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THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



"Assumption of the Virgin," 1516 to 1518, by Titian. Oil on wood panels; 22 feet by 11 feet, 3.5 inches. Church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.

FINE ARTS

ART CONSERVATION AT WORK:
RESTORING THE IRREPLACEABLE

'ASSUNTA'

See story on [Page 4](#)



Conservators at work on scaffolding on "Assunta."

FINE ARTS

ART CONSERVATION AT WORK:
RESTORING THE IRREPLACEABLE

'ASSUNTA'

Venetian altarpiece gets a much-needed cleaning and touch-up

YVONNE MARCOTTE

Down through the centuries, artists have produced great artworks that have stood the test of time and, today, are priceless and irreplaceable. But time can ravage these works, and they need to

be brought back to their original glory. That's where art conservators come in. They use their skills to restore art that has fallen into disrepair.

In 1516, the church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (known as the "Frari") in Venice, Italy, commissioned Tiziano Vecellio (circa 1488–1576) to create an altarpiece. It was his first big job. He completed the painting two years later and it caused a sensation. It was showing the ravages of time.

We know this artist as Titian. When the

The experts did the restoration in carefully planned steps.

16th century started, Venetian painters reigned supreme. His trademark use of dynamic figures in various poses and bold colors of the Frari altarpiece and other great works established Titian above all the rest of his fellow Venetians.

Masterpiece of Design and Color
The "Assumption of the Virgin," also known as the "Assunta," Titian's masterpiece, is still the largest painting on wood panels in the world. It was painted on 22 horizontal planks of poplar.



Detail of "Assumption of the Virgin," 1516 to 1518, by Titian. Oil on wood panels; 22 feet by 11 feet, 3.5 inches. Church of Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice.

Shaped like a Roman arch, the painting is framed by Istrian stone. This type of limestone is formed from marine creatures over eons and has the strength of marble. Above the framed painting are three larger-than-life-size sculptures of Christ the Redeemer and the Franciscan saints Francis and Anthony.

Titian's arrangement of the figures in the "Assunta" is simple yet multifaceted. The figures are larger than life, the painting itself is almost 22 feet high, and the subject is out of this world, so to speak. It was designed to be seen easily from afar as one enters the church.

Titian divided the composition into three sections. The lower third of the painting shows the disciples who witness Mary as she rises to heaven; the disciples seem distraught at losing the mother of Jesus.

The middle section depicts Mary as she soars upward, bathed in heavenly light and encircled by a throng of angels. At the top of the painting, God awaits her, his arms outstretched, with an angel at his side holding a crown for her.

The Virgin Mary is the central figure, where all eyes are turned. She is shown in a swirl of red and blue drapery on solid-looking clouds. God looks down toward her in a welcoming gesture, while the disciples look up in distress at losing her.

This work demonstrates why Titian is considered the master of color. He used striking reds, heavenly golds, and earthy browns to tell his story. The artist painted with a limited palette, yet his paintings have depth due to how he used his pigments.

During the Renaissance, numerous paintings were composed with just a few colors, according to Arthur Pope, director of the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard. There might be a burnt sienna for brown, a yellow ochre, a white, a black, and perhaps a red. "A Venetian red, instead of burnt sienna, might be used to extend the palette down to red-orange; or Indian red, or even vermilion, might be used for occasional small accents."

Titian's palette as recorded by his pupil, Giacomo Palma, was limited to nine pigments: Lapis Lazuli, Malachite, Burnt Sienna, Lead-Tin Yellow, Italian Yellow Earth or Yellow Ocher, Vermilion, Red Ocher, Lead White, and Bone Black or Vine Black.

Titian's use of warmer hues gives the painting a golden tonality that had viewers looking upward toward the light of heaven.

A Careful Restoration

Although the painting had been restored several times over previous centuries, recently Titian's "Assumption of the Virgin" altarpiece was again showing wear and tear and needed repair. Around the 500th anniversary of the painting's unveiling in 1519, restoration began. Conservation planning was launched in 2012.

The experts did the restoration in carefully planned steps. Over three months, they initially removed accumulated dust and debris. They also used this initial stage to diagnose the issues and to research the history of the painting's maintenance. After the initial preparatory stage was completed, actual conservation activities commenced, which were expected to take 18 months.

Restorers found problems on the painting's surface. Paint was lifting and flak-



Istrian stone screen in the Frari with a view of "Assunta" altarpiece.



Conservator working on Istrian stone relief at Frari.



Sculpture above "Assunta" before and after conservation.

ing. Also, layers of paint and varnish were applied in later centuries which discolored the work.

Conservators also studied the back of the painting. Organ pipes had been installed in recent decades; when the organ was played, it made the painting vibrate. In addition, the wooden pipes of the organ, infested with wood-boring insects, were close to the back of the painting. For these reasons, the organ was removed in 2018 and donated to a church in another city. The restorers then eradicated the wood-boring insects around the wood structure; upon careful inspection, they found the painting's support structure sound.

In order for restorers to do their work on scaffolding and still allow visitors to enjoy Titian's masterpiece, conservators placed a replica of actual scale in front of the scaffolding.

Then the experts began to work on the painting itself. In small section by small section, they expertly lifted off flaked paint, cleaned the surface, and removed color and varnish not original to the work. Researchers discovered that there were areas of heavy, 19th-century overpainting, which was also removed.

Restorers also attended to the layers of grime on the Istrian stone, which covered the original gilding and the colored decoration.

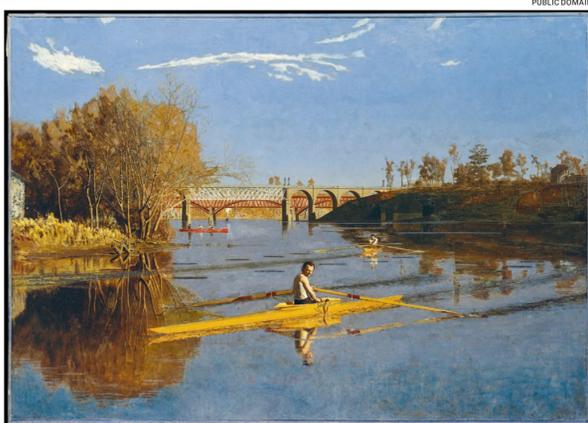
The work is continuing. Funded by SaveVenice.org, the conservation project is budgeted at \$500,000 and is now being completed on site. Restorers are expected to finish in the summer of 2022.

Treasuring the Irreplaceable

Hundreds of years have passed, and we still gain comfort and joy from the paintings of great masters like Titian, perhaps because the great masters had penetrating insight to paint these heavenly scenes. And those scenes are irreplaceable. "Art is an irreplaceable way of understanding and expressing the world," according to Dana Giola, poet and chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Art historian Giorgio Vasari visited Titian in 1566 and said that his art is "worthy of infinite praise, which shall endure as long as the memory of illustrious men may live." He later visited Titian's great work of art, and remarked that it was not well cared for. Concerned art lovers today are addressing that issue and taking care of Titian's irreplaceable masterpiece.

Thomas Eakins: Championing American Realist Art



"The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)," 1871, by Thomas Eakins. Oil on canvas; 32 1/4 inches by 46 1/4 inches. The Alfred N. Punnett Endowment Fund and George D. Pratt Gift, 1934. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

LORRAINE FERRIER

It's October 1870, and a fair-weather day on the Schuylkill River in Fairmont Park, Philadelphia. Four oarsmen line up on the river ready to race for the single-sculls championship in the Schuylkill Navy of Philadelphia's annual regatta.

The Schuylkill Navy of Philadelphia (now the oldest amateur athletic body in America) represents rowing clubs in the city, and in this year, 1870, the finalists are all from the Pennsylvania Barge Club: Max Schmitt, Austin Street, James Lavens Jr., and Charles Brossman.

The 3-mile circuit they're about to race starts (and ends) near Turtle Rock Lighthouse with the athletes sculling upstream, under two bridges before they turn near the Columbia Railroad Bridge for the return journey.

In his book "The Schuylkill Navy of Philadelphia, 1858–1937" Louis Heiland recalls the race. Starting well together, Schmitt soon takes the lead, followed by Street, Brossman, and Lavens.

Passing under the Girard Avenue Bridge, which is the first marker, Bross-

man and Street foul each other, the oars of one resting on the boat of the other. Schmitt is now three full lengths ahead. Street and Brossman foul again when Street tries to turn on the eastern stake, crossing Brossman's bow. Schmitt maintains his lead and easily wins the race.

A Quiet Victory

Rather than depicting the race, American artist Thomas Eakins (1844–1916) in his painting "The Champion Single Sculls (Max Schmitt in a Single Scull)" shows Schmitt just after he's won it. Gliding at speed, Schmitt's boat breaks the calm water, creating ripples that cut through the silent, sunny day. You can almost hear Schmitt's racing heartbeat settling down as he catches his breath and looks out toward us in quiet reflection.

Eakins, a keen oarsman, can be seen sculling in the background. He painted his name on the boat to make sure we know it is him.

Overall, the painting is one of quietude, largely due to Eakins's clever use of a series of parallels in the composition. Schmitt's boat almost aligns with the

bridge in the background, and both he and Eakins hold their oars in parallel, creating a harmonious effect. The tree-lined banks further frame the picture and bring our attention to Schmitt.

Eakins was one of the first American painters to train in Paris. And this painting is the first of many rowing scenes that Eakins created in the 1870s, after he'd just returned from Europe (Paris, then Madrid and Seville in Spain).

He spent around three years (from 1866) training in the Paris atelier of eminent history and genre painter Jean-Léon Gérôme at a time when photography was gaining popularity and impressionism was just emerging.

The rather murky trees in the background of his painting could be mistaken for having impressionistic qualities, much like a Claude Monet or Édouard Manet landscape painting. But Eakins did not go in this artistic direction.

Real Art

Eakins stayed true to realism. By the time he went to Paris, he'd already attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and anatomy classes at Jefferson Medical College in the city. (Two of his masterworks are medical paintings: "The Agnew Clinic" and "The Gross Clinic.")

He mastered photography only to study anatomy closer, as a tool for his art rather than a replacement. For instance, he pioneered the use of photographs and lantern slide projectors to enlarge compositions onto his canvas.

His rowing paintings show his anatomical knowledge well. In his oil painting: "John Biglin in a Single Scull," he strongly rendered Biglin's arm muscles, almost to the point of pulsating. Being a rower himself, he would've known the exertion needed for the sport and would have felt which muscles were engaged.

When Eakins sent Gérôme his watercolor painting, "John Biglin in a Single Scull," his master was delighted. He wrote: "Your watercolor is entirely good and I am very pleased to have in New York a pupil such as you who does me honor."

Eakins painted what he knew well: people, the human figure, and Philadelphia. He lived most of his life in that city, where he was born and raised.

He applied himself to perfecting his realist art. His wife, Susan, wrote in a letter that although Eakins delighted in works by Gérôme, Rembrandt, Diego Velázquez, and Jusepe de Ribera, he was more influenced by nature. She added: "He simply painted what he saw." Eakins's friend, the poet and essayist



"John Biglin in a Single Scull," circa 1873, by Thomas Eakins. Watercolor on off-white wove paper; 19 5/16 inches by 24 7/8 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Eakins painted what he knew well: people, the human figure, and Philadelphia.

Walt Whitman, admired how he "could resist the temptation to see what they ought to be rather than what is." His late portrait paintings, in particular, show not only his deep understanding of anatomy but also the nuances of human nature.

It was a talent that made some of his subjects uncomfortable, as he painted so true to life that some feared their portrait might not be flattering. Even some of Eakins's friends declined gifts of their portraits once they were painted.

Eakins's dedication to his art is clear. He made mirroring nature his mission by constantly studying anatomy, and by having numerous sittings with the subjects of his portraits to get the inner and outer likenesses just right.

He honed those skills across photography, sculpture, and most of all, painting. He specialized in painting portraits and genre scenes, especially outdoor sports in Philadelphia, such as boating.

The former director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Philippe de Montebello said: "Although fame eluded Thomas Eakins in his lifetime, today he is recognized as one of America's foremost painters as well as a master draftsman and watercolorist, an accomplished photographer, and a sculptor of note."



STEVE SESSIONS

4 playwrights share their experiences

ROBERT COOPERMAN

As the founder and president of Stage Right Theatrics, the home of the Natural Theater and the country's only "conservative" theater company, I have discovered that the more traditional voice is indeed out there among playwrights. The bravest among them are willing to challenge the status quo in the arts, even at the risk of ridicule and censure.

To further this discussion, I called upon four playwrights who have written plays produced at my annual Conservative Theatre Festival: Cece Dwyer, Mark Sasse, Gary Wadley, and Carl Williams. Each has had plays produced outside of my festival and has won writing competitions. Each writes with a "conservative" point of view, and each explained what being a conservative in the arts means to him or her, and why it is necessary for a different voice in the theater to be heard.

Is 'Conservative' the Right Term?

The first issue to grapple with is whether the term "conservative" reflects reality in the theater. We don't talk about "liberal theater," after all. I suspect we don't need to. In fact, "liberal theater" seems redundant along the lines of "unexpected surprise" or "hot water heater."

But do some playwrights consider themselves "conservative"? Carl Williams does not consider himself a conservative playwright but rather a "conservative who writes plays." Mark Sasse agrees, noting: "I am a

conservative, and I am a playwright, but I never call myself a conservative playwright." Playwright Cece Dwyer adds "I actually did not know I was 'conservative' until the rest of the world decided I fit the description." This seems to be the consensus: "Conservative" is not a label that these playwrights attach to themselves.

Conservatives seem to be more likely to support diverse voices in the arts.

The Conservative Voice Must Be Heard However, the playwrights agree that the conservative voice must be heard in the theater, even if they do not call themselves "conservative."

Playwright Gary Wadley sees the conservative point of view as necessary to protect life and liberty:

"The conservative voice leads to life, well-being, freedom, and social stability, without placing undue burdens on individual rights. Conservatism eschews relativism in favor of truth. Relativism as a social construct leads to death; truth leads to life."

Dwyer believes that all perspectives should be comfortably at home in the arts. "All voices should have the ability to be heard," she says. "Obviously, the arts would seem to be the one place that happens."

Sasse views the conservative message as needed precisely because it is not heard via mainstream channels:

"The conservative voice has much to offer in terms of the grand American themes of

love, freedom, personal responsibility, and the pursuit of happiness. I think that many people have conservative ideas yet don't even know it, and the arts is a fantastic avenue to expose people to ideas and traditions which they may not naturally hear in mainstream media or academia."

The point is that conservatives seem to be more likely to support diverse voices in the arts than even our present-day liberal caretakers of the arts.

The irony here is inescapable, but I firmly believe that this is not solely because conservatives are marginalized in the arts and simply want their voices heard. The fact is, conservatives are more tuned to support the concept of free speech in the marketplace of ideas, just as our Founders did.

We conservatives do not think in terms of silencing critics; these artists, therefore, do not either.

The Challenges Conservative Writers Face

There is no doubt that bad playwriting does not align itself with one political party or movement. But I imagine that some "conservative" playwrights must think themselves incapable of writing anything stage worthy as they have reported having their work rejected based on theme and subject matter alone.

Cece Dwyer, for example, talks about receiving "unsigned letters calling me things I'm not." She says: "Playwriting classes can be brutal. ... During playwriting classes sometimes my plays are found offensive, insulting, etc. Not the play of course, just the subject matter." It should be noted that Dwyer's play for the Conservative Theatre Festival, "The Comfort Room," was about abortions—after birth.

Gary Wadley recalls something similar:

"Probably the biggest challenge is getting a truly conservative work produced. Of course, it is a challenge to get any work produced, but explicitly conservative themes carry an added burden. I did have some audience members walk out on an anti-abortion play I presented on a college campus several years ago."

However, others have not experienced this wholesale rejection of conservative themes. Carl Williams says:

"As someone active in the theater world, I interact with people of many different beliefs, largely liberal. Many of them locally know me as a Christian. We collaborate in a collegial way, respecting each other's differences."

Mark Sasse talks of something similar:

"I was in Ireland at an arts center doing a reading of one of my new plays based on the 1831 Nat Turner slave uprising. At the end of the reading, I was asked how others might view this work because I wrote about the African American slave experience when I myself am not black.

"Without skipping a beat, I said a writer should have no limitations to what he or she should explore, because limiting writers to their own experiences would be ridiculous. We are all human and we each can have contributing ideas about the human experience, regardless of our backgrounds. They seemed to accept that answer and overall, really enjoyed the reading."

What's It All Mean?

What this tells me is that what's important is the ability of playwrights to develop an entertaining piece of theater, unapologetic in its stance but honest, civil, and thought-provoking in its execution.

And what is just as important is that playwrights play a major role in the development and promotion of their works. They cannot simply present their plays to producers or theater companies and expect the world to adapt. These writers must share in the effort to promote the values of conservatives in a positive and suitable manner.

The experiences of these playwrights point to a very positive trend, one that I believe parallels our country's current debate on the primacy of free speech and the unfettered sharing of ideas. More and more, it seems as though the political dogma is being countered by reasonable people of all political stripes who defend the right to say things that might be labeled "disagreeable."

There is still work to be done if the conservative artist is to be granted a seat at the table, but evidence mounts that we're now at least a step or two from the room.

Robert Cooperman is the founder of Stage Right Theatrics, a theater company dedicated to the preservation of our Founding Fathers' vision through the arts. Originally from Queens, N.Y., he now lives in Columbus, Ohio, where he earned his doctorate at The Ohio State University.

LITERATURE

Seemingly Irrational Hope

Short-story writer O. Henry's 'The Skylight Room'

KATE VIDIMOS

"Star light, star bright,
The first star I see tonight,
I wish I may, I wish I might,
Have this wish I wish tonight."

Children often wish upon a star and never doubt its ability to grant their wish; it holds their dreams. But how long do they have hope in the dreams that they shoot up to the stars? Often, their dreams die in the darkness of reality when a jealous world tries to bury any dreams, hope, and love that shine forth.

In his short story "The Skylight Room," O. Henry presents young, whimsical Miss Elsie Leeson. According to many in the modern world, she irrationally believes and hopes in her dreams.

Elsie enters the story carrying her typewriter up to the highest room in Mrs. Parker's house: a coffin-like room with a tiny skylight. As a transcriber, she can only afford this somber room. With the rest of the house crammed with callous boarders and snobby owner Mrs. Parker, Elsie's hopes look like they will die very quickly.

Despite such an ominous situation, Elsie's hopes persevere. She remains bright and

joyful. She brings joy especially to the three male boarders: Mr. Skidder, an unsuccessful playwright; Mr. Hoover, "fat, flush and foolish"; and young Mr. Evans. Each man falls in love with her.

O. Henry presents young, whimsical Miss Elsie Leeson.

The men may love her, but Elsie does not desire their love. She loves and places her hope in a bright, young star she names Billy Jackson—the constant, "steady blue" star that she sees "every night through [her] skylight." She imagines him not as a cold light in the sky but as a steady friend. She shoots her hopes and dreams to him.

Gradually, darkness in her life closes in. Elsie cannot find any transcribing jobs, which are her source of income. She cannot support herself or even buy food. Yet her star never abandons her.

As she lies dying of starvation, Billy remains alive by her, holding her dreams. He is, as Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 says, "an ever-



PUBLIC DOMAIN

"The Meteor of 1860" by Frederick Edwin Church.

fixed mark / That [...] is never shaken." Billy Jackson is truly the "star to [Elsie's] wandering bark." Elsie blows him a kiss, acknowledges his constancy and her hope in him, and falls into a faint.

An ambulance is called. Everyone at the boarding house doubts that Elsie will make it. She doesn't awaken. It seems that nothing can save her—even her resilient hope. Yet G.K. Chesterton, in his "Heretics," says: "Exactly at the instant when hope ceases to be reasonable it begins to be useful."

A doctor arrives and swiftly carries her to the hospital. The next morning the newspaper announces that "Dr. William Jackson, the ambulance physician [...] says the patient will recover." Billy had come for her.

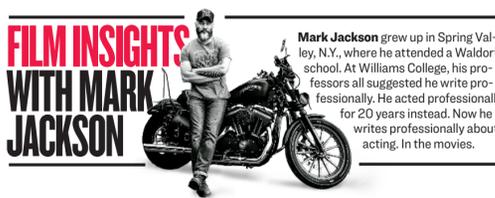
O. Henry questions his story: "Is it a story?" Such a story seems too romantic and fanciful.

Elsie's hope in Billy Jackson and Billy's love for Elsie, in the end, carries her from her dark world. Her star has saved her.

Despite its whimsical character, Henry's story proves, as Jordan B. Peterson says in "12 Rules for Life," that "what you aim at determines what you see."

If we aim our dreams as high as the stars and place trust and hope in them, even through our darkest moments, we can achieve the impossible and live our dreams.

Kate Vidimos is a 2020 graduate of the liberal arts college at the University of Dallas, where she received her bachelor's degree in English. She plans on pursuing all forms of storytelling (specifically film) and is currently working on finishing and illustrating a children's book.



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.

Adam Sandler's Best Serious Role Yet

MARK JACKSON

Adam Sandler loves basketball. The former "Saturday Night Live" goofball alum is on a roll, reinventing himself as a dramatic actor. He recently surprised the public with his dramatic range, playing a diamond merchant who sold jewelry to NBA stars in "Uncut Gems," and now in "Hustle," he's Stanley Sugerman, a world-weary NBA basketball scout. The movie features what appears to be the longest list of actual world-class athletes electrifyingly playing themselves, ever seen. Sandler's 100 percent believable, and "Hustle" is a sports movie that sports fans won't want to miss.

Sports movies have a tried-and-true, "best practices" formula. Whether it's "Rocky," "Hoosiers," "Soul Surfer," "Crooked Arrows," "Turbo," "American Underdog," "Heart of Champions," or even the documentary "Manny," there's really only one way to tell these stories.

Some critics scream "formulaic!" But that's like saying that when you light a Blockbuster, it goes "bang." I'm not talking about the movie label, I'm talking about the 1970s illegal quarter-stick-of-dynamite megafirecracker from whence big summer hit movies (and the now defunct video store chain) got their name. No, it does not go "bang." It causes a minor earthquake, causes dogs to go crazy for 10 heavily wooded suburban blocks in every direction, and blows 15-year-old boys' fingers clean off on the Fourth of July.

The plot goes: 1) The humble beginnings of underdog nobodies; 2) the first flash of massive talent (or outstanding levels of grit, or both); 3) the first depressing beatdown; 4) the pep talks; 5) the second depressing beatdown; 6) the get-in-shape (or hone-the-skills, or both) montage; and 7) the third-act showdown payoff.

This "formula" is always as delicious as that Gruyère cheeseburger with the red onion, on the crunchy English muffin bun (and you're free to empty the whole ketchup bottle), that you'll drive across town for. "Hustle," released on June 8 on Netflix, is very tasty.

What Goes On

Full-bearded Stanley Sugerman (Sandler) is a longtime Philadelphia 76ers talent scout, whose work life largely consists of international jetting about looking for hidden superstars in other countries, staying at five-star hotels, and downing the type of artery-clogging American fast-food franchise fare that usually dominates the diets of bachelors.

However, Stan's married to former track star Teresa (Queen Latifah), whom he met when he himself was a red-hot, fast-track, college varsity hoopster. Stan's fate was sealed when a DUI accident shattered his shooting hand.

Luckily, Stan loves his job, even though it separates him for weeks at a time from Teresa and their teenage daughter (Jordan Hull), whose birthday he's missed repeatedly.

His former boss, the 76ers' owner (Robert Duvall), promoted Stan to assistant coach. It's a dream come true. But when the boss shuffles off this mortal coil, the business is inherited by his kid, Vince (Ben Foster), a blowhard whose silver spoon leaves his mouth only for purposes of smirking, and who inherited exactly no basketball-savvy talent from his old man. The new, baby boss ruthlessly kicks Stan back down the promotion ladder while dangling a carrot: If Stan finds a hoops phenom, he'll get his coaching job back.

On the Prowl in Europe

After a hilarious bit about a very talented Serbian b-ball giant (Dallas Mavericks' Boban Marjanovic) who looks 38 (but claims he's the NBA cutoff age of 22), and his 22-ish-looking son (whom he claims is 10), Stan stumbles upon a unicorn in Spain. At a local pick-up game his jaw drops as a 6-foot, 9-inch heavily tattooed kid in beat-up Timberlands swats down 3-pointers, pins would-be dunks thunderously against the backboard, and scores with impunity and flair. Stanley's in scout heaven; he's never

Adam Sandler completely owns this modest, self-deprecating, regret-filled role.



A movie poster for "Hustle."

'Hustle'

Director: Jeremiah Zagar

Starring: Adam Sandler, Queen Latifah, Ben Foster, Juancho Hernangómez, Robert Duvall, about 50 NBA players and former players, playing themselves

MPAA Rating: R

Release Date: June 8, 2022

Running Time: 1 hour, 57 minutes

★ ★ ★ ★ ☆



ALL PHOTOS BY SCOTT YAMANO/NETFLIX UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

Bo Cruz (Juancho Hernangómez) and Stanley Sugerman (Adam Sandler), in "Hustle."

seen this degree of raw talent.

The kid's named Bo Cruz, played here by actual Utah Jazz power forward (and Spaniard) Juancho Hernangómez in a surprisingly believable and moving acting debut. Bo, 22, is a construction worker and single dad who flees Stanley's stalking due to Stanley's inept use of his translation app. Bo believes he's being pursued by an adoring older gay man and is convinced only when Stanley manages to get former German NBA legend (and highest-scoring foreign-born player in NBA history) Dirk Nowitzki on FaceTime.

Bo's never played anything but pick-up games. He can hustle money in street ball, but—actual Hoop Dreams? The NBA? Nah. C'mon. He'd rather keep his construction job. When Bo's petite mom hears Stanley quote the starting NBA rookie salary, she assures Stan that Bo will call in sick for his construction job and leave for America tomorrow.

Stateside

Stan eventually tells baby-boss Vince—who turns up his nose at diamond-in-the-rough Bo—to take his scouting job demotion and shove it. Stanley, out of desperation, and also for sheer love of the game, puts Bo up in a hotel and trains him on his own dime.

He needs to give the kid some personal finance lessons on not eating room service constantly and leaving the hotel TV porn channel alone. Is Stanley living lost dreams through Bo? Of course. So what?

The main thing that Bo has to learn is to control his temper. He's got the physical moves down, but he's in no way, shape, or form prepared for the next-level, get-in-your-head-like-Hannibal-Lecter evil of American professional sports trash talk. The prime example of this is delivered by Minnesota Timberwolves shooting guard Anthony Edwards (also an actor), who makes an excellent, grating, grinning, insinuating, blood-pressure-raising b-ball villain.

If Bo can learn to keep his emotions under control, it's just a matter of getting him on the right court, with the right players, in front of the right people, at the right time. Hopefully ...



Teresa Sugerman (Queen Latifah) and her husband, Stanley (Adam Sandler).

Do You Need to Know the Game?

"Hustle" doesn't demand knowledge of basketball's rules, regulations, history, or the draft system to work as well as it does. If you don't know hoops, you'll miss small details like when they bring in Grayson "The Professor" Scott Boucher, the American streetball player, actor, and former professional basketball player, to assist with Bo's training.

And if you don't see the movie, go ahead and YouTube the white (as in "White Men Can't Jump") 5-foot, 8-inch, slam-dunking, supernatural-power-level deceptive dribbling Boucher, who often goes into maximum security prisons with a camera crew and confounds the hardcore, 24/7 basketball-playing lifer inmates (who adore him) with his wizardry.

Adam Sandler completely owns this modest, self-deprecating, regret-filled role. And if basketball figures as heavily as it appears to in Sandler's life, and he's thinking about another basketball-themed movie, it's hard to imagine how he'd ever top this story.

The only improvements to his newfound cinematic trajectory would be better soundtracks; it's not elevator music, but sometimes it's related. And for sports movies, you need some fist-pumping hits. But it's early days yet for Sandler's new career.

The movie can be seen at Netflix.com/Hustle



NBA stars Juancho Hernangómez (L) and Anthony Edwards play rival NBA hopefuls.



Stanley Sugerman (Adam Sandler) scouts for the 76ers.



Bo Cruz (Juancho Hernangómez, L) comes to America, having been recruited by Stanley Sugerman (Adam Sandler).

Correction

In the May 24 edition, Mark Jackson's film review "The Best Action Sequel of All Time" mis-identified two characters. The correct military title for Jon Hamm's character is admiral, and the correct occupation of Anthony Edwards's character from the first "Top Gun" film is radar intercept officer. The Epoch Times regrets the errors.

FINE ARTS

Allegories of Timeless Beauty

Classical mythology in 19th-century French Academic Art

KARA BLAKLEY

Ancient Greek and Roman mythologies have influenced artists around the world for centuries, and one of the most inspired manifestations is found in 19th-century France.

The art world in France during this century was incredibly diverse, with a number of techniques and subjects finding expression. Among the most enduring styles is academic art. This style was produced within European academies of art; in France, this academy is the famous Académie des Beaux-Arts.

These academies boast a storied history in Europe. Cosimo I de' Medici—famed patron of the Italian Renaissance—established the first academy in Florence in 1563. From the time of the first academy's inception, mythological subject matter was of central importance, and the Académie des Beaux-Arts oversaw the creation of innumerable classical masterpieces.

Academic art sought to reconcile theoretical branches that artists debated for centuries. The debate centered around whether line and form or color was the most important aspect of a composition. Within European academies, a superlative synthesis emerged. Ancient Greek and Roman myths provided artists with the timeless subject matter required to perfect this style. Mythological themes were a source of both artistic and intellectual developments, as allegories and ideals were of especial importance in academic circles.

The Abduction of Psyche

William-Adolphe Bouguereau's artworks exemplify the academic mastery of integrating perfect line and color to bring allegorical concepts to life. In recent decades, Bouguereau has rightfully become synonymous with French academicism. His 1895 painting "The Abduction of Psyche" revitalizes an ancient story for contemporary audiences.

Better translated as "The Rapture of Psyche," the tale comes from the second-century book "Metamorphoses" by Lucius Apuleius Madaurensis. The story is about Psyche and Cupid and the prevailing power of true love. Psyche, born a mortal and a princess, was so beautiful that men stopped worshipping at the Temple of Venus. The jealous goddess commanded that her son, Cupid, pierce Psyche's heart with an arrow to make her fall in love with a vile, repulsive man. Instead, Cupid shot himself and fell in love with her. After a series of supernatural obstacles, Zeus transformed Psyche into a goddess and she and Cupid were finally united. Bouguereau's painting captures the moment that Cupid carries his bride away to the heavens; Cupid basks with pride, and Psyche glows with joy and relief.

Bouguereau's composition is an elegant example of the 19th-century academic style—a style that transcends time and place. The lines and forms are imbued with a dynamism that visually lift the figures toward the heavens, and the vibrant purple cloak connects the lovers. The subtlety of clouds and a landscape in the background support the central plot.

Notably, this is not a beautiful painting devoid of deeper meaning. Bouguereau meditated on the endurance of true love, immortality, and the connection between Love and the Soul. (Cupid symbolizes love, and "psyche" means "soul" in Greek.) The artist reminds his viewers that when love is pure, it will triumph over any obstacle.

Bacchante

Bouguereau reinterpreted another mythic figure in his 1894 painting "Bacchante." In Greek mythology, the bacchante, also called "maenads," were the female followers of the god Dionysus (Bacchus in the Roman tradition). Dionysus is the god of wine, festivities, and theater. Bouguereau's Bacchante appropriately holds a wine vessel and cup, and her leafed crown is reminiscent of grapevines.

Traditionally, the maenads were depicted as frenzied revelers, overcome with euphoria, ecstasy, and excess. Bouguereau, however, dignified his serene figure, and she became an erudite symbol of the more decorous pleasures in life. Undoubtedly, this rendering would appeal to his viewers—the Parisian Salon-goers.

Calliope Teaching Orpheus

Auguste Alexandre Hirsch similarly utilized Greek myths as a way to celebrate the



Mythological themes were a source of both artistic and intellectual developments.

simple and stately joys in life. His most famous painting, the 1865 masterpiece "Calliope Teaching Orpheus," is a celebration of music and the everlasting power of the arts. The painting portrays Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, teaching her son Orpheus how to play the lyre; the lyre is the shared symbol of this mother-son duo. Orpheus was regarded as the greatest poet and musician of ancient Greece. His unparalleled singing could tame animals and bring trees

and rocks to life. Hirsch hinted at Orpheus's talent as a small pheasant watches on in the corner of the composition.

Besides the subject matter, Hirsch also relied on his academic training for the way he portrayed his figures. Calliope and Orpheus are naturalistic, idealized figures with skin that almost glows in its sheen and perfection. The matching red cloaks underscore their familial bond. While the pair are engrossed in their activity, the movement does not overwhelm the contemplative painting. French academic artists often drew inspiration from the contemporaneous Romantic style—a style characterized by energy and dynamism. The academics, however, were often more staid in their depiction of activity.

Springtime

This balance between motion and tranquility is also exhibited in Pierre-Auguste Cot's 1873 painting, "Springtime." A student of both Bouguereau and Alexandre Cabanel, Cot's most notable artwork is an allegorical reflection of youth, first love, and new beginnings. Two young sweethearts share a loving embrace on a swing. They are enveloped in a lush and blooming environment, symbolizing the promises of spring's arrival and the freshness of new love. The two figures wear classical-style garments, which lends an eternal quality to the scene. This agelessness was an important tenet of academic art, as artists believed that the most important concepts and values were universal and should transcend time and place.

While other movements have occasionally overshadowed the accomplishments of French academic art in the 19th century, new generations of viewers and museumgoers have now begun to appreciate the significance—and beauty—of this style. French academic artists were masters of their discipline, finding innovative ways to synthesize form and color. Their representation of antique mythology was both fresh and classic. As aficionados continue to explore 19th-century French art, the academic movement remains an essential style for viewing.

Dr. Kara Blakley is an independent art historian. She received her Ph.D. in art history and theory from the University of Melbourne (Australia) and previously studied and taught in China and Germany.

"Calliope Teaching Orpheus," 1865, by Auguste Alexandre Hirsch. Oil on canvas; 39.3 inches by 40.9 inches. Museum of Art and Archeology of Périgord, in Périgueux, France.



"Bacchante," 1894, by William-Adolphe Bouguereau. Oil on canvas; 60 inches by 35 inches. Private Collection.

BOOK REVIEW

'Five Letters From Prison That Have Changed the World'

LINDA WIEGENFELD

Letters that have transformed the world have come from the very best persons and some of the very worst. Both categories are represented in "Five Letters From Prison That Have Changed The World" by Rodney Walker, a U.S. history teacher.

Walker became interested in how letters from prison have changed the world because some were written with an eloquence reminiscent of soliloquies. A soliloquy usually denotes a profound solo utterance of an actor in a drama. Walker says that "prison, though punitive by design, can be an unexpected birthplace of self-reflection, self-discovery, illumination, and even transformation for a man's unsettled soul."

Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was an African American Baptist minister and the most prominent leader of the civil rights movement during the 1960s. He was arrested and jailed during anti-segregation protests in Birmingham, Alabama.

During his detention, he wrote the famous "Letter From Birmingham Jail," declaring the moral duty of individuals to disobey unjust laws. The letter was his response to a public statement of concern and caution issued by eight Southern white religious leaders, and it's regarded as a landmark document of the civil rights movement.

Four months following King's incarceration in the Birmingham jail, he helped launch the March on Washington, which became one of the largest civil rights events in the history of the movement. President John F. Kennedy reluctantly endorsed the march, although he feared the event would increase racial tensions. It did not.

The march proved to be an extraordinary success in pressuring Kennedy's administration to initiate a strong federal civil rights bill in Congress.

Paul of Tarsus

Paul was born a Jew and a Roman citizen. Though initially he had been known to persecute Christians, after his conversion to Christianity, he became the "Apostle to the Gentiles" (non-Jews).

Paul was taken to prison for protection

from religious Jews who sought to take his life. In prison, he felt an urgent need to warn others against false teachers and to instruct them in the basics of godly living. Paul felt it was his job to keep heresy out of an early church that was vulnerable to secular belief systems that were spreading.

Though the Roman government desperately attempted to put an end to the spread of Christianity, it could not. Wherever persecution of Christians increased, the religion appeared to spread even faster. The personal letters of Paul encouraged Christians to remain faithful while suffering persecution, and helped to establish the early Christian church.

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela was a South African revolutionary, political leader, and philanthropist. When apartheid—a system of racial segregation and economic discrimination—was established, he committed himself to its overthrow.

U.S. history professor Rodney Walker says in his book that 'prison, though punitive by design, can be an unexpected birthplace of self reflection.'

Mandela was imprisoned in 1962 and subsequently sentenced to life in prison for conspiring to overthrow the state. In prison, Mandela smuggled out statements and letters to fuel the continuing anti-apartheid movement. As the years passed, international pressure for Mandela's release mounted. He was told that he could go free if he renounced violence as a tool. Mandela chose to stay in jail because he wanted the government to declare a commitment to end apartheid.

On Feb. 11, 1990, Mandela was released unconditionally from prison after 27 years. Following his release, he supported the negotiations that would bring an end to the apartheid system. Mandela became the first post-apartheid president of South Africa.

Mahatma Gandhi

A leader in the Indian campaign for home rule, Mohandas Gandhi worked all his life to spread his own brand of passive resistance across India. Gandhi fought for freedom in India. But he didn't fight with weapons; he believed that words and actions were more powerful than violence. People called him "Mahatma," which means "Great Soul."

Walker talks about when Gandhi was in prison opposing the new Indian constitution, which gave the country's lowest classes their own separate political representation for a period of 70 years. A member of the merchant caste, Gandhi nonetheless advocated for the emancipation of the untouchables, whom he called "harijans," or

BOOK REVIEW

'Best Seat in the House: 18 Golden Lessons From a Father to His Son'

ANITA L. SHERMAN

June 19 celebrates Father's Day and, for golf devotees, the final play of this year's U.S. Open will coincide on the same day. It will be held at The Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts.

I'm a golf devotee. I'm not a player. I'd like to be a player, but my skills on the course are sorely lacking. I grew up with an avid and quite good golfer: my father.

My earliest memories of Saturday mornings include my father rising early, cleaning and polishing clubs, gathering balls, donning handsome cardigans, putting on sporty caps, giving me a smile, and then putting his golf bag in the trunk of the car and heading out. It is still on my bucket list to become a competent enough player to finish 18 (or maybe nine) holes in somewhat respectable fashion.

My dad was consistent. He was loyal to his foursome. He was a competitor. I never knew him to throw a club. I knew that he loved the game even though it often proved frustrating. He never let me caddie for him.

Names like Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, and Jack Nicklaus were golf buzz names on weekends when he would be glued to

the television set watching them play.

The Great Golden Bear

Now at 82, Jack Nicklaus's professional golf career spans some five decades. He won 120 tournament victories worldwide, punctuated by 73 PGA tour victories and a record 18 major championships. He's a member of the World Golf Hall of Fame and has put on the green jacket in a record six Masters.

What a golf legacy and, as the firstborn son bearing his namesake, what an act to follow.

In "Best Seat in the House," Jack Nicklaus II teams up with bestselling author Don Yaeger to share what he's learned from his famous father in appropriately 18 lessons.

Jack Nicklaus II shares a tender and treasured father-son relationship.

Golf is often referred to as "the gentleman's sport" since so many of its rules of etiquette demand keen consideration of the other players, the course, and the fans. It is also expected that you conduct and carry yourself well, watch out for emotional outbursts, and certainly neither throw clubs nor bash the greens.

Jack Nicklaus II ("Jackie"), of course, grew up with a father who golfed for a living. That was his work, and it often required him to be gone on tour for extended periods of time. The eldest of five children, all involved in various sports, Jackie remembers rarely seeing his mother and father in the stands for their children's respective games. One of the 18 lessons is to attend your children's games and activities.



Falun Gong practitioner Sun Yi began writing SOS letters about the desperate situation in the prison camp and hiding them inside the packaging of goods for export that he was made to work on.

"children of God." Gandhi believed that this constitution would permanently and unfairly divide India's social classes.

Walker highlights this fact in his book by including a letter that Gandhi wrote saying that he would fast until he died from starvation if a separate electorate was established.

Sun Yi

Turning to the present, Walker includes the powerful story of Sun Yi. In February 2008, just before the Beijing Olympics, Sun was caught and arrested by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) authorities during a raid. His so-called crime was that he believed in a spiritual discipline called Falun Gong.

Falun Gong, also called Falun Dafa, is based on the universal principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance and teaches five meditative exercises. The practice quickly spread by word of mouth, reaching up to 100 million practitioners by 1999. Seeing this popularity, the Chinese regime suddenly labeled it as a threat and began arresting, torturing, and killing practitioners.

Sun was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in a Chinese labor camp, where he was subjected to extreme torture and psychological pressure to recant his faith.

At the labor camp, Sun was tasked with assembling Halloween decorations to be exported and sold through U.S. department stores. Under the terrible conditions of the camp's slave labor, an idea occurred to him. He wrote a letter with the letters "SOS" in English and hid it inside a product box he'd assembled to tell the world about the abuses taking place in prison.

His heartbreaking letter described his torture and how Falun Gong prisoners at the camp suffered more punishment than others.

The scrap of paper traveled thousands of miles and was purchased by Julie Keith in Damascus, Oregon, near Portland. The box of decorations containing the letter languished in her home for two years before her 4-year-old daughter asked for a Halloween-themed birthday party. When Keith remembered the Halloween kit and retrieved it for her daughter, she found the note.

Keith took a photo of the note and contacted human rights organizations. After receiving little response from them, she did an interview at a local newspaper where

the story would eventually run on the front page. Later, there was also online exposure by a Chinese magazine that published an exposé about conditions inside Chinese prisons.

In 2010, Sun was released from the labor camp and traveled to Indonesia where he would meet Keith face-to-face and exchange gifts. After Keith's visit, however, Sun was contacted by a suspected Chinese agent; two months later, he died of a suspicious case of acute kidney failure. Despite a request from his ex-wife and sisters, there was no investigation into the cause of death. Sun had lived an exemplary life and died after heroically telling the truth.

A 2018 documentary about Sun's story, called "Letter From Masanjia," is available for free online.

Unfortunately, the CCP regime's persecution of Falun Gong continues to this day.

Adolf Hitler

Of course, not all letters have been for mankind's good and not everything written in prison has been in the form of letters. Although Walker says nothing positive about Adolf Hitler, the Nazi leader is included in the book because of the influence of "Mein Kampf," which he began writing while in prison.

Hitler and the Nazi party had led a coalition in an attempt to overthrow the German government. This insurrection failed miserably, and he was arrested. During the trial that followed, Hitler's popularity increased as his passionate defense speeches were printed in the newspapers. Hitler was convicted and sentenced to prison, but he was released after only nine months. During his incarceration, he dictated the first volume of "Mein Kampf."

In his book, Walker reprints some passages from "Mein Kampf," which was used as racist propaganda against the Jews. Hitler stressed that racial purity was an absolute necessity for a revitalized Germany.

Reading the portion of "Mein Kampf" in the book is excruciatingly painful. Hatred and anger jump out at the reader. People followed Hitler, and his words certainly changed the world: They were used to justify the slaughter of 6 million Jews.

To quote George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Linda Wiegenfeld is a retired teacher. She can be reached for comments or suggestions at lwiegenfeld@aol.com

'Five Letters From Prison That Have Changed The World'

Author
Rodney Walker

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2004 and, since then, has raised more than \$100 million.

Jackie shares a tender and treasured father-son relationship. Being with his father on and off the golf course gave him a vantage point—the best seat in the house—to observe and learn lessons from not only a great golfer but also a great man of faith, integrity, and character. These are valuable lessons from the "Golden Bear" for us all.

It's a fairly fast read, heartfelt, sincere—in fact, poignantly honest at times. It's also a loving tribute to a father and a son's best friend that will surely resonant on this Father's Day and long after.

Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist who has more than 20 years of experience as a writer and editor for local papers and regional publications in Virginia. She now works as a freelance writer and is working on her first novel. She is the mother of three grown children and grandmother to four, and she resides in Warrenton, Va. Anita can be reached at anitajustwrite@gmail.com



'Best Seat in the House: 18 Golden Lessons from a Father to His Son'

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Jack Nicklaus II and Don Yaeger

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POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

The Last Champion

A heartfelt tale of redemption

IAN KANE

Before I saw 2020's sports drama "The Last Champion," I had seen actor Cole Hauser on the movie poster smiling ear to ear and assumed it was a comedy. When I discovered it was a story of redemption, I was a little surprised yet intrigued. After all, John Wright, the character Hauser plays, is a gloomy-faced guy for much of the film's running time, although things eventually get brighter.

At the beginning of the movie, John drives his beat-up pickup truck into his small hometown of Garfield, Washington. He has returned after 20 years in order to settle the affairs of his recently deceased mother. Almost immediately, he is greeted by some sideways glances and gasps from the local residents, and it becomes apparent that his reputation might not be all that great.

A Wrestler With Great Promise

We learn that, back in the day, John was a standout wrestler in high school and was talented enough to eventually become an all-state wrestler. After that, he entered college and was named an All-American. But it didn't stop there; John's ambitions led him all the way to the Olympics, which culminated in his winning a gold medal.

However, his athletic career was cut short when he got busted for steroid abuse. As he acknowledges later on in the movie, his one "stupid" decision threw his entire life into disarray and caused him to leave Garfield in shame, rather than face the disappointment of the townsfolk he let down.

Not everyone hates John, though. His old wrestling coach Frank Stevens (Peter Onorati), who still teaches high school wrestling in Garfield, welcomes the former hometown hero with open arms. Coach Stevens implores John, who walks around slumped over with downcast eyes, to leave his shameful past behind and move on with his life.

John also runs into the town's friendly spiritual leader, Pastor Barnes (Bob Mc-

Cracken), along with the pastor's daughter Elizabeth (Annika Marks). It soon becomes apparent that there's a mutual attraction between John and Elizabeth, but he's still too full of shame to engage her since he still hasn't forgiven himself yet. John was stripped not only of a gold medal but also of his confidence and dignity.

Faced With Change

But one night, when Coach Stevens suddenly dies from a heart attack, John is hired to coach the high school wrestling team—the very one he used to be on. He immediately sees potential in the team, although there is an intense rivalry between two of its standout wrestlers, social outcast Michael Miller (Sean H. Scully) and the team's captain, Scott Baker (Casey Moss).

Michael's family is going through some financial troubles, which isn't helped by his mother's unchecked alcohol abuse and general irritability, which is typically directed at her son. Things get so bad that Michael gets busted for shoplifting some meat (protein for his wrestling diet) from a local grocery store.

Meanwhile, Scott's devoted father, Bobby (Randall Batinkoff), hatches a scheme that involves manipulating John into favoring his son. From there, the main thrust of the film deals with John attempting to redeem himself through his actions as Bobby's nefarious plan closes in around him. John also has a soft spot for Michael, whom he begins to think of as his protégé.

Slow Burn

One enjoyable thing about this movie was that its slow burn was indicative of many great indie films I've seen. Director Glenn Withrow ("The Outsiders," "Rumblefish") takes plenty of time to develop his characters and gradually reveals their motivations.

There are also some great faith-based scenes in the movie that feel genuine. One of them involves John, filled with shame and self-pity, seeking spiritual guidance



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Director Glenn Withrow takes plenty of time to develop his characters.

from Pastor Barnes. Their interaction seems natural and authentic, as if we are witnessing it organically unfold from just a few pews away.

The film's positive messages of communal reconciliation, forgiveness, and redeeming one's self by helping others are very timely in this modern day and age. Just be aware that it's more suitable for older kids and their families since it does contain some violence.

Cole Hauser as John Wright coaching Sean H. Scully as Michael Miller in 2020's "The Last Champion."

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. You can check out his health blog at IanKaneHealthNut.com

'The Last Champion'

Director: Glenn Withrow

Starring: Cole Hauser, Sean H. Scully, Annika Marks

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Running Time: 2 hours, 2 minutes

Release Date: Dec. 8, 2020

★★★★☆



Bob McCracken as Pastor Barnes gives Cole Hauser as John Wright some spiritual guidance in "The Last Champion."



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