

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

SASCHA SCHUERMANN/GETTY IMAGES

This BBC production marked a watershed moment for television documentaries.



TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Still Important,
Still Relevant:

Kenneth Clark's 'Civilisation'

"Charlemagne is the first great man of action to emerge ... since the collapse of the Roman world. ... Without Charlemagne's tireless campaigning, we should never have had the notion of the united Europe," says Kenneth Clark in the episode "Skin of Our Teeth" from his 1969 "Civilisation" series.



JEFF MINICK

The year 1969 is one to remember in the history of American television.

"Monty Python's Flying Circus" premiered that year, and its madcap antics transformed TV comedy. Other beloved series still remembered today, like "Gunsmoke," "Bonanza," and "Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color," entranced audiences as well. In January of that year, in what is still regarded as one of the biggest upsets in American football

history, the New York Jets knocked off the Baltimore Colts 16 to 7 to win Super Bowl III, the first championship officially bearing that trademark name.

Of course, the most widely watched event on the screen that year, with more than 600 million viewers from around the world, was the flight of Apollo 11, the spacecraft carrying three American astronauts—Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins—to the moon and back.

Largely forgotten nowadays in this '69 cavalcade of drama and entertainment is a BBC production that marked a watershed

moment in the making of television documentaries and the promotion of Western culture. More than 5 million Americans and 2.5 million citizens of Great Britain tuned in once a week to watch Kenneth Clark's 13-part series, "Civilisation: A Personal View."

On both sides of the Atlantic, enthusiasts threw "Civilisation" parties—in part so that neighbors without color television could join them. In England, churches worked to reschedule evensong so that parishioners wouldn't miss an episode. Later in the summer, an uptick in Ameri-

can tourists traveling to Europe was noted, and on a trip to the United States the refined Sir Kenneth Clark was greeted like a rock star.

Soon afterward, Clark's book based on this series sold more than a million copies. Today, "Civilisation" remains in print, DVDs of the series continue to sell, and episodes are available online.

All of which raises questions: Why? What was the attraction for these forays into art and history?

Continued on Page 4



Ying and Yang by Sandra Kuck

Original artworks, canvas wraps, and prints of Award-winning oil paintings now available at

InspiredOriginal.Org/Store

INSPIRED ORIGINAL

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



An early professional photo of Jimmie Rodgers posing with his guitar, circa 1921.

COUNTRY MUSIC

Jimmie Rodgers: The First Star of Country Music

REBECCA DAY

From 1890 to 1930, the small town of Meridian, Mississippi, was a bustling stop along the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. Meridian's main attraction was the former McLemore Plantation, a destination that railroad workers took note of while traveling the route for the first time.

Nestled in rural Mississippi, the plantation was set against a forest of pine dotted with giant, moss-laden oak trees. Vast fields of corn and cotton surrounded the property. When the railroad was built, the historic plantation became the So-washee Station.

People from nearby towns flocked to it, mailing off packages and picking up deliveries. Among the railroad crew working the in-demand route was Meridian native Jimmie Rodgers, a brakeman who had a penchant for singing the blues.

When Rodgers wasn't meticulously operating track switches or uncoupling freight cars, he entertained railroad workers with original music about life on the road. Even in his early singing days, his languid, easy sound was distinctly influenced by his home state.

The Singing Brakeman

Rodgers's acoustic guitar style featured rolling bass lines and a gentle swinging waltz rhythm. His melodic voice stole the show, delivering story-centric lyrics about his various travels across the southern region of America. His style was the first of its kind, succinctly combining traditional folk influences from his childhood, blues standards, and gospel vocal arrangements all within two- or three-minute recordings.

Rodgers got his musical start in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, participating in what were then known as "field recordings" for the Victor Talking Machine Company. The success of those recordings landed him a contract with the company's record-

ing studio in New Jersey.

During his time with Victor in the late 1920s until his passing in 1933, Rodgers recorded over 100 songs, quickly becoming known for his distinct yodeling style. At the time, the warbling vocal technique was popular in rural Southern communities due to populations with deep-rooted ties to both Europe and Africa, where yodeling originated. When people came to America, musical traditions like yodeling continued to influence musical trends through generations.

Rodgers experienced success with his "Blue Yodel" recordings, a series of songs he released that gave listeners a peek into the life of a railroad worker-turned-traveling musician. His interesting past quickly earned him the nickname "The Singing Brakeman."

Jimmie Rodgers's languid, easy sound was distinctly influenced by his home state.

The recording company was intrigued by the singer's past and chose to highlight his blue-collar roots in a 1929 short film titled after his nickname. The film "The Singing Brakeman" featured Rodgers singing some of his most popular early tunes, including "Waiting on a Train."

His yodeling paired with folksy guitar and delta blues song influences drew the attention of fellow musicians, especially those in blues communities. Soon, bluesmen like Mississippi John Hurt were deeply influenced by Rodgers's unique sound.

Chicago blues musician Howlin' Wolf credits Rodgers as one of his early influences as well, famously turning to howling after trying out Rodgers's distinct vocal style and feeling like he came up short. Some might say that without Rodgers's yodeling, blues fans would have never been gifted with Howlin' Wolf's



A mural to country music, showing Jimmie Rodgers on the far right, in Bristol, Va. Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress.

haunting falsetto vocal runs.

During the height of his career, Rodgers sometimes teamed up with fellow bands and musicians like the Carter Family, and trumpeter Louis Armstrong, whose melodic prowess perfectly accompanied one of Rodgers's most enduring recordings, "Blue Yodel Number 9 (Standin' on the Corner)." The single helped earn him a new nickname, "The Blue Yodeler."

The First Star of Country Music

Before Jimmie, there was no country music in America. Known simply as "hillbilly music," the genre's subject matter often had a somber feel to it due to the socioeconomic realities of war and Reconstruction. Because of this, the songs never garnered much attention outside of the local communities of the musicians who authored them.

Rodgers connected with music lovers in a way like never before. His lyrics and tender vocal delivery showed that he was an expert on the human condition: He sang poignantly about love, overcoming pain, and celebrating family while rhythmic instruments waltzed in the background. With his one-of-a-kind style, the singing bluesman from Meridian became known as the Father of Country Music.

While performing and recording, he also had to work through a long bout of tuberculosis, which left him with long-term repercussions from the illness. In true artistic fashion, he channeled his pain into his work and produced "T.B. Blues," a recording that features his surprisingly sunny disposition as he sings about his condition.

Just days before his passing at the age of 35, he was still recording tracks with Victor's studio, taking breaks to catch his breath in between takes, and leaving behind a vast body of work that shows he made the most out of his short time here on earth.

Like the railroad he traveled on as a young, aspiring musician, Jimmie Rodgers's music acted as a bridge, connecting genres, styles, and even people from different continents and cultures. In 1961, almost 30 years after his death, Rodgers was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame. The organization's website honors him by saying he "created and defined the role of the singing star in country music."

Rebecca Day is an independent musician, freelance writer, and frontwoman of country group, *The Crazy Daysies*.

LITERATURE

Overcoming Fear in a Crucial Moment

KATE VIDIMOS

Fear can paralyze us and prevent us from taking action, and courage can overcome its paralyzing force.

In her short story "The Shed Chamber," Laura E. Richards shows us courage in action and how one young woman overcame her fear. She tells the story of young Nora who leaves home to work for a family in need.

Leaving home for the first time, Nora feels understandably anxious and cautious. She doubts whether she will like the family and whether the family will approve of her. Yet when she meets the Bowles family, she realizes, as does the biblical heroine Esther, that "perhaps [she] was made for such a time as this." Mrs. Bowles is an invalid with three children, Mr. Bowles cannot care for all of them alone, and the previously hired help left everything in disarray.

In times of fear and dread, we can still do the right thing.

Nora's concern and compassion for the Bowles family overcomes her apprehensions. She immediately begins cleaning the kitchen, feeding the family, and setting the house to rights. Within a few days, Nora "feels that she belongs there." The family truly needs her and welcomes her completely into their lives. They give her a bedroom upstairs that contains another smaller room with a door, bare except for some old trunks, called the "shed chamber."

Mr. Bowles leaves on a business trip a week after Nora is hired. The day that he leaves, a young girl, Annie, arrives at the house late in the evening. She was the last hired help that the Bowles family had before Nora came on, and was let go because she "was careless and saucy."



ALENA POPOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Nora, the protagonist in "The Shed Chamber," is given a bedroom upstairs that contains another smaller room with a door, bare except for some old trunks.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Author of "The Shed Chamber" Laura E. Richards, circa 1902, The Critic.

Annie says that she left something in the shed chamber and asks if she can retrieve it. Nora senses something is off and quietly follows the girl upstairs. Through the keyhole of the shed chamber door, Nora sees Annie open the window, let in an "evil, coarse" man, and hide him in the largest trunk.

'Courage, Brave Girl!'

The moment Annie leaves the house, Nora's "strength seems to come back with a leap, and she knows what she has to do." She bolts upstairs, locks the largest trunk, and runs back downstairs to Mrs. Bowles.

She has a plan. With composure

and calm, Nora asks Mrs. Bowles if she may go for a walk in the beautiful moonlight.

Nora knows that by trying to stop this evil man, she puts herself in great danger. If he escapes, he will harm her and the Bowles family. Yet she does not worry about her own safety and wants to do everything to protect defenseless Mrs. Bowles and the children.

Through Nora's exemplary bravery, Richards shows, as Eleanor Roosevelt says: "You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face." In times of fear and dread, we can still do the right thing. Filled with love and hope, we can find the courage to face our darkest fears as Nora does and free ourselves from its paralyzing force.

In 1917, the author won a Pulitzer Prize shared with her sisters for a biography of their mother, Julia Ward Howe, who wrote the words for "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Kate Vidimos is a 2020 graduate from 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.



THE EPOCH TIMES

A Winning Tradition

We all want our lives to mean something, like we are making a difference in the world. That's exactly what you are achieving each day you participate in our mission to restore the Free Press to our nation. Each time you read an Epoch Times

article, watch a show on EpochTV, or pick up one of our insightful special reports, you're making America a better place.

When you pass on or post an article, or discuss what you're learning, you help move society back in the right direction.

Seemingly small acts like keeping yourself informed and helping others see the news in a new light mean everything. Multiply the impact you have by the millions that The Epoch Times influences every day, and you have a movement that really can change the world.

Do Your Part To Keep The Free Press Alive

READ & WATCH
TheEpochTimes.com
EpochTV.com

PASS
YOUR PAPER ON

SHARE
AN ARTICLE

GIVE A GIFT
ReadEpoch.com/gift

REQUEST
A FREE SAMPLE
FOR A FRIEND*

* (1) Log into your account at TheEpochTimes.com (2) Click your name to manage your account (3) Click "Request Free Papers" on the left menu bar and follow steps



"A Mon Seul Désir" ("To My Sole Desire") is one of the six tapestries based on the five senses. In the episode "Romance and Reality," Clark remarks: "Its real subject is the power of love, which can ... subdue all the forces of nature including these two emblems of lust and ferocity: the unicorn and the lion." National Museum of the Middle Ages, Paris.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Still Important, Still Relevant: Kenneth Clark's 'Civilisation'

Continued from Page 1

The Man and the Medium

With his bad teeth, tweed jackets, and upper-class accent and demeanor, Kenneth Clark (1903–1983) seemed an unlikely candidate to become a television star in the political tumult of the late 1960s. Yet perhaps it was these very attributes that lent him authenticity—"the real deal," as Americans might say.

Certainly his credentials could not be disputed. Born into wealth, Clark attended Oxford University and then spent two years in Italy under the tutelage of Bernard Berenson, one of the great art critics of the 20th century. On his return to Britain, Clark served as director of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum and soon held the same position at the National Gallery, two extraordinary achievements for so young a man. For the rest of his life, he gave himself to art as a teacher, a writer, and a public servant.

And though he himself didn't own a television, Clark took an early interest in exploring ways this new medium could serve the culture. Before making "Civilisation," he had worked extensively with television and its place in the arts as a tool for reaching and educating mass audiences.

Once television was no longer recorded live, and shows began appearing on the screen in color rather than in black-and-white, the medium became an ideal vehicle for displaying the richness and beauty of paintings, sculpture, and buildings. The man had met his moment.



Portrait of Kenneth Clark from James Stourton's biography, "Kenneth Clark: Life, Art and Civilisation."

"In the early 19th century, Paulus Potter's bull was one of the most famous pictures in Holland. It's one of the first pictures that Napoleon wanted to steal for the Louvre," Clark remarks in the episode "The Light of Experience." "The Young Bull," 1647, by Paulus Potter. Oil on canvas. Maurice House, Hague, Netherlands.

The Moment and the Message

For some people in the late 1960s, Western civilization seemed on the verge of collapse. Radicalism had become chic, momentous changes in everything from fashion to music to romance and marriage had kicked tradition to the ground, and riots and massive protests from all sorts of causes had broken out in places as distant from one another as Paris, London, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

And then, one winter evening in 1969, a man largely unknown to the general public appeared on television in living rooms throughout Great Britain and the United States. Kenneth Clark launched his series on Western European art and civilization by looking first at the collapse of the Roman Empire and the chaos that followed its demise. In the very beginning, Clark spoke of the fragility of civilization, saying of the fall of Rome: "For two centuries the heart of European civilization almost stopped beating. We got through by the skin of our teeth"—which was, by the way, the title of his first episode.

Clark then adds: "In the last few years, we developed an uneasy feeling that this could happen again. And advanced thinkers, who even in Roman times thought it fine to gang up with the barbarians, have begun to question if civilization is worth preserving."

As the series progressed, viewers were repeatedly reminded of the art and culture they had inherited from the previous millennium—of why, in other words, their civilization was indeed worth preserving. The building of Chartres Cathedral, the invaluable gifts bestowed by Renaissance Florence and Rome, the writings of

Shakespeare and Montaigne, the music of German composers, the art of Dutch painters: These subjects and many more were brought together by Clark and the camera, and made into an enormous collage of European civilization, presented without gimmickry or false notes by the man with the mellifluous voice and gentlemanly presence.

Enchanting Beauty

In her online article on "Civilisation," Anne Morey speaks of Clark's insights into the use of television as a medium for education and art. She cites this quote from "The Other Half: A Self-Portrait," his memoir: "When I set about the programmes I had in mind Wagner's ambition to make opera into a gesamtkunstwerk—text, spectacle, and sound all united."

Clark and his sound and camera crew adhered to this ambition throughout the series. From the dramatic landscapes of coastal Ireland in the beginning of the series through all the shots of cathedrals, museums, castles, and more, we learn from Clark's words about the art while we view the works themselves and hear the music of the age in which they were produced.

And perhaps this feature offers the best explanation for the popularity of "Civilisation." The beauty that attracts human beings can move us in profound and mysterious ways. Strangers to faith, for example, may enter Chartres Cathedral and be overwhelmed by feelings of awe, wonder, and peace, a yearning for something beyond themselves. Surely, some of these same emotions crept into the hearts of the program's viewers as



they were enchanted by the spectacle of beauty they found on their screens.

The Critic's Critics

Not all who watched "Civilisation" fell under its spell. Some art historians considered the production too sweeping and facile, overlooking the fact that the series was designed for multitudes rather than the denizens of academia. Others have accused Clark of chauvinism for neglecting female artists. They forget that Clark was born two years after the death of Queen Victoria and grew up in an era when views about men and women differed from our own. They also forget that in most of the centuries discussed by Clark, the artists considered prominent were men.

In today's culture, "Civilisation" also leaves itself open to be criticized and mocked for its focus on Europe and Western art. Here again, however, critics miss the point. The full name of both the series and the book is "Civilisation: A Personal View." Kenneth Clark devoted a lifetime of study and writing to Western art, particularly that of the Renaissance. For him to venture into the arts of China, India, or other civilizations would have been both wrongheaded and ludicrous.

The beauty that attracts human beings can move us in profound and mysterious ways.

Here, one thinks of the old Arabic saying "The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on." The wise among us will ignore the critics and continue to enjoy and learn from "Civilisation."

Lessons for Today

The primary purpose of this series is to educate us in the arts and to allow us a glimpse into why and how we, like Kenneth Clark, might acquire a treasure trove of riches from studying them.

But there is also another lesson here, mainly the idea that civilizations are fragile things and that art and the culture that produced it can be destroyed. Just as the Protestant Reformation brought about the destruction of old churches, paintings, statuary, and relics, so too can movements like today's cancel culture smash statues in our public squares or remove certain books from our libraries and university curricula.

At the end of "Civilisation," Clark reflects: "I said at the beginning that it is lack of confidence, more than anything else, that kills a civilization. We can destroy ourselves by cynicism and disillusion, just as effectively as by bombs."

True. And to push back against disillusionment and gain some confidence from our ancestors, we might begin by watching "Civilisation" as we make our way into the new year.

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.



"The Visit to the Nursery" demonstrates a minor ritual of polite society: a cradle visit. Clark comments that the "Dutch invention of every picture telling a story, and paintings of everyday life—especially paintings relating social customs and etiquette—is what inspired Victorian British art." "The Visit to the Nursery," 1661, by Gabriel Metsu. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



"The Annunciation" in "The Beautiful Hours of Jean of France, Duke of Berry," 1405–1408 or 1409, by the Limbourg brothers (Herman, Pol, and Jean de Limbourg). Tempera, gold, and ink on vellum; 9 3/8 inches by 13 7/16 inches. The Cloisters Collection, 1954, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The Teenage Limbourg Brothers' Illuminated Work 'The Annunciation'

LORRAINE FERRIER

In 1405, three Flemish teenage brothers—Herman, Pol, and Jean de Limbourg—began a commission that would alter the art of illumination and painting.

Prince Jean, the Duke of Berry and the third son of King Jean II of France, was an extravagant art patron. He commissioned the brothers to create "The Beautiful Hours of Jean of France, Duke of Berry."

Many hands worked on the 172 illuminations in the manuscript, which took up to four years to finish. The duke dedicated a scribe to write each of his books of hours (of which he had 14 at that time). Two artists created the borders and another made the historiated initials, which are the illuminated letters at the beginnings of sections or paragraphs.

In every book of hours, artists made the illuminations of the Virgin Mary the most opulent. Working in the duke's court afforded the brothers rich and rare pigments that they'd grind down to make jewel-colored tempera. "The Annunciation" is a grand example of these pigments put into practice, and it is the only leaf in the "Beautiful Hours" that the brothers completed themselves.

The illumination is rich in both color and meaning. The angel Gabriel holds three lilies (each in a different stage of bloom) representing Mary's purity. Both Mary and Gabriel have their arms crossed, showing their humility. Gabriel points his index finger at Mary, symbolizing that he is speaking, and God in heaven above holds his hand in the blessing gesture. Golden rays (symbolizing the Word of God) rain down on Mary as a dove (symbolizing the Holy Spirit) hovers over her head.

The brothers painted putti, prophets, angel musicians, and the duke's heraldic crest in the vibrant blue border, along with bears and swans (the duke's heraldic emblems) that playfully weave their way through scrolls of Italianate acanthus leaves.

Inspiring Illuminations

The Limbourg brothers' pioneering style of illuminating advanced that art form and influenced the development of the Northern traditions of landscape and genre painting.

Their illuminations exemplify the International Gothic style, a courtly style that matured in the 1400s when the French and Italian styles of painting converged. In this style, "Elegance of line, delicacy of color, and a jewel-like sharpness of definition were prized above all," according to "A World History of Art" by Hugh Honour and John Fleming.

When Pol visited Italy, he was inspired by the frescoes of the Italian painters Taddeo Gaddi (Giotto's godson) and Ambrogio Lo-

renzetti. After his trip, Pol's illuminations imitated and surpassed the Italian painters' naturalistic renderings and simple linear perspective. In addition, all three brothers were influenced by Byzantine art, which they observed in the Siemese School of painting that upheld the Byzantine tradition.

The brothers painted using perspective, and they painted truer to life by incorporating solid figures and architecture, and even by introducing shadows. But the figures still took on the more elongated look that was characteristic of the International Gothic style of painting.

"The Beautiful Hours" is unusual in that the brothers included seven narrative cycles depicting Christian figures or events that the duke held dear, such as the martyrdom of St. Catherine. In addition, rather than incorporating the illuminations into the text, as per tradition, the brothers included standalone miniatures that were set apart from the calligraphy.

A Legacy

Many see the Limbourg brothers' striking "Beautiful Hours" as a practice run for their masterpiece "The Very Rich Hours of the Duke of Berry," lauded as the best surviving example of International Gothic-style illumination. Sadly, the three brothers and the duke died in 1416, probably from the plague, leaving "The Very Rich Hours" unfinished.

Despite the brothers all dying before they were 30, they left a lasting legacy. For instance, art historian E.H. Gombrich in his book "The Story of Art" said of the preeminent 15th-century Netherlandish painter Jan van Eyck: "He rather pursued the methods of the brothers Limbourg, and brought them to such a pitch of perfection that he left the ideas of medieval art behind."

Van Eyck left medieval art behind, and the Limbourg brothers' work continued to inspire Northern Renaissance artists. For instance, in "The Beautiful Hours," the brothers placed figures, objects, and buildings in their compositions to show depth of field, which was pioneering at the time, and something that 16th-century Flemish artists developed further in their landscape and genre paintings. Some of these artists copied the figures in the illuminations, and some even went so far as to replicate the entire compositions.

After The Metropolitan Museum of Art made a facsimile of the "The Beautiful Hours of Jean of France, Duke of Berry," the leaves were bound into three manuscripts. Visitors to The Met Cloisters can always see one of the three manuscripts on display on a rotational basis. To find out more, visit MetMuseum.org

The Limbourg brothers' pioneering style of illuminating advanced that art form.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

A Musical Comedy to Cheer the Soul

IAN KANE

Out of all of the genres I've enjoyed and immersed myself in over the years, musicals were never my favorite—with few exceptions. However, watching funnyman, singer, and dancer Danny Kaye in films such as 1946's "The Kid from Brooklyn" and 1954's "White Christmas" (with fellow standout Bing Crosby) made me his fan.

So, it was only a matter of time before I watched the rom-com musical "The Inspector General," a 1949 Danny Kaye vehicle. Directed by Henry Koster ("The Bishop's Wife," 1947; "Harvey," 1950), this zany romp is a briskly paced affair that showcases Kaye's numerous talents. The film is based on a 19th-century Russian play by Nikolay Gogol.

Mistaken Identity

The film opens with Gregor (Nestor Paiva) traversing some dusty and drab foothills, desperately pushing his horse to its limits. He gallops into a town called Brodny and, as he dismounts, is immediately accosted by guards. However, Gregor manages to barge through the guards, insisting that he talk to his cousin, the mayor of Brodny (Gene Lockhart). Gregor greets the mayor, a shady man who is holding court in the town council's chambers, surrounded by other murky characters who are all related cousins and oversee various facets of the town.

Gregor has ridden in from a neighboring town and brings bad news: The emperor has sent forth an inspector general to purge the countryside of corruption. He tells his highly corrupt cousins that "wherever [the inspector] finds bribery and corruption, there the gallows and the firing squad go to work!"

Since Gregor explains that the inspector general is traveling incognito and no one knows what he looks like, the mayor orders all of his subordinates to begin cleaning up the town, or at least make it presentable as a place where corruption doesn't exist.

Meanwhile, Yakov (Walter Slezak) has a traveling band of performers. He is perform-

This is one of the most outrageous of Danny Kaye's films.

'The Inspector General'

Director:
Henry Koster

Starring:
Danny Kaye, Walter Slezak,
Barbara Bates

Not Rated

Running Time:
1 hour, 42 minutes

Release Date:
Dec. 31, 1949

★★★★☆



Romance blossoms between Georgi (Danny Kaye) and Leza (Barbara Bates), in "The Inspector General."

ing with one of his actors, Georgi (Danny Kaye), a good-natured simpleton. While a gathering crowd looks on, Yakov insists that Georgi's life has been extended for 2,000 years by ingesting "Yakov's Golden Elixir," which is actually furniture polish.

But when Georgi witnesses Yakov selling some of the fake medicine to a poor old lady whose husband is sick, he tells the lady the truth. Naturally, when the crowd overhears this deception, they turn into an angry mob that runs Yakov and Georgi off. Furious that Georgi revealed his scheme, Yakov tells his former actor to leave.

Yakov wanders into Brodny and is wrongly arrested as a horse thief. Shortly afterward, the mayor meets with all of his officials, and Kovatch (Alan Hale), his chief of police, reports that he's had all of the roads leading to the village blocked off, thus preventing any surprise visits from the anticipated inspector.

But when Kovatch also mentions that he recently arrested a "common tramp," the rest of the council assumes that their new prisoner, Georgi, is actually the inspector general in disguise. The council thus frees Georgi and tries to impress him—all the while plotting to murder him.

From there, over-the-top high jinks ensue, with Georgi at the center of several plot lines, including a romantic one with the outstanding Barbara Bates as local girl Leza.

Infectious Silliness

This is one of the most outrageous of Kaye's films I've seen—and I mean that in the best of possible ways. It packs a fantastic supporting cast that doesn't disappear due to Kaye's over-the-top physical antics but rather complements him.

Additionally, it features some great writing, with a story line that has many twists and turns, as well as some positive messages about being honest and forthright no matter how dire or confusing one's circumstances are.

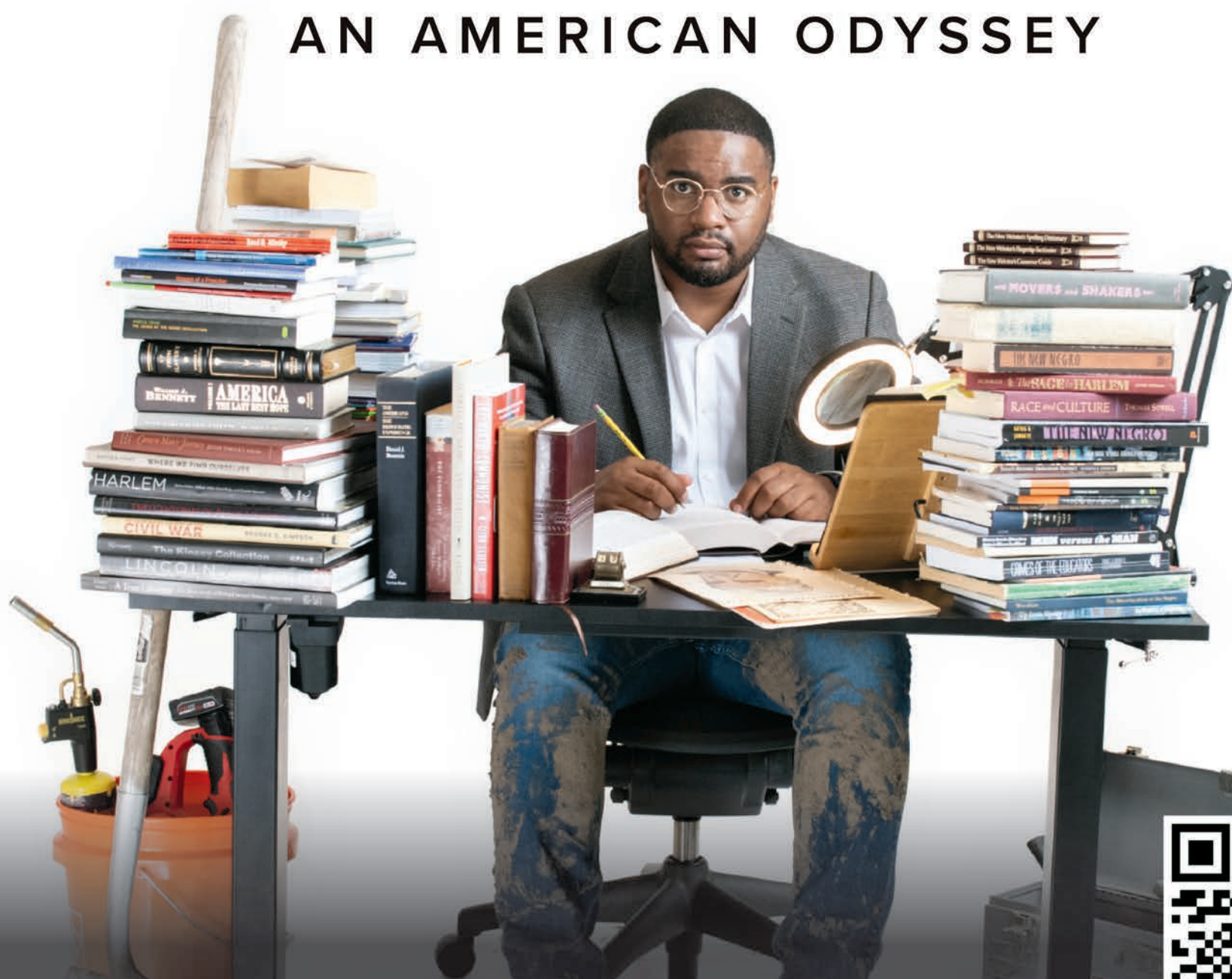
Some of its musical numbers are a bit long-winded (no pun intended) for my taste. However, fans of musicals will probably enjoy them.

In the end, "The Inspector General" is highly entertaining with some hilarious, often satirical dialogue that is elevated further by Danny Kaye's infectious brand of physical humor. By the time the ending credits roll, its satisfying climax should cheer anybody's mood—the perfect sort of film for these challenging 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. You can check out his health blog at IanKaneHealthNut.com

UNCLE TOM II

AN AMERICAN ODYSSEY



NOW STREAMING ON EPOCHTV.COM

