

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



▲ Verdi conducting the 1880 Paris Opera premiere of "Aida."

TRUTH TELLERS

A Composer of Warmth, Generosity, and Unwavering Sincerity

Giuseppe Verdi, one of our great artists and visionaries

By Raymond Beegle

Buddha observed that "on a heap of rubbish ... the lily will grow." Indeed, the rubbish that men have heaped on the world—violence, injustice, and poverty—have been the soil in which other men in turn have produced sublime works of art, representing an ideal, a reality above our

own, that guides, and cheers, and gives our life meaning and purpose.

On Oct. 9 or 10, 1813, in the tiny Italian hamlet of Le Roncole, Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi was born, and in the bitter soil of poverty and political oppression, the seeds of his genius were to take root and flourish.

Music claims its own, and so it took possession of little Giuseppe, a 7-year-old altar boy, when he heard the cathedral organ for the first time. He was so deeply affected that he froze on the spot, causing a frustrated priest to give him a violent shove that sent him tumbling down the altar stairs. This episode helped persuade Carlo Verdi

to give his son music lessons—with the very organist whose playing caused that tumble.

Verdi and Opera

Just 19 years later, his first opera was produced at La Scala, Italy's major theater. It was a considerable success but was accompanied by tragedy. While writing this first work, young Verdi suffered the death of his two small daughters, and, soon after its completion, his wife, who was his best friend and inspiration from childhood, died.

He was under contract at the time to produce a comedy; it proved to be his only

Continued on Page 4

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▲ "Bible and Book of Common Prayer," circa 1607, by Robert Barker. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

The Bible and Western Culture

Why we should recover a lost legacy

By Jeff Minick

In H.W. Crocker's "Custer of the West" series, George Custer survives the Battle of the Little Big Horn and roams the West under the pseudonym of Armstrong. In "Armstrong and the Mexican Mystery," he travels with some companions to Mexico, seeking lost treasure and eventually doing battle with descendants of an underground ancient Atlantis, whose philosophy mirrors that of today's radicalized people who seek to destroy Western civilization.

Crocker presents Armstrong as a man devoted to duty and honor, but also as impetuous and so sure of himself that he sometimes appears ridiculous. Throughout the novel's hijinks, adventures, and grand buffoonery, for example, Armstrong frequently mangles verses and stories taken from the Bible. At one point, he says: "Horses are a man's best friend. Far be it from me to quote Scripture in front of Father Goncalves, but as the Bible says, it is not good for man to be alone, which is why God created horses—and dogs." Later, Armstrong slips Samuel Johnson's aphorism into Scripture: "As Samson told Delilah, 'Depend on it, Madam, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.'" Push forward a few pages, and we find: "I remind you that Samson was left eyeless in Gaza and yet tore down a Philistine temple, married Delilah, and spawned Jason and the Argonauts."

Crocker clearly intends Armstrong's mishmash of the sacred and the profane as entertainment. But after encountering several of his scriptural goofs, the thought suddenly occurred to me, "What if some readers are themselves so ignorant of the Bible that they don't get the joke?"

Statistics

Approximately 100 million Bibles are printed worldwide each year. Twenty million are sold annually in the United States. In America in 2017, nearly nine out of 10 households owned a Bible. Of these, the average number of Bibles per household was three.

Search online for "biblical illiteracy," however, and an abundance of sites, nearly all Christian, pop up, lamenting scriptural ignorance among American churchgoers. Here, commentators, pollsters, and preachers reveal how so few of the faithful read or know the Bible.

This unfamiliarity only increases when we move from the sanctuary to secular culture. Twelve percent of adult Americans, for example, believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. A large number of respondents to one poll thought that Billy Graham preached the Sermon on the Mount. Sixty percent of Americans can name no more than five of the 10 Commandments.

In the article where he cites these and other statistics, theologian and minister Albert Mohler writes: "Secularized Americans should not be expected to be knowledgeable about the Bible." For those who treasure Western culture, Dr. Mohler's casual observation begs for disagreement.

A Legacy Neglected
Since adolescence, I've heard that Athens and Jerusalem were the two pillars of Western civilization. Athens was the birthplace of democracy and Western philosophy, Jerusalem the mother of our Judeo-Christian heritage. In my undergraduate American history classes, and from books I've read since, I was told that many of the Founding Fathers—men like Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and John Adams—were well-versed in



▲ "The First Bible Lesson," circa 1861-1897, by L. Prang & Co., Boston Public Library.

both the classics and the Scriptures, that these headwaters of our civilization influenced their thinking, oratory, and writing.

Behind them came an army of Americans quite familiar with the Old Book. Whatever their religious beliefs, leaders like Abraham Lincoln, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Calvin Coolidge could identify figures like the prophets Nathan and Jeremiah, Rebecca and Judith, King David, and the Apostles. Untold millions of other Americans, once again putting aside the spectrum of their religious faith, knew these same stories. Phrases like "old as Methuselah" or "to cast pearls before swine" were familiar across the land.

These bonds have now largely vanished. The doctrine of separation of church and state, the emphasis on multiculturalism, and the long propaganda war waged by our arts and culture on "Bible-thumpers" have cast their shadows over the Bible as a key document of our civilization and its importance to our laws, history, arts, and moral code.

Moses and Michelangelo
More than 30 years ago, an 80-something atheist in my hometown launched a crusade to have the Ten Commandments removed from the courthouse. He was protesting because the Commandments, which were engraved on two marble plaques and bolted to an interior wall more than six decades earlier, invoked a deity. He died before a final decision by a court could be rendered.

This man apparently appreciated little of law or history. The Commandments, and later some of the teachings of the New Testament, are basic to our understanding of law and even government. Many other elements, such as English common law, enter into that development, but "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not steal" remain linchpins of our legal system. New Testament teachings such as "Love your neighbor as yourself," justice for the oppressed, and helping the poor have heavily impacted our behavior and our government.

From colonial times until the early



▲ "Moses Descends From Mount Sinai With the Ten Commandments," 1662, by Ferdinand Bol. Oil on canvas. Royal Palace of Amsterdam.

years of the 20th century, Americans also invoked stories, proverbs, and lessons from the Bible to promote social change. Slaves who knew the Bible, for example, adopted Moses as their hero and sang songs of freedom drawn from Scripture, like "Go Down, Moses" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," creating along the way a whole genre of music: "spirituals." Civil War orators and song-

writers frequently brought Scripture references into their performances. Popular expressions of that day—"the blind leading the blind," "a wolf in sheep's clothing," "fight the good fight," and many more—have their roots in Scripture and remain in use today.

The same debt holds true for the arts. Michelangelo's "David," da Vinci's "The Last Supper," Dante's "The Divine Com-

edy," Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress," Handel's "Messiah," T.S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi"—these are only a handful of the works connected to the Bible. This fact in itself should rank the book as one of the world's great artistic masterpieces. Poets and composers have drawn inspiration from the Psalms, and hundreds of other writers from Shakespeare to the American Marilynne Robinson have felt the influence of the Bible's proverbs, metaphors, and smiles, and have referenced these in their writings.

The Bible as Literature and History

When I was teaching Advanced Placement European History courses to homeschooling students, we would read "The Communist Manifesto." I selected that document not to endorse communism, but instead to give those young people the words and philosophy that would in the 20th century sweep around the globe, killing more than 100 million people and imprisoning the populations of entire nations. In our world history classes, we looked at Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, recognizing their importance in history and art, and seeking to understand their hold on their adherents.

We can increase our knowledge of the Bible, and so enhance our understanding of our Judeo-Christian roots, with the same approach. Whether we're believers or nonbelievers, we can read the Bible for its stories, its history, and its wisdom. We can dive into Proverbs and the Psalms for their aphorisms and poetry, we can study the leadership lessons taught by King David and the Apostle Paul, and we can deepen our appreciation of the past by visiting the historical events found throughout the Bible.

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 nonfiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.

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EPOCH Health

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▲ A detail of the east pediment of the Parthenon in Nashville.

ARCHITECTURE

Athens of the South

Nashville's devotion to education and classicism

By Bob Kirchman

The Rev. Philip Lindsley came to Nashville, Tennessee, in 1824 to rescue the struggling Cumberland College (now University of Nashville). What he brought with him was a great vision: to create "a center of learning and civilization in the midst of the Old Southwest." He pictured a group of academics, similar to those depicted in Raphael's famous fresco "The School of Athens," enriching the city's culture. Lindsley brought in some of the finest scholars of the day as visiting professors and expanded the school's academic offerings. Emphasizing classics, languages, mathematics, and the sciences, the university set the tone for a city's cultural growth. It was that growth that led Lindsley to refer to Nashville as "the Athens of the South." Actually, he referred to it as the "Athens" of the West, or Southwest. The territory of Tennessee had joined the Union in 1796, and at the time it was seen more as the western frontier.

Building a Vision

In the turbulent 19th century, Nashville grew and prospered. Mary Ellen Pethel, in her book

"Athens of the New South," explains that even in the dark days of the Civil War, the city continued to grow. It was the first Southern city occupied by Union forces and was spared the destruction that so many of them experienced. After the war, industry and a central location fueled its prosperity. The city was blessed, according to Pethel, with a unique "demographic, structural, and cultural composition." Building on Lindsley's vision, at least eight schools opened in Nashville between 1864 and 1912: David Lipscomb College, Fisk University, Meharry Medical College (now University), Peabody College, Roger Williams University, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial Normal School (Tennessee State University), Vanderbilt University, and Ward-Belmont School (Belmont University).

Tennessee Centennial and International Exposition

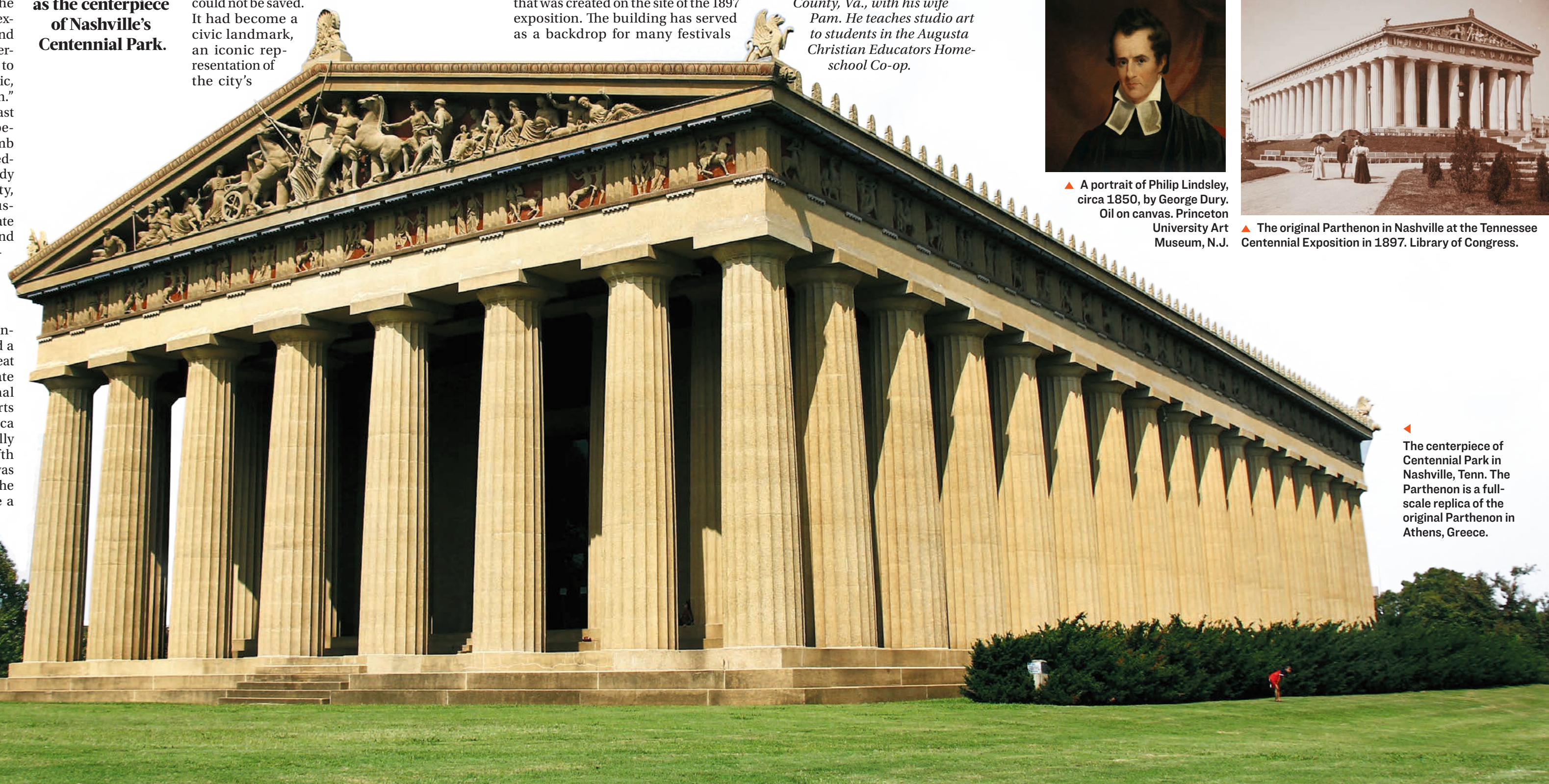
To celebrate the centennial of Tennessee statehood, Nashville hosted a world's fair that ranked among the great neoclassical expositions of the late 19th century. The 1897 international exposition presented great Beaux-Arts halls and featured a full-scale replica of the Parthenon of Athens. Originally built during the reign of Pericles (fifth century B.C.), the Greek Parthenon was a temple to the goddess Athena, the city's patron. It later became a Christian

church, and after the Ottoman conquest, it was turned into a mosque.

The Tennessee State Capitol Building, designed by William Strickland, had already introduced Nashville to Greek Revival architecture. Inspired by ancient buildings of Athens, the building featured all three Greek orders of columns—Ionic, Doric, and Corinthian—and was constructed with great skill and accuracy. Maj. Eugene Castner Lewis, director of the 1897 fair, first suggested that a reproduction of the Parthenon would be a fitting symbol for the exposition.

William Crawford Smith was the architect who drew up plans for an extremely accurate and full-sized copy of the Parthenon. It was a popular attraction at the successful fair—so popular that no one wanted to tear it down. This presented a unique problem, as the building had been intended as a temporary display. It was built of plaster, wood, and brick. It stood for 20 years, but the ravages of weather and time caused such severe deterioration that the building could not be saved. It had become a civic landmark, an iconic representation of the city's

The reconstructed Parthenon stands as the centerpiece of Nashville's Centennial Park.



▲ The centerpiece of Centennial Park in Nashville, Tenn. The Parthenon is a full-scale replica of the original Parthenon in Athens, Greece.

cultural foundations. What was to be done? Should the city build a permanent Parthenon? Marble was prohibitive in cost, especially at the scale of the full-sized Parthenon.

Reconstructing the Parthenon

It was decided to rebuild the structure out of concrete on its original foundations. In 1920, the original building was razed and a new Parthenon began to be constructed. The exterior was completed in 1925 and the interior was finished in 1931. It became a temple of the arts. The "Athena Parthenos" statue by sculptor Alan LeQuire was unveiled in 1990, replicating the Athena that stood in the original Greek temple.

Today, the reconstructed Parthenon stands as the centerpiece of Nashville's Centennial Park—a permanent park that was created on the site of the 1897 exposition. The building has served as a backdrop for many festivals



▲ The "Athena Parthenos," 1990, by Alan LeQuire is the largest indoor sculpture in the Western world.

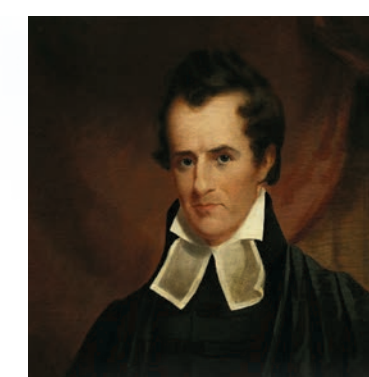
and theatrical productions. Spring pageants, with casts of hundreds, became a major tourist draw as the railroads gave special promotional pricing to encourage attendance. Chariot races, large dance numbers, and other visual displays drew visitors from surrounding states to experience firsthand the "Athens of the South."

This all is a fitting tribute to a city that stretched its vision and its commitment to education and culture as it prospered economically. It is a tribute to those leaders who saw the need to enrich the generations to follow—a testimony to what one man can inspire. Philip Lindsley's legacy is aptly remembered.

Bob Kirchman is an architectural illustrator who lives in Augusta County, Va., with his wife Pam. He teaches studio art to students in the Augusta Christian Educators Home-school Co-op.



▲ A print shows a bird's-eye view of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition's grounds and buildings. Library of Congress.



▲ A portrait of Philip Lindsley, circa 1850, by George Dury. Oil on canvas. Princeton University Art Museum, N.J.



▲ The original Parthenon in Nashville at the Tennessee Centennial Exposition in 1897. Library of Congress.

TRUTH TELLERS

A Composer of Warmth, Generosity, and Unwavering Sincerity

Continued from Page 1

utter failure. Never would he forgive the public who knew of his sorrow but booed and hissed at the premiere. Grief brought on an early winter. The composer's creative powers lay dor-

mant and he resolved never to write another note, but what are plans and resolutions when God, or life, or fate has other plans?

After two years, the dormant elements of Verdi's genius revived. A dazzling spring, a fruitful summer, and a

golden harvest of great works followed.

'Nabucco' His third opera and first stunning success came to be through the kindness of La Scala's impresario Bartolomeo Merelli, who recognized the composer's enormous potential. During those bleak days of silence, Merelli suggested now and then possible subjects for a new opera. A perfect subject—opportunity, visceral, and politically explosive—presented itself.

Italy, at that time, was engaged in a bitter struggle for independence from France and Austria, and although "Nabucco" told the biblical story of Jerusalem's conquest by the Babylonians, the likeness to the present struggle was only too obvious to the Italian public.

Legend has it that when, in the third act of the opera, the Israelites sang in their exile "Go, my thoughts, on golden wings. ... Greet the river Jordan, and Zion's ruined towers," the effect was stupendous. Cheers lifted the roof of La Scala. The performance could not

go on. Verdi was carried on the shoulders of the audience around the nearby streets and brought back to the theater. The chorus was sung again, and the ovation was repeated, followed by a second trip around theater square. The "Va, pensiero" chorus, known to every Italian, became the anthem of the "Risorgimento," the independence and unification of Italy.

Whether a Verdi opera was a success or a relative failure, and there were many, his works were never mere entertainment. "I want art in whatever form it is manifest, not entertainment," he wrote to French impresario Camille du Locle.

In his "Critique of Judgment," German philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote: "If the fine arts are not imbued with moral ideals then they can serve merely as frivolous entertainments." The moral elements of compassion, forgiveness, speaking the truth, and rising above despair are indeed the driving forces behind each of Verdi's works.

'Rigoletto' Music, by its alchemy, can transform an idea into a feeling. When hearing "Rigoletto," one comes to feel deeply the idea that every person, rich or poor, beautiful or homely, is precious in God's eyes. The compassion for two

helpless souls, suffering at the hands of privilege, awakens in us, at least for a moment, the emotion that would surely bring peace to this troubled world if it could be sustained.

"Rigoletto," the zenith of Verdi's middle period, is a near-perfect work. It gives the impression that despite all our intellectual effort, there is something about it that remains beyond our full comprehension, that remains a mystery. The characteristic beauty of Verdi's art, its sublime melodic material, its warmth, its generosity of spirit, and unwavering sincerity has an expressive power matched perhaps, but never surpassed in our musical tradition, by even the great Bach or Beethoven.

'Rigoletto,' the zenith of Verdi's middle period, is a near-perfect work.

'Aida' "Aida," completed in the composer's 58th year, is perhaps not only the masterpiece of his late period but also the height of operatic form. The characters, unlike most heroes and heroines of the past, become very much alive due to the simplicity of their words

and the transcendent beauty of the music. The story has a compelling sweep forward as one event follows another to an irrevocable end, and it seems that not one note could be removed nor one note added to heighten its dramatic power.

Drama and display are, of course, part of the genre, and these elements are present in abundance. There are parades, dances, trumpets, and choruses. Also, the premiere was attended by the glittering "beau monde," dignitaries and notables from around the world, but the guest of honor, unnoticed by most, was the truth.

The tale, a true one thousands of years old, relates the fatal love between a young man and woman when their two countries were at war. That they were prominent figures, the daughter of a king and the commander of an army, is of little importance. What matters is their love for each other, stronger than the governments and judges who took their lives but could not kill their love.

'Te Deum' Verdi's last two works were religious. He was always a man of religion and all his productions, even "Falstaff," are, at their core, religious. "Te Deum" ("God, We Praise Thee") is a song of thanksgiving and a prayer for deliver-



▲ Portrait of Giuseppe Verdi, 1886, by Giovanni Boldini.

Recommended Listening

- Toscanini conducting "Te Deum" and Act 4 of "Rigoletto" with the soprano Zinka Milanov.
- Zinka Milanov on what has been called the aristocrat of "Aida" recordings, with tenor Jussi Bjoerling.
- A stirring performance of "Va, pensiero" conducted by Lamberto Gardelli.

ance. The work reflects the composer's view of the world: that life is a blessing and a marvel, that it is beautiful though often unjust and cruel, and that "the Judge shall come" ("Judex Venturus") and justice will be done.

Giuseppe Verdi was one of our great artists and visionaries, but ultimately, he too was a mortal, given his measure of joy and sorrow. Joy is easy for us but grief is hard, a bitter cup from which all of us must drink. Our recourse, Verdi's recourse, the only expedient any of us has whether great or humble, is to say our prayers, and each in his own way transform those sorrows into something else—something good, something beautiful.

Raymond Beegle has performed as a collaborative pianist in the major concert halls of the United States, Europe, and South America; has written for *The Opera Quarterly*, *Classical Voice*, *Fanfare Magazine*, *Classic Record Collector* (UK), and *The New York Observer*. Beegle has served on the faculty of the State University of New York-Stony Brook, the Music Academy of the West, and the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria. He has taught in the chamber music division of the Manhattan School of Music for the past 28 years.



▲ A 19th-century depiction of the Teatro alla Scala.

MAYUR PHADTARE/CC BY-SA 3.0

COURTESY OF J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM



▲ “Five Lidded Vases,” 1781, by Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory. Soft-paste porcelain. Three central vases from the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, and two end vases from The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

FINE ART

Luxury and Chinoiserie

Porcelain from Louis XVI's Versailles

By Da Yan

For the first time since the French Revolution, a group of exquisite vases are reunited in an exhibition at the Getty Center in Los Angeles, over 200 years after their dispersal from the Royal Palace of Versailles. The vases, luxuriously made in turbulent times, bear witness not only to the sophisticated artistry of the craftsmen and the lavish lifestyle of their illustrious patrons, but also to a distant cultural imagination that took root in a society ripe for momentous change.

viewed in its full regal splendor, impressing us as it once appealed to the lavish tastes of the short-lived monarch.

The Chinoiserie Trend Another set of porcelain vases had better fortune remaining intact in the Versailles collection. Marie Antoinette, upon becoming queen in 1774, began to commission a redecoration of her private apartments and purchased three egg-shaped vases for the sitting room. They are made in hard-paste porcelain and set in gilt-bronze mounts, delicately made with detailed molding. The painted motifs on the white porcelain surface were particularly special. Fanciful, whimsical, and exotic, these groups of ornamental scenes were adopted from a suite of prints supposedly illustrating “Chinese figures,” designed by the Rococo painter François Boucher (1703–1770). Although the artist had never visited China, his inspired imagination for the distant land typifies a wider and extremely fashionable European curiosity for all things Chinese: gardens, cabinets, décor, and among them true hard-paste porcelain, of which the extraordinary luminous quality was notoriously difficult to imitate.

▲



(Detail) Portrait of Marie-Antoinette of Austria (1775) by Jean-Baptiste Gautier Dagoty. Oil on canvas. Palace of Versailles.

extraordinary luminous quality was notoriously difficult to imitate.

The Rococo period of art is known for its stylish decadence, and the romantic and whimsical picturing of exotic motifs were an imaginative play on Eastern aesthetics. In a tapestry woven for the

French court at the beginning of the century, a Qing emperor is made to set sail from a sumptuous and almost ethereal port. Woven Chinese motifs such as cranes, turtles, porcelain, and pagodas are blended together with a peculiar Roman décor known as the “grotesque” (decorative motifs mixing animal, human, and plant forms) and an ornamental architecture reminiscent of the Venetian Gothic.

The “chinoiserie” fad raged with the greatest force in France, where the intensifying trade with Qing Dynasty China and the frequent missionary reports about its people and culture facilitated a society-wide interest in the Far East. For Marie Antoinette, her porcelain wares—decorated with trendy pictorial motifs—would have helped stage a regal display of her most exquisite and cosmopolitan taste in a space for private audiences.

Scattered, found, and reunited, these exquisite vases represent the highest caliber of French decorative arts and the most exuberant taste of the Bourbon royalty. Having lived through the vicissitudes of fortune, the vases survived to



PUBLIC DOMAIN

◀ Back view of the three vases housed at the Getty Museum. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

◀ A detail of Telemachus and Termodis on the front of one of the vases. J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.



COURTESY OF J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

◀ “Three Lidded Vases,” 1775–1776, by Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory. Hard-paste porcelain with gilt-bronze mounts. National Museum of the Palaces of Versailles and Trianon.

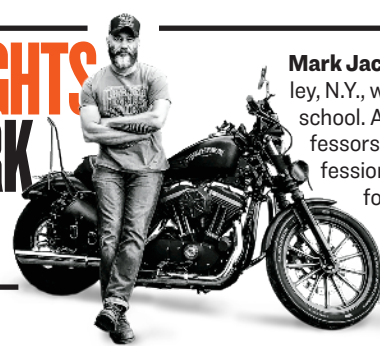
The Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory produced a collection of five vases to a design called the ‘Vases of the Ages.’

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The “Porcelain From Versailles: Vases for a King & Queen” exhibition at the Getty Center in Los Angeles runs through March 3, 2024. To find out more, visit Getty.edu

Da Yan is a doctoral student of European art history. Raised in Shanghai, he lives and works in the Northeastern United States.

FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON



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

A Funny Little Family Film

A whimsical work with a precocious, young actress

By Mark Jackson

“Scrapper” just won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival for the World Cinema Dramatic Competition. It’s a sweet, mostly lighthearted dramedy, featuring rapid-fire, witty repartee with impeccable comedic timing, and its little lead actress, Lola Campbell, looks from certain angles like a tiny, blond Emily Blunt.

The Scrapper

Highly precocious 12-year-old Georgie (Campbell) has morphed into the titular scrapper. She’s become a wee grifter who, while systematically working herself through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (the ubiquitous five stages of grief) in the wake of her beloved mother’s death from an unknown illness, has decided to tackle life on her own. She continues living in their flat in the Limes Farm housing estate in Chigwell, in Essex, England.

‘Scrapper’ is lightweight, but surprisingly potent when it focuses on the reality of the situation.

Georgie supports herself by stealing and reselling bicycles with her little buddy Ali (Alin Uzun). When her school and social services call her up to check in, she selects from a list of faux phone recordings solicited from the local “voice-over talent” (a turbaned, teen-

age, grocery store cashier pretending to be her uncle-who-provides-care-at-home). Said fictitious uncle is curiously named Winston Churchill. The barely interested authorities never bother to follow up.

Georgie cleans the house obsessively and painstakingly crosses off the stages of grief, but her hyper-controlled existence gets a monkey wrench thrown into it when a young man breaks into her flat. This would be Jason (Harris

Dickinson), her long-lost, estranged birth-dad.

Georgie’s naturally wary of him, and trust does not come easily. There’s the issue of why he’s appeared after being a deadbeat dad all these years. He brags to Ali that he’s been living in Spain, where the chicks are hotter. This doesn’t help matters.

But soon, father and daughter figure out that they have quite a lot in common. Especially fun is when Jason introduces his daughter to a game he used to play with her mom, where they look at distant couples talking and invent dialogue to go with the gesticulations. This is hilarious.

He even goes with her on a bike-stealing spree but experiences a lock-picking fail, and the two hightail it into the maze of neighborhood backyards to escape the outraged, pursuing bobbies.

we do nay-ow? Shou’ we maybe ‘ave a cuhhd-oo? (cuddle).

At the heart of “Scrapper” is the very impressive performance of Lola Campbell, whose street-smart yakkity-yakking is in hilarious contrast with her baby face. Harris Dickinson, who had a starring role in Ruben Östlund’s 2022 Palme d’Or-winning “Triangle of Sadness,” is very believable and touching as the man-child-deadbeat-dad, trying, at long last, with no form of guidance to provide guidance to his daughter.

An impressive debut feature from director Charlotte Regan, “Scrapper” is a genuinely funny and heartwarming family drama.

‘Scrapper’

Director Charlotte Regan

Starring

Harris Dickinson, Lola Campbell, Alin Uzun, Ayokunle Oyesanwo, Ayobami Oyesanwo, Ayooluwa Oyesanwo

Running Time 1 hour, 24 minutes

MPAA Rating Not Rated

Release Date Aug. 25, 2023

★★★★☆

GREAT POINT MEDIA/PICTUREHOUSE



▲ Jason (Harris Dickinson) and his long-lost daughter, Georgie (Lola Campbell), in “Scrapper.”

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Post WW II Film Searches for Life’s Answers

Finding meaning in service to others

By Rudolph Lambert Fernandez

Director Edmund Goulding’s multi-Oscar nominated film draws inspiration from W. Somerset Maugham’s novel and defines selflessness as the route to meaningful self-fulfillment.

Ex-soldier Larry Darrell (Tyronne Power), perturbed by the fragility of life he witnesses in World War I, totters through the turgid world of his socialite friends, searching for peace and purpose. He finds neither, whether in Chicago where fiancée Isabel Bradley (Gene Tierney) awaits, or in Paris which he frequents. So he heads on a journey to find to a holy man (Cecil Humphreys) in India. Up in the mountains, things start to make sense.

A soldier once died to save Darrell’s life, which prompted his search for pur-

pose. Now, he discovers that purpose: living for others in need.

Bradley would gladly have waited to marry him if he hadn’t kept discarding the superficial for the simple. Furious, she marries their mutual friend, Gray Maturin (John Payne); fortunately for her, he inherits his broker father’s millions. Another mutual friend, Sophie (Anne Baxter) marries lawyer Bob MacDonald (Frank Latimore).

Before Darrell returns to the world of his successful friends, the friends encounter the fragility of life, too, in many setbacks. Maturin loses his fortune in a market crash and is buoyed only by largesse from Bradley’s wealthy uncle Elliott Templeton (Clifton Webb), who later suffers a nervous breakdown. Distraught Sophie MacDonald, who’s lost both her husband and their baby in an accident,

is now vulnerable to Darrell’s charms, but Bradley, still possessive of him, has other plans for MacDonald. Meanwhile, patronizing Templeton will do anything to keep his niece from Darrell.

Walking this razor’s edge as it were, Darrell shares with his friends a newfound sense of self, hoping they’ll find theirs. Wisely, Maugham and Goulding dispel notions that the exotic East holds miracle cures for the West; self-transformation lies within, in freedom from narcissistic manipulation. Geography has nothing to do with it.

Darrell helps Maturin discover that fatalism (not his nervous system) is crippling him. Stunned at Maturin’s recovery, Bradley figures that Darrell’s brought magic from the East, but he explains, “There’s nothing miraculous about it.” What auto-suggestion heals in a humble mind can only harm in an arrogant one.

Darrell discovers wisdom, but wears it lightly.

Fabulous Cast, Character Study

Maugham inserts himself as a character, a writer who befriends them all, a narrator-witness to Darrell’s transformation, within and without. Clinging Bradley is the antithesis of charitable Darrell. Needy, Maturin and Sophie MacDonald mirror each other, but differently. When Bradley wishes them well, Darrell’s able to help.

Raised in France, Maugham was bullied in school for his poor English. He knew a bit about being an outsider and wields that in characterizing Darrell.

Tierney as Bradley depicts tenderness as she wavers between longing for the winsome Darrell and loathing his contentment. Power is charismatic as Darrell, who discovers wisdom but wears it lightly. Their scenes in Paris feel real because Tierney and Power could speak fluent French; he had French ancestry, and she’d learned while attending school in Switzerland.

Goulding’s theme is salvation, but his camera wonders if his characters are asking the right questions: salvation from what, for what? When Darrell asks the holy man to be his guide, like all truly holy men he corrects Darrell: “God is the *only* guide.” Masterfully, Goulding has Power almost, but not quite, facing the camera, and Humphreys facing Power. This is a conversation between two honest seekers, not an all-knowing teacher and a student.

Darrell looks not at the holy man but elsewhere toward an alluring truth.

He places the words of the holy man in his heart: “The road to salvation is difficult to pass over... as difficult as ... the sharp edge of a razor.” The holy man nudges Darrell back to his relationships and responsibilities.

He learns that he doesn’t have to desert the world to find enlightenment, but to live in the world and love those in it, not for their own sake but for God “in them.”

You can watch “The Razor’s Edge” on Apple TV, Amazon Video, YouTube, and Vudu.

Rudolph Lambert Fernandez is an independent writer who writes on pop culture.

‘The Razor’s Edge’

Director Edmund Goulding

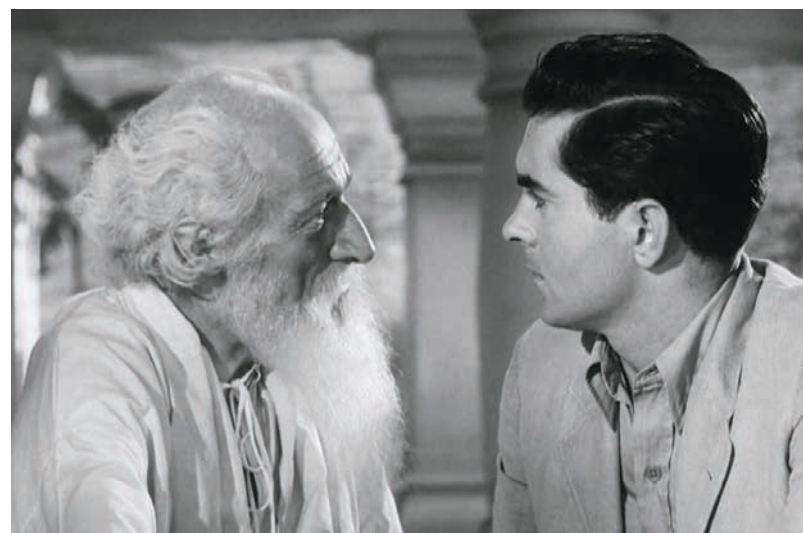
Starring Tyronne Power, Gene Tierney, Anne Baxter

Running Time 2 hours, 25 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date Dec. 25, 1946

★★★★☆



20TH CENTURY FOX

◀ Holy man (Cecil Humphreys, L) and Larry Darrell (Tyronne Power), in “The Razor’s Edge.”

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Bravery Beyond the Expected on Flight 93

On 9/11, ordinary Americans gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country

By Michael Clark

In the 22-plus years since the Sept. 11, 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks, there have been in excess of 100 films and TV shows produced globally. Although I haven't watched them all, I've seen most, and it saddens me to say that the majority of them are rubbish.

Not only is "United 93" the only worthwhile movie about 9/11, it is unlike any other film ever made.

Once United Flight 93 became airborne, the narrative begins, being presented in real time. It contains elements of drama, docu-drama, thriller, and cinéma vérité yet is practically beyond exact genre categorization.

It is populated with performers most movie people (including myself) couldn't identify by name but have seen in other productions. In addition, dozens of people (journalists, FAA, and U.S. military personnel) were cast as themselves, and real-life airline personnel were hired as pilots and flight attendants.

No Names, No Histories

None of the characters are addressed or referred to by name, and there are no backstories provided for any of them. There is no lead character, and there are over 100 speaking roles, with less than one-third of those being given multiple lines of dialogue.

These unorthodox casting and screenplay choices by writer-director and co-producer Paul Greengrass ("Bloody Sunday," "Captain Phillips," and three "Jason Bourne" installments) lend the production an immeasurable level of realism. A filmmaker who often goes overboard with handheld cameras, Mr. Greengrass keeps that in check here, adding yet another layer of "you-are-there" believability.

At this point, you might be asking yourself (and me) if there were no survivors on Flight 93, how could Mr. Greengrass possibly know what took place on the plane?

On the DVD commentary track, Mr. Greengrass states that his script was based



▲ Some of the heroes: (L-R) Jeremy Glick (Peter Hermann), Tom Burnett (Christian Clemenson), and Mark Bingham (Cheyenne Jackson), in "Flight 93."

on findings revealed in the official 2002 U.S. "9/11 Commission Report" and recorded voicemail messages left by passengers to their loved ones. They were able to do so with airphones on the plane and, once the airplane dropped in altitude, standard cellphones.

Not a Hostage Situation

It was also during some of these calls that the passengers were informed of the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks and quickly surmised that theirs was not a hostage situation, but rather a Muslim-based terrorist attack and suicide mission. This was solidified by one of the passengers who noticed the plane changing direction from west to southeast. Flight 93 departed from Newark, New Jersey, and was bound for San Francisco.

Flight 93 was delayed for departure by 40 minutes, which put the terrorists in a precarious position. They knew they had limited time to commandeer the plane, and the delay greatly handicapped them.

This was compounded when group leader Ziad Jarrah (Khalid Abdalla) began having moral doubts about the mission and de-

veloping cold feet. Jarrah waited a crucial 50 minutes after liftoff before initiating the hijacking, something that visibly irritated his co-conspirators and eventually gave the passengers a marked offensive advantage.

The start of the third act sees Mr. Greengrass making something of a commercial compromise when he puts the spotlight on four male passengers: Tom Burnett (Christian Clemenson), Mark Bingham (Cheyenne Jackson), Todd Beamer (David Alan Basche), and Jeremy Glick (Peter Hermann).

United 93 Fighting Back

These men, the flight crew, and the majority of the other passengers came to the consensus that death was inevitable and imminent and decided to overtake the terrorists. There was discussion on regaining control of the aircraft, but this soon gave way to the realization that the only way to defeat the terrorists was to take over and purposefully crash the plane, thus saving countless lives at the target site (inferred here to be the U.S. Capitol Building).

The 9/11 attacks forever changed not only the future lives of every American but, in one way or another, all humans on the

planet. It was one of, if not the darkest day in the history of our country.

There were many EMT, police, and fire heroes born on that fateful day in New York City and Washington, and their collective efforts will never be forgotten. Few of us could imagine the amount of fortitude, bravery, and valor required by the Americans traveling on Flight 93 on 9/11 to carry out such a selfless act. They didn't sign up to fight fire, fight crime, or provide medical assistance. They were people just like us living their lives, yet they made the ultimate sacrifice for their fellow man. Their actions above an empty field in rural Pennsylvania were beyond inspirational; they were life-affirming in the most glorious of ways.

The film is available to stream on Vudu, Amazon Prime, and Apple TV and home video. It is presented in English with frequently subtitled Arabic.

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.

40
PASSENGERS
AND CREW
MEMBERS
aboard United
Flight 93 died
on Sept. 11,
2001.

'United 93'

Director
Paul Greengrass

Starring
Christian Clemenson, Cheyenne Jackson, David Alan Basche, Peter Hermann, Khalid Abdalla

Running Time
1 hour, 50 minutes

MPAA Rating
R

Release Date
April 28, 2006

★★★★★



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