupportEpoch.com or **Please use this form**

Yes, I'd like to donate!

- \$50 \$100 \$300
 \$500 \$1,000 Others: _____

Payment Method

- CREDIT CARD / DEBIT CARD:
 VISA MC AMEX DISC
 CHECK \$ _____ # _____

CHECK PAYABLE TO The Epoch Times Association Inc.
 MAIL CHECK TO Attn: Accounting Department
 229 W. 28th St., Fl. 7, New York, NY 10001
 OR DONATE ONLINE SupportEpoch.com

YOUR BILLING INFORMATION (PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY)

FIRST NAME _____ LAST NAME _____ PHONE _____
 ADDRESS _____ UNIT # _____
 CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
 EMAIL _____
 CARD#* _____
 EXPIRATION _____ CVV _____ ZIP _____
 NAME ON CARD _____ SIGNATURE _____

*We use your credit card solely, and securely, for your donation. We do not share it with any third parties.



Close-up details of the Aurora room mural by Francesco Barbieri (Guercino).



Aurora room at the Villa Ludovisi Aurora in Rome.

FINE ARTS

Roman Treasures: 'The Eternal City,' the Villa Aurora, and Princess Ludovisi

Continued from Page 1

Inheritance wars, art thefts, and family drama all came to light as attention was trained on the villa with its asking price of 471 million euro (approximately \$521 million) and a lineup of rumored prospective buyers from Bill Gates to the Sultan of Brunei.

The terrain was troubled from the beginning. Julius Caesar set up a fabulous garden on the site, but after his brutal murder in 44 B.C. it fell to the historian Sallust. A jewel among the aristocratic pleasure palaces, it was burned to the

ground when Alaric invaded Rome in 410. The area lay fallow for over a thousand years until under the new Caesars of Rome, the papal court, new structures arose from the ashes.

The Princess in the Palace

After arson and murder, a public auction will seem pretty tame, but to Princess Rita Boncompagni Ludovisi, who has called the villa her home since she married Prince Nicolò Boncompagni Ludovisi of Piombino in 2009, it is a death knell. Née Rita Jenrette, the journalist, actress, and real estate broker rivaled Caravaggio

The princess knows these murals as if they were old acquaintances.

in notoriety in her youth, until she met her prince.

Rita was reborn in the Villa Aurora (named, incidentally, for the goddess of dawn). For 12 years, she worked to maintain the villa, in constant need of repairs, putting the site back on the list of great things to see in Rome as it had once been during the age of the Grand Tour when Henry James claimed that there "is nothing so blissfully right in Rome, nothing more consummately consecrated to style." Princess Rita often led the tours herself, sharing her love for the history and beauty of the place.

The princess said in an exclusive interview with The Epoch Times: "Nicolò gave his life for this ... and for years I have supported this villa through my efforts." After all that effort, she is "heartbroken to see it sold."

The villa is no stranger to sudden sales, however. Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, a Tuscan ally of the Medici dukes, purchased the property in 1596 only to have it requisitioned for the nephew of the reigning pope. It was returned in 1599, when the cardinal hired Michelangelo Merisi, also known as Caravaggio, to paint his one and only mural on the vault of a little attic chamber.

Caravaggio, on the eve of his stratospheric success with the "Calling of St. Matthew" in San Luigi dei Francesi (St. Louis of the French), chose a daring composition: three towering deities—Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto—seen in the nude in a sharp vertical foreshortening. Here, where Cardinal del Monte performed his alchemy experiments, whether fabricating gold or observing the heavens, Caravaggio personified the elements of water, air, and fire, each accompanied by



Mural of the entrance vault in the Aurora room by Francesco Barbieri (Guercino).



Ceiling mural of the personification of Fame (fama), and a detail of its center (C), by Francesco Barbieri (Guercino).

A detail from Caravaggio's mural on the vault of the attic chamber.

its respective animal: an eagle, a hippogriff, and the three-headed dog Cerberus. They are arrayed around a translucent celestial sphere with Earth visible at its center. In a strange twist of fate, Galileo would come to the villa a few years later on one of his many trips to persuade the Roman court of his heliocentric theory.

The tiny room with three giants crowding the vault, all painted with the same dark scowling features of Caravaggio's own self-portrait, would perhaps be daunting to many. But for the princess, it is "the room where she does yoga."

The villa changed hands again when Cardinal del Monte sold it to a new papal family: the Ludovisi Boncompagni of Bologna. From 1621 to today, it has stayed within the family, handed down from generation to generation.

The Ludovisi family expanded the property to an astonishing 74 acres spread over the Pincian Hill. The cream of the Baroque painters left their work in the villa and their sculpture collection became the envy of Rome.

To fresco the entrance vault, the family hired Francesco Barbieri, nicknamed Guercino, a disciple of the famed Carracci academy. In his first Roman work, he painted Aurora galloping across the ceiling strewn with flowers and dispelling darkness. Like Caravaggio, he used a dramatic viewpoint from underneath, demonstrating his exceptional draw-

ing skills. The family so appreciated his work that they rehired the Bolognese painter to paint the personification of Fame upstairs.

The princess knows these works as if they were old acquaintances. She recounts her discovery that Bernini used to "spend many nights in the Aurora room playing cards," and she fumes over Italian landscape and seascape painter Agostino Tassi's collaboration on the vault, after his notorious rape of Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi. Her tone softens, however, as she says: "I love Guercino. I like the Guercino more than practically anything else in the villa."

Since the glory days of the 17th century, the villa has been assaulted by time and greed. Speculation in the 19th century saw the estate dwindle to the half acre it is today. In 1896, J.P. Morgan considered buying the site for the American Academy. One hundred and four of the finest Ludovisi sculptures were sold to the Italian State in 1901, yet Caravaggio and Guercino have remained steadfast at the villa.

Princess Rita also discovered another priceless asset of the villa—the archive of family documents, a vast sea of papers that she has spent 10 years organizing, preserving, and digitalizing. Working with both Rutgers University and the Italian Art Police, Rita succeeded in reclaiming a handwritten 1867 letter from St. John

Bosco to Princess Agnese Ludovisi, stolen in 2016 "by relatives." The categorized 150,000 pages of documents—from letters of Marie Antoinette, to a document, signed in Pope Gregory XIII's own hand, recognizing the legitimacy of his natural son, Giacomo—are the legacy that the last owners of the villa will leave to the world.

The loss of the villa is devastating. Following Prince Nicolò's death in 2018, the inability to reach an agreement between Princess Rita and Prince Nicolò's sons from his first marriage and settle the estate's debt resulted in the magistrature's involvement, which ordered the sale. The first auction on Jan. 18, 2022, produced no bidders, and the villa suffered the same fate on a second auction on April 7. The third round, in what has been dubbed the "Sale of the Century," will take place on June 30, when the starting price will be lowered again.

The princess has no regrets regarding the time, energy, and personal funds she poured into the villa, saying: "The only thing that survives is art and architecture, ... our paintings and our literature from generation to generation."

As Aurora galloping across the villa's vault knows, no matter how dark the moment may be, the sun always rises.

Elizabeth Lev is an American-born art historian who teaches, lectures, and guides in Rome.



A peek at a salon and ceiling.



The Villa Aurora.

FILM REVIEW

'Montana Story': The Uneasy Family Ties That Bind

MICHAEL CLARK

Had creator and show runner Taylor Sheridan chosen another name for his wildly popular Paramount+ TV series "Yellowstone," it could have just as easily been "Montana Story." Like this film with that name, it includes a patriarch with a lot of baggage (emotional and otherwise), siblings with emotional scars, and years' old unfinished business to tend to amid the backdrop of some of the most gorgeous natural scenery God ever created.

Not long after the opening credits, a vehicle passes underneath an entrance archway with the family name in cast iron: "Thorne." It's not dissimilar to the wooden "Dutton" sign shown regularly in "Yellowstone," but this is where any comparisons to the two productions cease. The viewer is not entering a sprawling estate chock-full of intrigue and obscene riches, but one of desperation and resigned, nagging closure; a once-imagined great life desiccated by poor decisions and would-be grandeur.

The Wayward Son Returns

After learning that his father, Wade (Rob Story), is in a coma with mere days to live, civil engineer Cal (Owen Teague, "The Stand"; the bully in "It") returns home from Wyoming where he lives with his cat, Oscar Wilde. Named after baseball legend Cal Ripken Jr., Cal also plays the mandolin, keeps his own counsel, and has resigned himself to the upcoming unpleasant chore of tidying up Wade's meager estate, selling the family chicken farm, and taking care of a mountain of his father's ever-mounting debt.

Upon arrival, Cal is warmly greeted by Valentina (Kimberly Guerrero), a Native American woman who could be Wade's

housekeeper or his girlfriend, or both. The women in Wade's life don't tend to fare well, including his daughter (and Cal's older half sister) Erin (Haley Lu Richardson, "The Chaperone," "The White Lotus").

Disappearing into thin air seven years earlier, Erin now works as a chef at a New Age restaurant in upstate New York, and her arrival stuns Cal who had reluctantly given her up for dead. Their reunion is at best bittersweet with their sole remaining shared bond being their bitter disdain for Wade.

What to Do With Mr. T

The reunion appears to end almost immediately as Erin decides to bail but changes her mind once Cal tells her what he intends on doing with Mr. T, the 25-year-old family horse that was born the same year as Erin. Exactly what Cal wants to do with it, and Erin's counterproposal are better left explained by the film, but their respective positions are polar opposites with little room left for compromise.

Watching all of this unfold with guarded fascination from not quite the sidelines is Ace (Gilbert Owuor), Wade's Kenyan nurse, who regularly imparts pearls of wisdom while acting as a nonjudgmental metaphorical salve to the ever-present sibling friction.

The above covers most of what transpires in the first act and it is stupendous. Longtime writer and director partners Scott McGehee and David Siegel never dole out too much information too soon, and the narrative is rich with percolating subtext. With a résumé of just five features ("Suture," "The Deep End," "Bee Season," "Uncertainty," and "What Maisie Knew") over the last three decades, McGehee and Siegel never do the same thing twice, yet all of their features include blood-related characters who rarely see eye to eye.

A Near-Fatal 2nd Act

The considerable momentum amassed up to this point is nearly lost when the filmmakers hit their own erected brick wall at the beginning of the second act. A scene that should have been dispatched in two minutes drags on for nearly 20, and it is only because of the undeniable chemistry between Richardson and Teague, and their investment in their respective roles, that the entire endeavor escapes a complete meltdown. It also helps that most of this portion of the story takes place



BLEECKER STREET

The siblings redeem themselves and rescue a relationship that initially seemed unsalvageable.

'Montana Story'

Directors:
Scott McGehee and David Siegel

Starring:
Haley Lu Richardson, Owen Teague, Gilbert Owuor, Kimberly Guerrero, Rob Story

Running Time:
1 hour, 54 minutes

MPAA Rating:
R

Release Date:
May 27, 2022

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

outdoors, with the spectacular natural Montana skyline taking center stage.

It is when Erin begins delivering a symbol-heavy monologue, which includes references to Dante's "Inferno," at the mouth of a giant crater dubbed "Copperhead" that the film gets back on its feet and regains the steam it established so well in the opening act.

The Darkness Before the Dawn

This is where the filmmakers redeem themselves by waiting as long as possible before revealing Cal and Erin's respective ghosts and the unconventional ways they are conquered, or perhaps not. For a movie rife with so much acrimony and regret, we never sense a loss of hope or get the idea that the siblings won't be able to overcome and triumph over the negativity of their past. They redeem themselves and rescue a relationship that initially seemed unsalvageable.

Neither of the leads is present in the final scene, one that will likely give animal lovers cause to shed an emotional tear or two and leave every viewer with goose flesh and a soaring heart.

Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.

Owen Teague as Cal and Haley Lu Richardson as Erin in "Montana Story."



THE 6TH NTD INTERNATIONAL FIGURE PAINTING COMPETITION

Reviving the pure authenticity, beauty, and goodness in art

June 2023 | New York City

Call for Global Entries / Deadline : 1/15/2023 / US\$25,000+ in Awards

NTD

1-888-477-9228 | Oilpainting@globalcompetitions.org

OILPAINTING.NTDTV.COM

