

THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS &

TRADITION



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When Editing Unfinished Music
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POETRY

'Building Wall': A RESPONSE TO AMERICAN POET ROBERT FROST'S 'MENDING WALL'

EVAN MANTYK

As the border wall with Mexico that President Trump is building gains greater and greater attention, so too has the early 20th-century poem by American poet Robert Frost, "Mending Wall." The poem takes issue with the old proverb "good fences make good neighbors," which happens to be precisely the same proverb that Vice President Mike Pence has used in the past to describe the border wall with Mexico.

Pence said, "But you know, there's an old saying in Indiana that good fences make good neighbors. And the way we can be good neighbors is with strong leadership in the United States as a start."

Now, Frost's poem is becoming a sort of anti-wall anthem. To be clear, the proverb preceded the poem, though some people seem to think that Pence was quoting Frost.

At any rate, the catapulting of an old poem to front-page news, or any page, is always exciting for literary types and led one Washington Post writer to even write their own version of Frost's poem, lampooning Pence's sentiment. The poem is neither well-written nor compassionate to those who have suffered because of the problems caused by illegal immigration. That said, it does have the terrific line, "Good fences make good neighbors." I'll drink to that.

Any pro-wall politician may happily quote Robert Frost's 'Mending Wall' and the proverb unimpeded.

Lost in the romanticism of poetry and politics is the fact that Frost's anti-wall poem specifically stipulated that the wall in his poem was not needed since "there are no cows." Thus, any pro-wall politician may happily quote Frost and the proverb unimpeded—the Mexicans with criminal backgrounds entering the country illegally being the equivalent of cows.

Finally, in the same vein, I offer to you a poem in response to Robert Frost's "Mending Wall," which follows mine:

Building Wall

There is something there that loves a wall:
The easy car trip when your loved ones call—
No need to worry cows might block the road
And pepper it with putrid, pie-like load.
No need to live a life in fear of crime
Thanks to my front door, it's the wall that I'm
Most thankful for. It also keeps me warm
And saves me from the lashings of a storm.
As in exquisite works of Renaissance art,
Which have deep wisdom and beauty to impart,
The lines are firmly shaded, unrelenting,
And chief among the means used for inventing,
Now you may hear folks quote the poet Frost

That building walls comes at some sort of cost:
A loss of our humanity's connection,
A severing of some vague innate extension.
For Frost claims that he mends a needless wall,
Implying his mind's broad, his neighbor's small.
Frost mocks the phrase "Good fences make good neighbors"—
A civil tradition the common man harbors.
Yet who knows all? Who knows the future's course?
Is not the urge to mend a greater force?
New grandkids may need fences when they play;
Strong walls on property will one day pay.
No, it was Frost who had a wall in heart
That tore tradition's timeless truth apart...
So if a man requests a wall, then build it.
It's more than what you think you see that willed it.



In defense of building a wall along the U.S. southwest border, Vice President Mike Pence has relied on the old saying that "good fences make good neighbors."

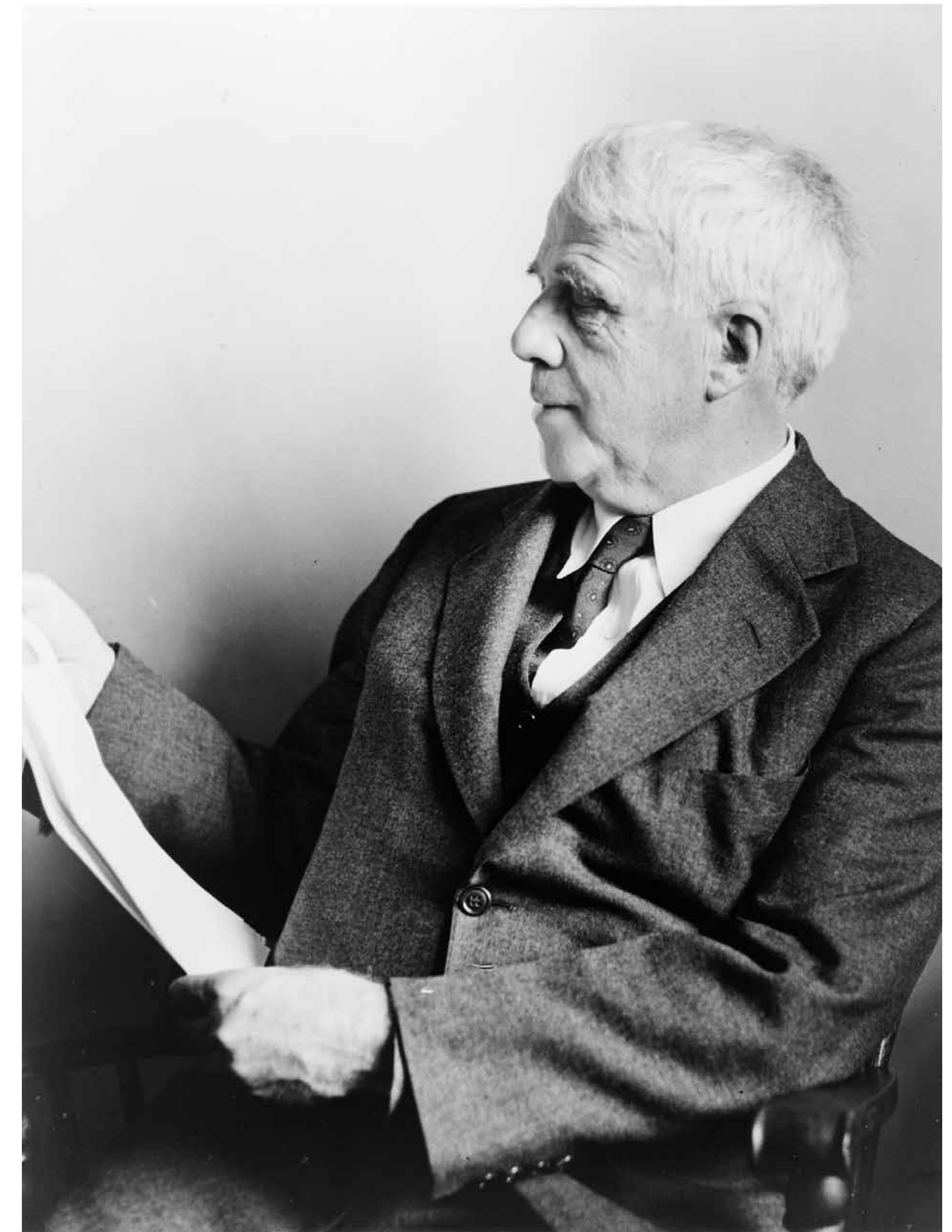


Mending Wall

By Robert Frost

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbours."
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
"Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbours."

Evan Mantyk is an English teacher in New York and president of the Society of Classical Poets.



Robert Frost.

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

When Editing Unfinished Music Needs to Be Done

DAVID TRIPPETT

Unfinished works of art have long had a poetic allure. Such works are attractive to us today, in part, because of the curiosity and sadness that inevitably accompany fragments. What have we lost? What might it have become? Perhaps more importantly, unfinished works promise to open a window into the creative process more transparently than “finished” ones. They can provide insight into both the intellectual decisions and technical means by which the artist sought to create something.

For Pliny the Elder, artists’ unfinished pictures were “more admired than those which they finished, because in them are seen the preliminary drawings left visible and the artists’ actual thoughts.” Similarly, in the 19th century, sketches became central to models of the creative imagination, appearing to grant privileged access to this moment of inspiration.

While certain genres celebrate the fragmentary, scholars are often squeamish about dealing with incomplete works, and significant funding to undo unsavory past attempts to restore sculptures sits alongside occasional outbreaks of public vitriol at botched restorations of paintings and carvings.

Nor are these arguments new. The archaeologist Ludwig Pollak discovered in 1905 that the famous Laocöon sculpture—unearthed in 1506—had been supplied with a new, outstretched arm, the result of a competition in 1532, judged by Raphael, no less. When the original arm was unearthed and shown not to be outstretched, it was reunited with the sculpture, which had looked different for the past four centuries.

The Problem of Time

I am a musicologist and so my interest is primarily in musical sketches. These can pose challenges of presentation that scraps of poetry or incomplete drawings do not. However beguiling incomplete art may be, what are we to do with unfinished music?

Writing with the statue of Laocöon in mind, the 18th-century writer Gottfried Lessing famously drew a distinction between the arts that work in time (nacheinander) and those that work in space (nebeneinander). While we can read an incomplete verse, or take pleasure from contemplating the unfinished strokes of a pencil, music exists in time. It needs performance: active realization in sound.

The pleasure of reading a musical fragment in an archive is essentially antiquarian. It excludes those who cannot read scores silently. Music’s sensory realization in time sets it apart in this context.

Many “pieces” remain incomplete, from fragments of chant to Bach’s “St. Mark Passion” and Mozart’s Requiem, from symphonies by Beethoven, Schubert, Mahler, and Elgar to operas by Weber, Donizetti, Mendelssohn, Verdi, Liszt, Puccini, and Berg. Some, such as the Requiem or Mahler’s Tenth, have been completed multiple times by multiple people. In several cases, we’ve become comfortable with these “completions,” many of which date from the second half of the 20th century and have been recorded by the world’s top conductors and orchestras. But this is not always the case.

In 1966, musicologist Paul Henry Lang poured scorn on the first “completion” of Mahler’s Tenth Symphony by Deryck Cooke, writing: “One never hears of an archaeologist adding a missing arm of his own making to a recovered Venus, nor would his musicologist colleague do any such thing to a symphony.” While there are many such additions to sculpture, perhaps the point is whether the restoration is faked up so you can’t see it.

Cooke’s work was blessed by Mahler’s wife, Alma, yet—in at least one respect—Lang’s reasoning is sound: No two creative personalities can be alike, meaning that even with all the expertise in the world, some level of creative difference creeps into any such “completion.” And attitudes haven’t changed much. The classic example of such a debate may be the speculative completion of Beethoven’s Tenth Symphony in 1988, where the exaggeration of evidence in Beethoven’s manuscript generated similarly fierce reactions.

From this arises the question of whether we should simply leave unfinished works alone in silence. Where existing notation can be performed to point, should we stop dead in performances (“and here, ladies and gentlemen, the master died”)? Should we relegate knowledge of such works to specialists, as Lang suggested? And could we bear to forego Mozart’s Requiem and Bach’s “The Art of Fugue” in this way?

It seems clear that latter-day performers and scholars ought not to intrude arbitrarily on the integrity of any particular composer’s materials. But consider the flipside. If performable music fragments are present, can we allow them to sit in silence, or is there an ethical obligation to bring the music into the world, as a kind of social property?

For me, everything depends on the detail and state of completion of what is noted by the composer. The line between editing, realizing, and reconstructing is drawn on this basis.

Liszt’s ‘Sardanapalo’

My interest in this debate concerns my recent work toward an edition and first performance of Liszt’s “Sardanapalo,” an opera assumed to be fragmentary and irretrievable, but which—on closer investigation—proved to be

The question is whether we should simply leave unfinished works alone in silence.

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a continuous piano-vocal score of the first act. It is occasionally written in shorthand, but otherwise specifies the music’s cardinal parameters virtually in full: pitch, rhythm, melody, harmony, counterpoint, and texture. For nearly two centuries, the hard-to-decipher notation concealed some 52 minutes of music by one of the most famous musicians of the 19th century.

Simply put, I felt an obligation to bring this into the world. The score still needed orchestrating according to Liszt’s instrumental cues (a task he remitted to an assistant in 1851, but which never took place). With the exception of this and the final 20 bars—which I supplied based on his earlier closing material—no “compositional” input was needed: Liszt notated or otherwise abbreviated a full conception of the music. But to be realized, it needed to be read in the context of conventions of Italian opera and Liszt’s notational practices.

And the resulting music? According to critics it is “absolutely fascinating,” “a thrilling piece of music”—“I think Bellini reimagined by Wagner and you have some idea of the vast emotional sweep of this gripping music.”

Faced with a similar situation to my own, the composer Ernst Krenek argued that: “Completing

the unfinished work of a great master ... can honestly be undertaken only if the original fragment contains all of the main ideas of the unfinished work.” What is meant by “all the main ideas” depends a lot on the source situation, and the reliability and clarity of the individuals’ notational habits. The modern, free composition of an absent bridge passage, a missing theme, or even an omitted movement would never warrant publication under the name of a historical composer, in my view.

We trust scholars implicitly in this regard. And musicological work depends in large part on reliable scholarly editions. In the end, then, clarity about how extensively “all the main ideas” exist can offer balm against concerns about editing “unfinished” music. Facsimiles, particularly open-access online facsimiles of original manuscripts, can offer full transparency for those with eyes to see and an inclination to investigate. Maybe this would allow our beguilement at unfinished art to be shared, unguarded, with unfinished music.

David Trippett is a senior university lecturer at the University of Cambridge in England. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

Finishing a work can have its dangers. The Laocöon Group after its 20th-century restoration.



CLASSICAL MUSIC

Composers Are Under No Threat From ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

A look at Huawei’s finished Schubert symphony



Unsurprisingly, composing an ending to Schubert’s “Unfinished Symphony” with artificial intelligence brings a soullessness to his work. “Schubertiade,” an 1897 painting of Franz Schubert performing, by Julius Schmid, 1897.

GOETZ RICHTER

Chinese technology company Huawei has not had particularly good press recently. Countries including Australia have excluded it from construction of a 5G network, while the U.S. Justice Department recently laid criminal charges against the firm and its chief financial officer.

It is understandable that in the midst of such woes, one might turn toward something harmless like classical music to wallow in sophisticated creativity, cultural tradition, and human mystery.

In time for the Year of the Pig, Huawei recently presented a completion of Franz Schubert’s “Unfinished Symphony” in performance at London’s Cadogan Hall. It was accomplished by “pairing technological innovations of Huawei’s artificial intelligence” from its smartphone with the human expertise of film composer Lucas Cantor.

What was the division of labor here? The company’s website, where you can now hear the music, explains that the smartphone “listened to the first two movements of Schubert’s Symphony ... analyzed the key musical elements that make it so incredible, then generated the melody for the missing third and fourth movement from its analysis.” The composer Lucas Cantor selected and orchestrated the melodic offering. His role was to “draw out the good ideas from Artificial Intelligence (AI) and fill in the gaps where necessary.”

Cantor describes his experience of composing with AI as having a tireless collaborator, who never runs out of ideas and does not become cranky.

Why did Huawei take on a symphony that was left (perhaps intentionally) incomplete by a composer who famously sought a better world through music, notably after a severe syphilitic infection in the months after its composition? According to Huawei’s president of consumer business, Walter Ji, Huawei’s intent is “to make the world a better place for people.”

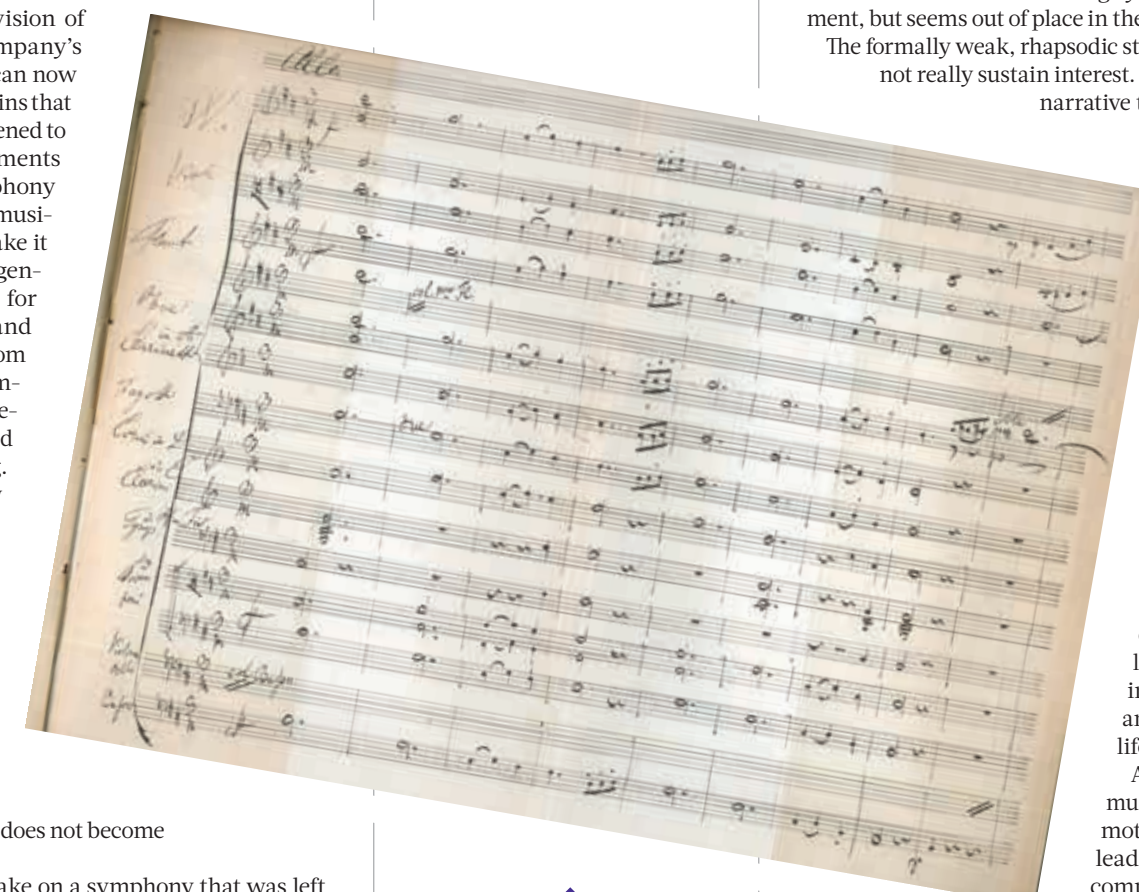
We know that Schubert succeeded, but does Huawei’s experiment reflect this lofty rhetoric? Those with ears to hear can listen to the experiment on the website: Consumer.Huawei.com

Actually, it is somewhat surprising that the third and fourth movements are entirely by Cantor and the Huawei smartphone, as Schubert left some sketches for the third movement that other composers have respected in their completions in the past. Maybe the smartphone did not have phone contacts to Schubert scholars?

Impression Management

Be that as it may, the greatest issue seems to me that these movements sound only a little like Schubert and a lot like film music. Allusions to Wagnerian harmonic suspensions and a clichéd orchestration do not make it

It seems that character is entirely lacking from Huawei’s experiment.



Perhaps Schubert intentionally left his Symphony No. 8 in B Minor unfinished. A page from the “Unfinished Symphony,” third movement, Facsimile, 1885, in J.R. von Herbeck’s biography of Franz Schubert.

easy to be otherwise.

Where Schubert’s first two movements seek voice in an intimate, personal, and tragic lyricism, reflecting an internal, subjective dialogue, the final two movements transform the symphony’s identity with pretentiously epic and dramatic elements. The grandiose ending of the fourth movement is entirely unsuited to the uncertain and haunting starting point of the first movement.

The final two movements communicate profound ignorance of autonomous art or artistic development. Crafted to provoke acclaim and applause, they are impression management at its worst.

The completed movements are trivial and achieve ultimately a loose and inauthentic family resemblance to Schubert. This is despite their rehashing material of the first two movements, which appears courtesy of the smartphone in melodic snippets and reduces Schubertian features to clichés. (His repetitive string accompaniment, for instance, lends a characteristic searching dynamic to the first movement, but seems out of place in the others.)

The formally weak, rhapsodic structure especially cannot really sustain interest. It demands an external narrative to illustrate. To be sure,

the music is no worse than the slush that is poured over TV’s historical soap operas.

So, what do we learn then about music and artificial intelligence? Most importantly: The composition of music is a unique human achievement, and no mere constructive process that cobbles together a pre-given, flat pack of ideas. Unlike modular kitchens, symphonies intimately link material and form as they come to life and evolve together.

Analytical extraction of musical material (melodies, motifs, or phrases) cannot lead to a natural, artistic composition. Huawei’s experiment is artistically and aesthetically naive.

At the beginning of any musical composition is the intuition of voice or spirit.

When the two movements by Schubert were first performed in 1865, 37 years after his death, the Viennese music critic Eduard Hanslick heard this spirit:

When after several introductory bars, the clarinet and oboe in unison strike up their sweet song over the quiet murmur of the violins, then every child knows the composer, and the half-suppressed exclamation “Schubert!” passes whispered through the hall.

In the unity of musical form and material, the composer articulates spirit. Hanslick refers to this as “character.” It seems that character is entirely lacking from Huawei’s experiment.

Without character, we have no authentic humanity. How could flattening of spirit ever make the world a better place?

Goetz Richter is an associate professor of violin with the Sydney Conservatorium of Music at the University of Sydney in Australia. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

FILM REVIEW

Story of a *Quiet Love* That Gets *Torn Apart*

CATHERINE YANG

It's all very cloak-and-dagger. When police detective Chen is finally reunited with his childhood sweetheart, there is an undercurrent of secrecy, and it's soon revealed that this is because she is on the verge of exposing a state secret he has been tasked to cover up.

The short film "Reunion" by Peabody Award-winning director Leon Lee is a quiet love story bookended by a dark secret.

It stars Anastasia Lin, the 2015 Miss World Canada who was refused entry into China for the Miss World pageant four years ago for being outspoken against human rights abuses in China.

"Reunion" deals with a story in the same vein. Chen and his girlfriend, Yun, speak in hushed tones in empty rooms with low lights. It's clear they're being monitored by the Chinese communist regime.

Chen works for the police, which means he works for the state. His girlfriend, however, is a medical doctor who uncovers evidence that links the Communist Party to a gruesome crime. We get glimpses in the beginning, but it is not until the end of the film that the magnitude of the Communist Party's actions are clear.

The film, though short, is based on real events and unravels to reveal a very real crime. That alone makes it worth seeing. But the story the filmmakers chose to tell, in order to reveal this massive injustice, is intimate and human, and it reminds us that this is real and that we should care.

A Focus on Human Rights

The popular and controversial human bodies exhibitions have been shown all around the world for over a dozen years. Through plastination, real human bodies are dissected, preserved, and put on display. There has been controversy as to whether it is ethical to

show human bodies like this, and there is controversy regarding where these bodies come from in the first place.

The bodies in these shows have been donated by the Chinese regime, claiming that, at the time of death, there was no one to claim the bodies. They were first dissected in Chinese universities before being donated to exhibitions.

But there is good reason to believe that these are bodies of prisoners of conscience, which the Chinese regime had killed.

China has been the subject of multiple investigations and condemned by international governments over its human rights abuses, revealing, among other things, its massive-scale illegal organ trade. People persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party, notably practitioners of the spiritual meditation group Falun Gong, have been

medically tested, matched, and then detained in order to be killed once a willing buyer could be found to pay for an organ transplant.

Chinese authorities have refused to explain whether the plastinated bodies come from the same sources, or provide evidence that these bodies were donated willingly.

A Choice

As Lin's character Yun discovers what has been happening on the surgery tables, she becomes resolved to get this information out of China and shine a light on the truth. But nothing goes unnoticed in this police state, and Chen's superiors put pressure on him to silence Yun, threatening her life.

Eventually, Chen needs to make a choice, and we as viewers hope he has enough time left to make the right one.

'Reunion'

Director
Leon Lee

Starring
Anastasia Lin, Tony Bai

Running Time
20 minutes

Release Date
March 6, on YouTube

★★★★★

The film, though short, is based on real events and unravels to reveal a very real crime.

Peabody Award-winning director Leon Lee's "Reunion" is a short film based on real events dealing with a massive scandal the Chinese Communist Party is trying to cover up.



COURTESY OF FLYING CLOUD PRODUCTIONS



Anastasia Lin stars in the short thriller "Reunion."

COURTESY OF FLYING CLOUD PRODUCTIONS



"Reunion" will be released online, on YouTube, March 6.

COURTESY OF FLYING CLOUD PRODUCTIONS



Tom Schilling as artist Kurt Barnert in director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's latest movie, "Never Look Away."

CALEB DESCHANEL/COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

FILM AND ART

'Never Look Away' From Truth and Beauty

An interview with German director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck

MASHA SAVITZ

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck gives us a master class on filmmaking with his stunning Oscar-nominated release "Never Look Away."

The latest offering by the award-winning writer and director is everything a movie should be: a compelling story, visually sublime, conceptually evocative, and emotionally gripping.

The film follows an aspiring artist over three turbulent and dynamic decades of German history: the 1930s into the '60s, examining how the political ideologies during this era affect one family in particular.

But more importantly, perhaps, the film demonstrates how political ideologies influence society and art. These ideologies have altered the art world, changing the perception and role of art and artists, perhaps more than any other time in history.

Donnersmarck's debut film, "The Lives of Others," a dark thriller, also set in communist East Germany, won every award, including the 2007 Oscar for best foreign-language film and the Golden Globe.

German-born Donnersmarck is a product of the environment he came from as well, and seems compelled to "never look away" from examining the complicated era that preceded him. The title, as he suggests, can mean "Never look away from things that are wrong. ... Don't look away from things you're embarrassed by."

"I like it when titles can mean different things and give you a feeling of the atmo-

“**Many atrocities might have been avoided if people hadn't turned away.**”

Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, film director

sphere," he said during a buoyant phone conversation.

Donnersmarck says, too, that we must not look away from things we think we know, but be willing to re-evaluate and reconsider what we think we know.

"Many atrocities might have been avoided if people hadn't turned away," he asserts.

Artistic Voice and the Origin of Creativity
The artists' journey to hone their own voices is a mysterious confluence of experiences,

Continued on Page 8

COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES CLASSICS



(L-R) Actors Sebastian Koch, Paula Beer, Tom Schilling, and director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck.

CALEB DESCHANEL/COURTESY OF SONY PICTURES CLASSICS



Aunt Elisabeth May (Saskia Rosendahl) and artist Kurt Barnert as a young boy (Cai Cohrs), in a scene from "Never Look Away."

FILM AND ART

'Never Look Away' From Truth and Beauty

An interview with German director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck

Continued from Page 7

both personal and political, internal and external, as well as one that sorts through those experiences to integrate and develop, and those to reject.

I asked Donnersmarck if he agrees with a statement that the protagonist's Aunt Elisabeth says early on in the film, "Everything that's true is beautiful."

"It is not directly an expression of my conviction." But what is important to him, Donnersmarck says, "is what the relationship between truth and beauty is."

Donnersmarck explained that many of the artists he knows are seeking either truth or beauty as a central aspect of their work, or as an ideal.

"But what is the relationship between truth and beauty?" Donnersmarck asks.

Lessons of Contemporary Art History

The film opens with ethereal Aunt Elisabeth taking her nephew Kurt, then a young boy with artistic aspirations, to see an exhibition of "Degenerate Art" in Dresden. Here in the first scene, a Nazi gallery docent educates the visiting public on the Nazi ideology of art, claiming it to be a protector of traditional art that "elevates the soul."

Trained as a classical painter myself, I can laud such a position, but here is the tragic irony: Hitler was responsible for murdering a huge percentage of the cultural elite in Europe, many talented traditional composers, artists, and musicians of this time. Nazi ideology clearly was not about the integrity of art and safeguarding humanity.

This is a fascinating albeit disturbing example of how political leaders and regimes use language that sounds noble to fuel their nefarious agendas, quite contrary to their slogans and promises.

The Nazis, as evidenced in this film, not only murdered the mentally and physically ill but also were vicious and evil in other, unthinkable ways. It would be a natural response, therefore, to believe and do the opposite of what they professed.

Unfortunately, this is a perfect example of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The baby here is a centuries-long history of traditional and beautiful art.

Darker Purposes for Art

After the Germans under the Third Reich lose the war, the Allied victors divide Germany into four zones of military occupation. Kurt (a fictionalized version of German artist Gerhard Richter), played by Tom Schilling, finds himself in art school in East Germany, under the Soviet communist philosophy. It seems here that the aesthetics are equally restrictive, as the only acceptable form of art is socialist realism—a form of propaganda for the state.

Georg Lukacs, the Hungarian cultural commissioner of the Communist International and founder of Western Marxism, founded the Frankfurt School. One of its tasks was to establish a "new cultural form" by abandoning traditional culture.

This new cultural form set about excluding art that sought to represent the divine. As Herbert Marcuse, a German socialist and a representative of the Frankfurt School wrote in "The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics": "Art both protests these [given social] relations, and at the same time transcends them. Thereby art subverts the dominant consciousness, the ordinary experience." That is, Marxist art sought to depict what was traditionally considered good as evil and evil as good.

In the film, when Kurt and his wife, Ellie (Paula Beer), escape to the West shortly before the Berlin Wall is built, he is accepted into a prestigious modern art school in Dusseldorf. In West Germany, he must now contend with reactive, perhaps equally warped ideas of art as he tries to discover his creative voice. He is continuously mocked for painting at all and told that "painting is dead," while his fellow students are preoccupied with piles of potatoes and slashing canvases.

This illustrates perfectly how modern art prioritizes self-expression over formal technique in the name of freedom. But art students, trained in most contemporary art schools today, have come to discover, conversely, that not knowing how to draw a figure, in fact, limits freedom, rendering one unable to truly express ideas and visions proficiently.

"The art establishment has turned away from the old curriculum which puts beauty and craft at the top of the agenda," says philosopher Roger Scruton, whose opinions have received enough attention that his quotes appear on several sites. Scruton, who teaches and lectures extensively on art and the importance of beauty in society, has written: "Art once made a cult of beauty. Now we have a cult of ugliness, instead. This has made art into an elaborate joke, one which by now has ceased to be funny."

It's hard to imagine that art in the tradition of da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Rembrandt would be mocked in art schools, but art has in fact become so polarized and reactionary that this mentality is indeed prevalent in art schools around the world.

It seems that the legacy of the tumultuous era from the 1930s to the '60s has contributed to a profound and lamentable, if understandable, confusion about art: If Nazis and communists are bad, and they say that classical art is good, then classical art must be bad, and anti-classical art (that is, modern art) must be good.

Transcendence

Through the character of Kurt, Donnersmarck

shows us that the most compelling art is transcendent. Kurt is unlike his university professor Verten (Oliver Masucci), who seems lost in a loop of his human experience and suffering. Verten's driven to work only with felt and animal fat as a direct result of a wartime trauma that he has never recovered from.

Kurt, on the other hand, in the context of this film, seems to finally be able to transform his skills and life experiences, both positive and painful, into a beautifully rendered image from life—his life—a homage to family, love, and the past.

Kurt's life, his childhood memories, losses, and strange karmic ties to his loving birth family, as well as to the nefarious relations he married into, produced, like sand in an oyster's shell, something magnificent. Seeing Kurt's final painting shows us that although we can trace factors that contributed to his creativity, there is something enigmatic, something undefinable, something perhaps divinely inspired in his process, which is the very thing the communists would denounce.

Paintings by Kurt Barnert, with professor Carl Seeband (Sebastian Koch, R) attending the gallery.



"When you do something good in art, or albeit in any field, something worthwhile, you have to understand that it is not you who created it. You channeled it; it was immanent somewhere. I think it's like that," said Donnersmarck of the creative process, echoing sentiments from Beethoven to Einstein, who have attributed their inspiration to some otherworldly source.

"If you get to the place where you are channeling it the right way, it hasn't got much to do with rational knowledge," Donnersmarck adds about this mysterious method that many artists have learned to trust. "Kurt uncovers some truths he can't explain rationally ... that feeling almost becomes infallible. It's not them, they know. Their antenna is set right to receive."

Donnersmarck, whose antenna seems set just right, acknowledges, "Truth is so rare to find that it gives you the same feeling as seeing beauty." Just like this film does.

Masha Savitz is a freelance writer and filmmaker in the Los Angeles area.

ALL PHOTOS BY JOHN PAINE

THEATER REVIEW

The Cost of GENIUS

DIANA BARTH

NEW YORK—Video producer Frank Beacham has based his play "Maverick" on experiences he had with the late Orson Welles in the latter days of the famed actor-director's life.

Beacham (played by Stephen Pilkington) had always admired Welles (George Demas), so when he had an opportunity to work with him, he jumped at the chance. Beacham had produced such programs as the vapid "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" but wanted to be affiliated with "high art."

Beacham, who considered Welles to be a major genius, was to find that he had to pay a big price for his association with genius. Welles was like a demanding child, ordering Beacham around like a slave, even though at the time Welles's status in the film industry was diminishing. Gone were the glory days of "Citizen Kane" and "The Magnificent Ambersons." Now, Welles was in the subservient position of having to plead for funding for his projects.

Here's where Beacham suited Welles's purposes. Beacham was a good fundraiser, and Welles's budgets were always over the top. Furthermore, Beacham had in his possession a new type of video camera: the Betacam. It was the first hand-held camera that could photograph and record simultaneously without the complicated paraphernalia of movie-set filming.

Welles hadn't done a big studio film in years. Besides, he was angry that the studio had butchered his "Touch of Evil." It was his hope that Beacham could help him produce a video version of "King Lear."

But the demanding Welles lost more associates than he won. Producer John Houseman (Pilkington), who had worked closely with Welles, now has artistic disagreements with him that finally lead to the end of their relationship.

A business associate (Alex Lin) of Beacham's walks out on him because Beacham could never specify a workable budget for the Wellesian projects, and she fears for her financial safety.

Most of the scenes in "Maverick" are brief and episodic, as in a film, but one longer episode illustrates Welles's overweening ego. He considers the wonder-



George Demas plays Orson Welles in "Maverick."

ful technical resources of UCLA's theater department for a possible project, but stiffly bows out when the university administrator insists that Welles must reciprocate by teaching a master class there.

For George Demas, "Maverick" is apparently a labor of love, inasmuch as he has co-written (with Frank Beacham) and co-directed it (with David Elliott) and plays the leading role. His appearance bears a close resemblance to the former star. He has the gait and deep voice, but lacks the hauteur of the original. Yet he gives an attractive performance.

Stephen Pilkington and Alex Lin give nice performances. The supporting cast includes Matt Mundy, Brian Parks, and Ted Peterson.

Produced by Pam Carter with the Cliphlight Theater, the play's style is stark, terse, and direct, like the text. The gray garb (by Jess Gersz) of all participants except the three leading players creates a pleasant monotone sense of a black-and-white film—Welles's métier.

The set by Tekla Monson makes terrific use of the large stage of the East Village's Connelly Theater, formerly an opera house, filling it on two levels with various bits of flatsam and jetsam of chairs, tables, and the proverbial work light. It creates a sense of either an abandoned theater stage or a movie set. The bright gold proscenium makes a vivid frame for the proceedings.

Not as exciting as it could have been, perhaps, "Maverick" offers a welcome glimpse into an earlier era of theatrical activity, and into the personality of a genius who burst like a flaming candle onto the scene and, sadly, flickered out at the end.

Welles died at only age 70, alone at his typewriter, according to Beacham.

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Orson Welles (George Demas) and producer Frank Beacham (Stephen Pilkington) to help him film "King Lear."

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TRUTH AND TRADITION



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.

'Fighting With My Family':

Dwayne Johnson Knows WWE Wrestling, Does America?

MARK JACKSON

My first job out of college was as a counselor in a group home for "emotionally disturbed" teens, but basically kids from broken homes.

Actually, the kids were popular in school: good-looking, mean girls and bullies who terrorized teachers, and terrorized the counselors the minute we picked them up in the group-home van that they would rather die than get caught being seen in. Police were at the group home regularly; one counselor rolled all the way down the hill from the home into the street, with one kid, fighting off a knife attack.

Anyway, I'm not here to talk about angry, depressed teens but about World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)—professional wrestling. We had one kid, Patrick, who came from a mountain-people family. When we picked him up the first time, one of his nine big brothers was throwing an ax into a tree from 20 paces, in the front yard. Straight out of Southern Appalachia, except in Sloatsburg, New York.

Huge wrestling fans, Patrick's kin. I

'Fighting With My Family'

Director
Stephen Merchant

Starring
Dwayne Johnson, Vince Vaughn, Florence Pugh, Jack Lowden, Lena Headey, Nick Frost

Running Time
1 hour, 48 minutes

Rated
PG

Release Date
Feb. 22

★★★★★

made the mistake one day of saying, "You know that's all fake, right?" Oh my goodness—the invective shower. It went on for days. I had violated Patrick's religious belief system. He was only 13, but his brothers ranged up into their mid-'30s, and they were all true believers in the WWE.

And so this particular experience afforded me a deep insight into American culture: A giant portion of the American population—and, indeed, the rest of the world—believes professional wrestling is very real indeed.

And I used to have no respect for it, but I've learned over the years that while a large portion of professional wrestling is showbiz, and (as here described by former superstar, pro-wrestler Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson) "soap opera in spandex," it is, nonetheless, incredibly dangerous.

It calls for a high degree of skill-in-mayhem and a particular high-octane, head-banging personality with a wild streak bordering on insanity. The stunts: jumping off 30-foot cages and landing on chairs and destroying them (and possibly your rotator cuff) and such.

Dwayne Johnson has never been better, giving, maybe for the first time, a real sense of who he is.

The Stage Is Now Set

"Wrestling With My Family" is the true tale (based on a 2012 documentary) of a British family of head-bangers, for whom wrestling is the family business, and how their little girl has a wrestler's Hero's Journey: She goes to America, meets "The Rock." There, she gets to ply her trade on a world-class stage, and in doing so (per the vocabulary of the Hero's Journey), brings gold back to the village compound, by beating star AJ Lee and winning the Divas Championship belt.

In a particularly funny scene, Ricky conducts an interview and negotiates a contract: Is the wrestler applying for the job willing to take a garbage-can lid to the face? Good! Duly noted. Will he take a bowling ball to his, er, nether region? (All of these "wrestling moves" are applied to the interviewee during the interview.) Long pause... weak nod of acquiescence. "Excellent! We'll let you know." Son Zak later demonstrates being body-slammed onto a thumbtack-strewn mat. That's actually a thing.

It's Like a Family-Run Circus

Ricky lives for wrestling, and so does his wife Julia (Lena Headey), son Zak (Jack Lowden), and daughter Saraya (Florence Pugh). They promote wrestling, wrestle themselves, and Zak runs a gym that provides an outlet for the local goth-clad, death-metal-loving kids in the neighborhood who need an outlet for their prodigious energy. Ricky's second son is in the slammer.

Zak and Saraya made WWE Championship belts out of cardboard when they were little, and eventually they go try out for a shot at the big time. Talent scout and WWE coach Hutch (Vince Vaughn) picks Saraya to relocate to Florida and join his WWE-pipeline training camp.

I'd advise not going into this movie thinking that it's just a comedy. It's a real-life story, and when Zak, who wanted the WWE-in-the-sky dream more than his sister, doesn't get to go, his devastation is very real, not to mention his jealousy.

Saraya picks the stage name Paige, and while she grew up with wrestling and considers herself the real deal, she's not prepared for the ultraserious American approach to any venue connected to a world-class platform. Wrestling boot camp is brutal, and her pudgy self is competing with fitness models, model-models, and cheerleaders who, while ditz in appearance, are anything but when it comes to competing.

Meanwhile Zak's status as an also-ran dropkicks him straight into deep depression, and he and his girlfriend are pregnant. Luckily, Zak's got a Hero's Journey character arc of his own: "Those can't do-teach." And while that's an oft-maligned phrase and not glam, it's just as necessary.

Vince Vaughn plays his stock-in-trade, funnily acerbic cynic, but underneath, informing his character's hard-bittenness, is a compassion born of having walked the talk, and lost.

Dwayne Johnson has never been better, giving, maybe for the first time, a real sense of who he is. As they say in most art forms—write, act, etc., what you know. The Rock knows WWE wrestling.

Patrick at the group home didn't know wrestling, but that was 36 years ago. I wonder how well America knows wrestling now, especially now that the WWE has to compete with MMA and the UFC (mixed martial arts and the Ultimate Fighting Championship)? It's alive and well and there's room for everybody, because America still loves itself some soap opera in spandex. And because, as this movie aptly demonstrates—professional wrestling is a way of life.

Zak Knight (Jack Lowden, L) and sister Paige (Florence Pugh) are both aspiring wrestlers.



Jack Lowden, Florence Pugh, and Dwayne Johnson in "Fighting With My Family."

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ARTIST PROFILE

A Higher Calling

Shen Yun principal dancer Piotr Huang



Through years of single-minded discipline, Piotr Huang has forged himself into one of the world's best classical Chinese dancers.

IRENE LUO

Majestic, self-disciplined, and stunningly refined—Piotr Huang's dancing leaves audiences breathless. Even when performing incredibly challenging leaps and flips, he maintains perfect control of every inch of his body, both in the air and when he lands soundlessly back onto the floor.

Through years of intense concentration and ceaselessly demanding more of himself, Huang has forged himself into one of the world's best classical Chinese dancers, touring the globe as a principal dancer for Shen Yun Performing Arts. His every movement emanates dignity, a righteous energy that makes him stand apart from the crowd.

When Huang first started dancing, it was just something he enjoyed, but as he delved deeper, he discovered a universe of boundless meaning rooted in five millennia of Chinese civilization. Even more so than by his passion for dance, Huang is now motivated by a sense of duty, a higher calling to bring the exquisite virtues and spiritual wisdom of ancient China to global audiences.

Perseverance

Born and raised in Poland as the son of Chinese immigrants, Huang flew across the Atlantic Ocean eight years ago to study classical Chinese dance at the prestigious Fei Tian Academy of the Arts in New York, which trains many of Shen Yun's dancers.

Back then, Huang enjoyed dance, but he was far from flexible; he could barely even touch his toes. Etched in his memory are the times he had to practice leg splits, with two other boys holding his legs in place for as long as ten minutes. While most students were instructed to complete this agonizing stretching exercise once or twice a day, Huang had to endure it three times every day. It was so excruciating that he tried to evade training by hiding in his dorm, only to be lectured by his teacher.

Compounded with the training was his homesickness. Huang missed his friends and his old life in Poland. Every day, he wanted to tell his parents he wanted to quit and return home.

But while at Fei Tian, he was often given unique and precious opportunities to observe Shen Yun's dancers in rehearsals. "Every time I finished watching them, I felt deeply moved," he recalls. "Shen Yun's performances gave me a joy I cannot describe. At the time, I thought to myself: I also want to become one of them."

A Vast Culture

As Huang's understanding of dance deepened, he soon realized that "the most difficult thing isn't



COURTESY OF SHEN YUN PERFORMING ARTS

Piotr Huang performs in "Outlaw of Mt. Liang," a dance depicting the story of Lin Chong, a respected gentleman and master of martial arts who is forced into exile by a nefarious official.

what's on the surface, like the techniques." Instead, it was grasping and evoking the profound inner meaning of a dance. At the core of classical Chinese dance is the concept of bearing, when you channel your innermost spirit into all your movements. It's the soul of the art, the essential ingredient that transforms movement into dance.

"As part of the new generations who grew up in the West, we don't have that deep of an understanding of Chinese culture. So our dancing is relatively straightforward. The inner meaning is not as profound. When you understand the habits or values of people from ancient China, the feelings evoked by your dancing are not the same," Huang says.

Although Huang is ethnically Chinese, he initially spoke patchy Chinese and knew little about the essence of Chinese culture. So at Fei Tian, he honed his Chinese and immersed himself in the worldview of sages like Confucius who believed in virtuous conduct and self-cultivation. The more he studied, the deeper his love grew both for his cultural heritage and for dance. Soon he was selected to tour in praeitium with Shen Yun, beginning a brilliant new chapter in his life.

For each historical figure he plays in Shen Yun's performances, Huang pores over the character's life story and his written works to understand every stage of the character's life. He contemplates the character's decisions in life and then questions himself: Under similar circumstances, how would I behave? If I would make different choices, why did he choose differently?

For NTD Television's 6th International Classical Chinese Dance Competition, Huang played Li Bai, one of China's most beloved poets. To perfect the character, he read dozens of Li Bai's poems. Under the moonlight, he'd go for a stroll, listening to the music he picked for the dance and trying to experience Li Bai's feelings.

"When you're dancing, you have to forget yourself. If you bring your own thinking, it will surely interfere with the character," Huang says. For his impeccable interpretation of Li Bai, Huang was awarded the gold prize in the adult division.

When asked which Chinese historical figure inspires him the most, Huang replies: "There are simply too many. Too many." A figure currently on his mind is the Duke of Zhou, who acted as regent for his young nephew, King Cheng. "He could have stolen the throne, but he didn't. He just kept on helping [King Cheng] responsibly and diligently. At the time, the effort he put in for the country and the people—he truly put himself in the most humble position," Huang says.

Huang hopes to bring back such traditional values like benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and honesty. Beliefs in moral and spiritual elevation once permeated all spheres of Chinese society, but in the past century, they have been rejected and defiled by the communist government in China—where Shen Yun is banned. As part of Shen Yun, Huang is rekindling the lost wisdom of the ancients, who celebrated virtue and endlessly strove to cultivate their character.

"I came to understand Shen Yun was not only bringing joy to audiences. At the same time, it was reviving traditional Chinese culture," he says. This is what fuels Huang as he leads over a hundred tightly packed performances every year, always with the same dedication as if every show was his first.

"We're not doing this for ourselves, so our motivation is different," Huang says.

An Elevated Art

To truly move audiences, Huang knows that he can't simply act the part. Both onstage and off, he has to embody the moral values Shen Yun presents.

Like many of Shen Yun's artists, Huang is guided by the ancient Chinese spiritual discipline of Falun Dafa. Through abiding by the practice's tenets of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance, Huang becomes a better, more considerate person. "When conflicts arise, we can calmly deal with them through cultivating ourselves," he says.

When he was young, Huang frequently clashed with his older brother and was inconsiderate toward his parents. Falun Dafa's principles have helped him become a kinder brother and more filial son, who now frequently dials home to check in with his parents.

This spirit of kindness and thoughtfulness permeates every aspect of Shen Yun. When Shen Yun dancers have fleeting seconds to switch costumes in the dimly lit backstage area, Huang says it's not a matter of taking care of yourself and making sure you're dressed. Instead, everyone helps each other, zipping up costumes and distributing props.

Huang's eight years of immersion in performing classical Chinese dance have enriched his life in ways far beyond what he could have imagined when he first started dancing. "The most joyous part," he says, is the time he spends every day with his fellow dancers. "Now, of course, they're my brothers," Huang says. "When someone walks over from afar, just from hearing the sound of his footsteps, I can tell who it is."

A veteran dancer now of classical Chinese dance, Huang has become a team leader tasked with helping the newer male dancers. "Helping the newer dancers is like looking at my old self. I also went through all this before, and veteran dancers helped me. While helping them, I'm also improving myself," he says. "I will see their shortcomings, and I can evaluate myself, like looking at a mirror."

Instead of forcing them to change or improve, he inspires with his example. "The easiest way is to do well yourself, so they can see these older brothers, how they behave," he says.

Someday, Huang hopes to become a professional dance teacher, to guide aspiring children into the magnificent world of classical Chinese dance. An art of not only technical mastery but also ineffable meaning, classical Chinese dance has imbued Huang's life with purpose.

As he tours with Shen Yun, he revels in each opportunity to bring Shen Yun's splendor to audiences around the globe and uplift them with a message of hope, goodness, and spiritual elevation.

"I hope I can travel on this path for as long as I can, while bringing the best for the audience and those around me," Huang says.

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Dwayne Johnson (L) as himself and Hutch (Vince Vaughn) in "Fighting With My Family."



Zak Knight (Jack Lowden, L) and sister Paige (Florence Pugh) are both aspiring wrestlers.

ESSENCE OF CHINA



Ancient Chinese Stories What's Inside Counts

ANONYMOUS

During the Ming Dynasty, Yu Liangchen and his peers created a community where members did good deeds and were forbidden to kill, visit prostitutes, curse, or talk behind others' backs.

Yu ran this community for many years, yet he encountered misfortunes, one after another.

Yu took the imperial examinations seven times but never passed.

He and his wife had nine children—five boys and four girls—but four of the boys and three of the girls died early. The surviving boy was very smart and had two birthmarks on the sole of his left foot, and the couple loved him dearly. Sadly, at age 6, he disappeared while playing outside. Yu's wife wept over the loss of her children and eventually became blind.

In addition, the family was by this time living in poverty.

Yu wondered why he was punished with such a horrible fate when he'd never committed any wrongdoing.

An Unexpected Visitor

One evening, when Yu was 47, he heard a knock at the door. An old man was outside. After Yu invited him inside, the elderly gentleman explained that he had come to visit because he knew Yu's family was feeling low.

Yu noticed that the man's manner of speaking was not that of an ordinary mortal, so he treated him with deep respect. He told his guest that he studied hard and did good deeds his entire life but still had a horrible life.

"I have known about your family for a long time," said the guest. "You have

too many evil thoughts, you complain and pursue fame, and you dishonored the Jade Emperor. I'm afraid even more punishment awaits you."

Stunned, Yu asked, "I know that a person's good and evil deeds are all recorded in detail. I vowed to do good for others and controlled my behavior. How have I been pursuing fame?"

"You say you don't kill, but you constantly cook crabs and lobsters in your kitchen. You say you watch your words, but you're always sarcastic, angering many gods. You say you don't use prostitutes, but your heart moves when you see beautiful women," answered the old man.

"It's even worse that you claim you're dedicated to doing good deeds. The Jade Emperor sent a messenger to check your records, and you've not done one single good deed in many years.

"On the contrary, your thoughts are filled with greed, lust, and jealousy. You elevate yourself through belittling others. You want revenge whenever you think of the past. With a mind this malicious, you can't escape disaster. How dare you pray for blessings?" continued the guest.

"Master, you know all about me. You must be an immortal! Please save me!" cried Yu, panic-stricken.

The old man advised: "I hope you can abandon greed, lust, jealousy, and various desires. Don't pursue fame and self-interest. Then you will be rewarded with goodness." He then disappeared.

Rewarded With Goodness

The next day, Yu prayed to heaven and swore to change. Determined to elimi-



Ming Dynasty portrait of a Chinese official.

nate all improper thoughts, he gave himself a Taoist name: "Empty Thought."

From then on, he paid attention to every thought and action. He saw to it that all of his deeds, whether big or small, effectively benefited others. Whenever he had the chance, he told people about the principles of karmic retribution.

At age 50, Yu was hired to tutor the son of Zhang Juzheng, the prime minister of Emperor Wanli. Yu and his family moved to the capital, and Yu passed the imperial exams the following year.

One day Yu went to visit the eunuch Yang Gong and met Yang's five adopted sons. One of them—a 16-year-old—looked familiar to Yu. Yu learned that he was born in Yu's own hometown, Jiangling, but was separated from his family when he accidentally boarded a grain boat as a child.

Yu asked the boy to take off his left shoe. When he saw two birthmarks on the sole, Yu exclaimed, "You're my son!"

The shocked eunuch was happy for them and immediately sent the boy to Yu's residence. Yu rushed to tell his wife the good news. She cried so bitterly that her eyes bled. Her son held her face with his hands and kissed her eyes. Suddenly, her vision returned.

Yu was overcome with both grief and joy. He no longer wanted to be a high-ranking official and asked to return to his hometown. Admiring Yu's moral character, Zhang approved his request and sent him a generous gift.

Back home, Yu worked even harder for others' benefit. His son married and had seven children, who carried on their grandfather's tradition. Influenced by them, people truly believed that karmic retribution is real.

Translated by Dora Li into English, this story is reprinted with permission from the book "Treasured Tales of China," Vol. 1, available on Amazon.



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