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The Passion and the Beauty
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CLASSICAL MUSIC

More Than Just COSTLY CANARIES



VICTORIA CADISCH

What the arias on the disc will show is how extraordinary and versatile each singer was.

ROBERT HUGILL

This year's London Handel Festival focused on the theme "Handel's Divas"; yet the word "diva," in fact, was not used about singers during Handel's day, and it has come to have rather negative connotations.

As part of the festival, international opera conductor, prizewinning harpsichordist, and early music specialist Bridget Cunningham and her company specializing in Baroque music, London Early Opera, performed on April 11 with a concert titled "Costly Canaries: Mr. Handel's Search for Superstars."

A regular at the festival, Cunningham hoped her concert would debunk some of the myths surrounding Handel's divas, such as that of Handel threatening to throw Francesca Cuzzoni out of the window when the soprano refused to sing an aria he had written.

In fact, the act of throwing someone out of a window was the punishment for murderers in parts of Germany, and Handel was merely being witty. Cuzzoni did sing the aria, and it even became something of a theme tune for her; she sang it for 30 years.

Cunningham set up London Early Opera as a research-led performing company, and for her the word and deed go hand in hand. As a research-led performer and conductor, her concerts and CDs with London Early Opera always explore the rich vein of music's background.

She hunts for the music herself in libraries because she believes it's important to go to the original manuscripts. After a time, she says, she's begun to recognize patterns in composers' writings.

I met up with her before the concert to chat about her London Early Opera's festival appearance as well as future plans for more of Handel's divas.

'Costly Canaries'

Cunningham's "Costly Canaries" concert commemorated the 300th anniversary of the founding of Handel's Royal Academy of Music, one of the most ambitious opera companies of the 18th century. For the venture, Handel recruited singers from operatic centers in Italy and Dresden, Germany, and they turned out to be rather more expensive than the parallel singers in Britain, thus giving the Academy a financial headache.

"Costly Canaries" revealed the sad decline of the Academy because of escalating costs as well as other issues. Then Handel and the impresario John James Heidegger formed the second Royal Academy of Music, and Handel recruited from Italy again.

(Left) International opera conductor, prizewinning harpsichordist, and early music specialist Bridget Cunningham conducting.

(Bottom right) Portrait of Anna Maria Strada, circa 1732, by John Verelst.

(Bottom left) Mezzosoprano portrait of Anastasia Robinson by John Faber the Younger, after the 1723 oil painting by John Vanderbank.



PUBLIC DOMAIN



PUBLIC DOMAIN



PUBLIC DOMAIN

(Left) Portrait of Faustina Bordoni by Rosalba Carriera.

(Bottom) A caricature of a performance of Handel's opera "Flavio," featuring the diva Francesca Cuzzoni in the center.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

The concert included images and a narration from Lars Tharp, a former director of the Foundling Museum, who had narrated Cunningham's concert at the festival in 2018.

The concert introduced three of Handel's divas, who were played by three singers. Handel met Margherita Durastanti during his Italian sojourn (1707-1710), and she was one of the first singers he recruited for London. Her arias were sung by mezzo-soprano Hannah Poulson, who is studying at the current Royal Academy of Music (RAM). (The current RAM and Handel's original have no connection.)

Anastasia Robinson was the only one of Handel's opera singers who was English. She was also Catholic, which meant that she was friendly with the Italian singers. Her arias were sung by mezzo-soprano Marie Elliott.

The last of Handel's divas portrayed in the concert was soprano Anna Strada del Po, who was the star of Handel's second Royal Academy of Music and for whom Handel wrote the title role of "Alcina." She was played by Anna Gorbachyova-Ogilvie, a finalist in the London Handel Singing Competition.

Other events touched on in the concert included the death of King George I and the coronation of King George II. Cunningham made use of important research by Professor Colin Timms on the funeral of King George I, who died abroad and did not have a British state funeral. It appears that Agostino Steffani's "Stabat Mater" was sung at the funeral service. For this reason, a movement from this work was included in the concert, as was Handel's revision to the march from his opera "Riccardo Primo," which was used for the coronation of George II.

The narrative of the concert continued with Handel's move to the theater at Covent Garden, and then his move away from Italian opera and into oratorio. Cunningham aimed to show Handel as a master of reinvention.

The Italian soprano Anna Strada del Po was one of the first of Handel's Italian singers to perform oratorio. But she also sang major roles in Handel's Italian opera and the title roles in the oratorios "Deborah" and "Athalia," thus breaking boundaries between genres.

And Anastasia Robinson broke boundaries too when, as an English singer, she appeared onstage with Italian singers. Opera singers in England were almost always Italian, but Robinson broke the mold. So Cunningham regards it as important that modern-day singers perform both Handel opera and oratorio, whatever their background.

Singing Handel, she believes, is a good foundation for any young singer. "If you can sing Handel, you can sing anything," she said.

A New Album

Cunningham was always interested in Handel; when she studied the harpsichord, she fell in love with his harpsichord suites and his arias. She quotes Beethoven, referring to Handel as the greatest composer to have ever lived. Handel's music connects with people, partly through the remarkable range of emotions that he portrays.

Cunningham and London Early Opera will release a new disc in July, a further installment of their Handel series on Signum Classics. This new one is a double CD and will include 15 world premiere recordings. Titled "Handel's Queens," it will feature music associated with Handel's two divas Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni. But rather than focusing on the singers' period in London, the recording will look at their whole

lives, from their early careers in Italy to their later, post-London activities.

Cunningham aims to set the record straight about the two and their infamous London fight, which never happened. In actuality, Cuzzoni and Bordoni had performed together before in Italy, where it was quite common to have two divas performing in an opera. The London press made up the story of the rivalry.

What the arias on the disc will show is how extraordinary and versatile each singer was. While each singer had distinctive vocal characteristics, with Handel writing specific arias for each, the repertoire on the disc shows that each must have been quite versatile. Mary Bevan will sing the Bordoni arias, while Lucy Crowe will sing the Cuzzoni ones.

Of course, we can never know quite what Handel's original singers sounded like, but Cunningham and her performers do their best to re-create their sounds by using the era's singing treatises to inform their decisions.

And, Cunningham believes that singers had a much greater armory in the 18th century than was believed by 20th-century scholars; the singers likely used portamento and vibrato, for example. The soprano Faustina Bordoni was known for her martellati (strongly accented notes, from the Italian word for hammer) and granite-like tone!

Of course, the original venues would have affected the music as well. For instance, Italian churches, with a prevalence of marble, would have had a very different resonance from German ones made with a great deal of wood.

As with Cunningham's previous discs in the series, significant booklet notes give full details on the history of the singers and the music.

In the Future

Further ahead, Cunningham has plans for another solo harpsichord disc.

And then, London Early Opera will be continuing its Handel travel series. Having released "Handel in Italy," "Handel in London," "Handel at Vauxhall," and "Handel in Ireland," the company will be returning to Ireland for a second volume.

It was when Cunningham researched Handel's Irish visit that her appreciation of the composer deepened. He gave the premiere of "Messiah" at a time when oratorio was going out of fashion in London. And, just before the visit, there had been a devastating frost in Ireland in 1739-40. Handel arranged that one of his concerts would benefit people in debtors' prison.

Since that first research on Ireland—issued under a different label and re-released on Signum to appear later in the series—Cunningham has created her travel series of CDs looking at Handel's different musical voyages to create snapshots of his life.

And, of course, London Early Opera and Cunningham plan to perform again at next year's London Handel Festival.

Robert Hugill is a composer, lecturer, journalist, and classical music blogger. He runs the classical music blog Planet Hugill, writes for the Opera Today website, and Opera Today and Opera magazines. He lectures and gives pre-concert talks on opera and classical music in London. As a composer, his disc of songs "Quickening" was issued by Navona Records in 2017. This article, edited for clarity and brevity, is reprinted with permission from Planet Hugill.

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SACRED MUSIC

THE PASSION AND THE BEAUTY

Why Easter Music Will Send a Shiver up Your Spine

THOMAS BREEZE

Easter is one of those times of year when even the most irregular churchgoers can feel impelled to don their Sunday best and attend a service. This joyful highpoint of the Christian calendar—and the darker-toned days of the Passion that precede it—may not nowadays have quite the same all-pervading presence in the secular consciousness as Christmas. But this time of year has captured the imagination of composers through the ages, not least because the Church was one of the few steady employment options available for composers for centuries. The result has been some of the best-loved, most enduring, and most ethereally transcendent pieces in the choral repertoire.

For many lovers of choral music, Johann Sebastian Bach is the go-to composer at any time of year. But at Easter, his two settings of the Passion story—as told by St. Matthew and St. John—are monumental presences in any discussion of great Easter repertoire. A devout Lutheran who never had the globetrotting career or musical superstardom of his exact contemporary, Handel, Bach spent almost his entire career in the service of the Church.

One of his many commitments while Kapellmeister (master of music) in Leipzig was to compose a weekly cantata to be performed in church. On Good Friday, this cantata became a setting of the Easter story running to some 2 1/2 hours. It can only be imagined how long the actual service was that contained this masterpiece, given that a sermon would originally have been preached in the interval between the two parts.

In keeping with the ideals of Lutheranism, the settings' libretti are written in the language of the people (German, in this case) and in earthy, direct terms, rather than florid and inaccessible phrases. Bach was ensuring that even the ordinary person could fully understand and experience this most dramatic of stories. The "St. Matthew" has a reflective, grand character, while the

"St. John" is more dramatic and anguished, leaving the listener to muse that Bach would have made an operatic composer to rival his countryman Handel, had his life taken a very different turn.

George Frideric Handel, of course, provided his own glorious tribute to the Easter season in the second and third parts of the "Messiah," his most famous oratorio premiered in 1742. Strangely, the "Messiah" is now most often heard in the run-up to Christmas, and yet the majority of the work deals with the events of the Passion and Easter.

By the 1740s, Handel's glittering career as an operatic composer was waning,

with public taste moving away from these enormously expensive spectacles. Ever the impresario, Handel moved with the times and began to write oratorio.

The "Messiah" was a huge success from the start, and can be relied upon to this day to pack concert venues, though perhaps not to the extent of the premiere performance. On April 13, 1742, when the great and the good of Dublin gathered to hear the premiere of Handel's masterpiece, concern about the capacity of the hall to meet demand was such that male patrons were requested to attend minus their swords, and their female companions to forgo the customary hoops in their dresses. This allowed an extra 100 audience members to squeeze through the doors.

Golden Age

For a golden age of religious composition in England, we need to turn back to the turbulent Elizabethan period, when religious affiliation became quite literally a matter of life and death. Thomas Tallis, composer of the famous 40-part motet "Spem in Alium," set the "Lamentations of Jeremiah" not for the sort of public performance that Bach's works enjoyed, but for the private devotions of recusant Catholics. This gives the rich polyphony, with its suspensions and dissonances, an emotional depth and significance even beyond that provided by the liturgical season.

At the center of the Easter story, with Jesus himself, is Mary, and the mother's anguish expressed in the 13th-century words of the "Stabat Mater" have inspired many composers. How to choose between the multitude of settings that span hundreds of years? While Vivaldi eschews the Italianate fireworks for which his many concertos have made him justly famous, and presents a stripped-down

setting for solo alto and strings, the Polish composer Karol Szymanowski gives us a six-movement, half-hour work for soloists, choir, and full orchestra that is full of earthiness and color.

Fruits of Guilt

For those music lovers who prefer to depart from the well-traveled routes and experience some less well-known Eastertide offerings, there are a couple of pieces that would reward the lover of fascinating music stories.

Carlo Gesualdo is hardly a household name as a composer, but his music tends to stay with the listener once discovered—the bizarre part-writing and tortured dissonances can lead the unwary to believe they are listening to 20th-century atonalism, but Gesualdo was in fact a prince who lived from 1566 to 1613. The source of his avant-garde compositional moments was a lifelong sense of guilt and torment at brutally murdering his wife and her lover on catching them in the act of adultery.

As a prince, he was able to evade justice for his crime, but the effect on his mind is, supposedly, the reason for the astonishing harmonic twists and leaps in his music. His "Tristis est Anima Mea" is a fine example of his tormented style dovetailing perfectly with the darker moods of Holy Week.

Mystery of Mozart and the Miserere

Gregorio Allegri's setting of Psalm 51, "Miserere Mei Deus," is instantly recognizable to most listeners, with its soprano soloist repeatedly soaring to a spine-tingling top C—all the more effective for the ethereal sound reverberating from the roof of the Sistine Chapel, the venue for which it was originally written, perhaps in 1638.

As befits a work written for such an exclusive setting, plenty of mysteries and legends surround the work, not least the story that its dissemination beyond the Vatican was banned on pain of excommunication (though this was probably just a rumor put around to discourage any attempts). The embargo was finally broken—so the story goes—by the 14-year-old Mozart who, on hearing the piece performed, went forth from the hallowed chapel and promptly wrote it down from memory. The fact that the piece consists of a number of repetitions of the same musical material does perhaps reduce the genius value of this particular feat a little.

However, the most interesting tale is how the famous top-C moment found its way into the piece in the first place, through a bizarre series of errors once the piece had made its way "into the wild."

Perhaps the many musical offerings by composers throughout the centuries to the Easter story provide us with a valuable antidote to the teetering piles of chocolate that greet us at every turn in the high street at this time of year. The list above, while far from exhaustive, should provide a more nutritious Easter experience, for the soul at least.

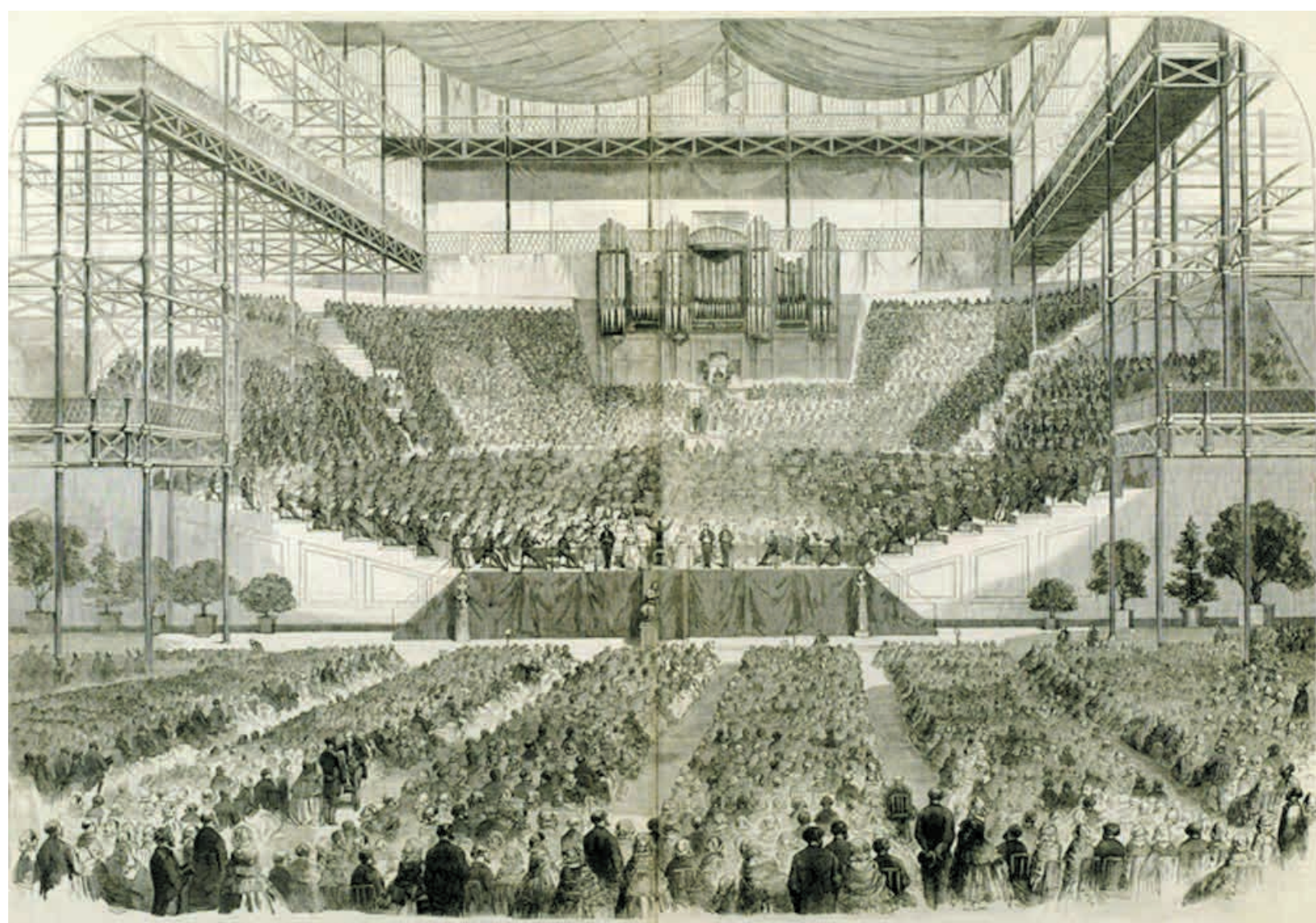
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For many lovers of choral music, Johann Sebastian Bach is the go-to composer at any time of year.



ALL PHOTOS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN



(Top left) The first page of a handwritten manuscript of the "St. John's Passion," circa 1738, by Johann Sebastian Bach.

(Left) In Britain, a "Great Handel Festival" was held at the Crystal Palace, performing the "Messiah" and other Handel oratorios, with a chorus of 2,000 singers and an orchestra of 500. Illustrated London News.

(Above) Another tribute to the Easter story: Michelangelo's "Pietà" in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.

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LEST WE FORGET

What Makes Great Children's Literature Great

SUSANNAH PEARCE

When it comes to reading great children's literature, I'm making up for lost time. I was not a voracious reader as a child, and my parents, though interested in our education, left it up to the schools that my siblings and I attended. They read to us at home when we were younger, but it did not endure as we became more active outside. We enjoyed the happy luxury of being young at a time when children could safely roam the countryside with friends for hours.

I am now a parent, homeschooling my own daughter, and enjoying the equally happy luxury of introducing her—and myself—to many great works of children's literature. Led by other parents who have trodden the path before me, I have the pleasure and responsibility of curating my child's literary world. And it is an immense and delightful world.

Children's literature may be written off at first glance as not serious literature. It resides in the more colorful and potentially sticky section of libraries, which adults have outgrown. But, it only takes a moment of reflection to realize there is more to it than its entertainment value or ability to lull a toddler to sleep.

What Makes It Literature?

The word "literature" can refer to anything from leaflets and printed matter to all the works written for others to read. Among its definitions, Webster includes, "Writings in prose or verse, especially: writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest." I think we can all agree on this. Mainly, I'm thinking about novels here.

Likewise, when I think of literature for children, I think primarily of longer fiction and exclude those shorter books that are meant for reading through in one sitting. However, there are always exceptions, as we shall see.

What Makes It Great?

Literature, to be great, whether written for juvenile readers or for adults, must be well-constructed. The writing must be good, not just technically but also crafted with a clarity of expression that elicits image, action, and emotion in the mind of the reader. It must be enjoyable to read and continue to please upon repeated readings.

A truly great work of literary art will draw the reader into the world of the story, rather than leaving him as an observer. The story involves a complexity that makes this world and its inhabitants believable and multidimensional. This world must reveal organic unity so that it not only makes logical sense but also involves multiple layers, nuance, and even surprise.

It will invite the reader to grapple with universal human problems, ideas, feelings, and experiences. Ultimately, great literature (and great art of any kind) puts the reader in contact with the good, the true, and the beautiful, even if it has to be teased out through contemplation.

What Makes It Children's?

This may seem obvious because

we generally know when a work is for children, as opposed to adults. But when you try to put a finger on it, you'll find there's more to it than just bright pictures or happy tales about kids. Just as I did, all the book-loving parents I consulted had to make a second attempt at this distinction. Much discussion helped us focus on those things that truly matter in distinguishing a work as children's, versus general literature.

It is often the case that a book written for children will have children as the protagonists. But, they may also be animals, as in "Charlotte's Web," "Black Beauty," or "Wind in the Willows." Characters might also include mythical creatures, as is the case in "The Chronicles of Narnia." What is crucial is that human adults are not the primary actors and the story world is not the real-life world of adult concerns.

I might mention, as contrast, a book in which the protagonist is a child, but which is decidedly not a work of children's literature: Charles Dickens's "Oliver Twist." The point of view is that of the boy, Oliver, but the world is one of adult issues.

Another thing that distinguishes children's literature from adults' is that, while it must contain enough complexity to be interesting, it will be scaled down to the developmental level of the target audience without being trite. The themes should never be about matters inappropriate for children. The vocabulary may be more accessible to younger readers. This is somewhat relative, however, as may be noticed when older children's classics are considered alongside even adult books of today!

While a great work will usually bring about growth in the young reader, those that become favorites are neither pedantic nor didactic. The author gets down to eye level with the child reader. What child would wish to open a book just to find another adult telling them what he must do and think? Children want to have adventures, contemplate great thoughts, and yes, be entertained—just as adults do. These are all possible in a truly good children's book.

Can Children's Literature Be Great?

The greatness of some children's

books is apparent at the time of publication, but it is only confirmed over time. As the reader grows older, the book still speaks to her. It stands up to many readings (a mercy when parents are called on to read it again and again to children), remaining fresh and enjoyable each time. The title will remain beloved over many generations. A book that contemplates perennial human issues will always speak to us.

Some works of children's fiction that have remained universally beloved over time include Louisa May Alcott's "Little Women," "The Little House" books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, "The Jungle Book" and "Captains Courageous" by Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island," J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit," and Hans Christian Andersen's stories. The list could go on and on. And on.

Though I originally limited my definition of children's literature to novels, several books and authors demanded exception. A.A. Milne's "Winnie the Pooh" is truly a poetic, philosophical work that touches even adults with wonder. Robert McCloskey combined his illustrations and stories in picture books ("Blueberries for Sal," "One Morning in Maine," and others) that tenderly capture very real moments of childhood and seal them in the hearts of the children and adults who have read these books.

Another anomaly among great children's books is the series of "Freddy the Pig" books by Walter R. Brooks. In addition to people, the characters include talking animals. The writing is masterful. The plots are dizzyingly complex. The missing element is that there is a complete lack of grappling with big ideas. Yet, I can't bring myself to drop them from the list. What they lack in philosophy, they make up for in comic genius. Brooks is the P.G. Wodehouse of children's literature.

Time Will Tell

Not every book that makes a splash at the time of publication will endure. I consulted the list of all Newbery Medal winners (from the first in 1922) and noted that I was not familiar with the majority. They may have spoken to the voting committee of their time, but they failed to remain in the hearts of readers over the long haul.

A better indication of the best children's books is parents who grew up with them and are looking forward to reading them to their children, not only to share them with the child but also to enjoy them again themselves. Great books never really get old and, in fact, can be enjoyed by adults, even without sharing them with children.

The parents I canvassed on this question described those books they would consider great, or classics, using phrases such as "perennially interesting," "made a big impact,"

Cover of the novel *Black Beauty*, first edition 1877, published by London: Jarrold and Sons.



"stood the test of time," and "get more from it with each reading." It is much the same with adult classics, but all the more remarkable that they can be both formative for a child and also meaningful to an adult.

Popularity Isn't Always Reliable

There are some books that endure and are enjoyed readily by children for several generations but are not particularly great. These often come in long series of non-sequential books, like Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, The Boxcar Children mysteries, or the Famous Five series.

The writing is simply not the stuff of greatness. They are not bad, but they are merely formulaic entertainment. A fun read. They don't hold up because of their greatness, but because children with voracious reading appetites must be fed books

continually!

Other good books sometimes fall into neglect as well. They may go out of fashion for a time and become hard to find. I am astonished by the number of wonderful books I have discovered through friends that I had never heard of! The Swallows and Amazons series is an example. First published in England in 1930, it has remained a favorite in the UK but did not have as big an impact in the United States until recently.

The Future of Great Children's Literature

There is no reason to worry that the output of truly great children's literature will come to an end. There are many promising new authors whose books meet the qualifications and are gaining a following among children and their parents. Kate DiCamillo, as an example, has been writing books since 2000. Her stories "The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane" and "The Tale of Despereaux" are just two of her moving novels.

Another new author within the same time-frame is Grace Lin. Her "Where the Mountain Meets the Moon," for example, is a masterful feat of storytelling. Woven through with Chinese folklore, and elegantly written, her books seem to be from a former era. Her illustrations are worthy of framing. I suspect they will have a lasting impact as well.

I'll close with the words of a wise, book-loving friend who contributed to the discussion distilled here: "Great books become a part of who the child is and of the scaffolding which helps the child understand his or her world, to grapple with human nature, and divine nature, and the big, important questions that children are just beginning to be aware of."

Susannah Pearce has a master's degree in theology and writes from her home in South Carolina.



A truly great work of literary art will draw the reader into the world of the story.



CRAFTSMANSHIP

POUNAMU

New Zealand's Beloved Greenstone

LORRAINE FERRIER

Slowly, slowly, years of erosion gently unlock pieces of greenstone into the Te Wai Pounamu: the greenstone waters of New Zealand's South Island, the only place they're found. This is how "pounamu," the greenstone revered by New Zealanders, emerges before it settles in riverbeds, or along the coast after being swept out to sea.

Steeped in Maori myth and tradition, pounamu, pronounced "POE-nah-moo," refers to three different types of stone: nephrite, bowenite, and serpentinite.

The exhibition "Kura Pounamu: Our Treasured Stone," at the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch on New Zealand's South Island, explores the Kiwi fascination with pounamu, from the bare rock to the finished product, through a selection of historic and modern tools, weapons, and ornaments.



(Above) The Arahura River on New Zealand's South Island is one of the greenstone waters where pounamu can be found.

(Left) Running water flows over this touchstone in the exhibition, as it would in its natural environment.

The exhibition was organized by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, which is New Zealand's national museum, in association with the traditional guardians of pounamu, the Ngai Tahu iwi (tribe). It was first shown in Te Papa from September 2009 to July 2011, after which it was adapted for an international audience, touring China from November 2012 to June 2014, and Paris from May to October 2017.

"Kura Pounamu: Our Treasured Stone" is now at the Canterbury Museum, in the very area that pounamu originates from. As such, the exhibition can be seen until June 3, and also includes exhibits from the Canterbury Museum's collection. Corban Te Aika, curator of Matauranga Maori (human history), tells us more.

Continued on Page 8



Detail of a pounamu "kohatu" or boulder, of the kawakawa variety. Maori classify pounamu by the environment. The kawakawa is a native tree.

CRAFTSMANSHIP

POUNAMU

New Zealand's Beloved Greenstone



Corban Te Aika, curator of human history (Matauranga Maori), at the Canterbury Museum in New Zealand.

“It was seen as being a symbol of authority and prestige to have pounamu.”

Corban Te Aika, curator of human history, Canterbury Museum

Continued from Page 7

THE EPOCH TIMES: Why is pounamu so treasured in New Zealand?

CORBAN TE AIKA: A lot of that has to do with the fact that it served many purposes. And probably the most important aspect of pounamu is that it's the strongest naturally occurring stone you can find in New Zealand.

Before pounamu was introduced to Maori, they were using things like basalt and argillite, and quite common rocks in the construction of tools and implements. All pounamu has a set of properties that are far superior to those other stones in terms of making tools and implements, but it's also a beautiful stone, so the construction of jewelry and other adornments was a natural progression for it.

It's quite a hard stone to work and so very labor-intensive. Even the smallest kind of pendant can take quite a significant time to shape and polish, and so it was seen as being a symbol of authority and prestige to have pounamu.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Is it still seen that way?

MR. TE AIKA: Yes, definitely. I think globalization, particularly in our tourism industry, has had an impact on that somewhat, in the sense that it's pretty easy now to buy pounamu. But generally, those items are made using modern tools and diamond saws, so that kind of preciousness of pounamu has been lost somewhat in its mass production.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What do you personally feel about the tourist industry around such a precious stone?

MR. TE AIKA: On some levels, I think it's great that we're able to share our culture with the world. But at the same time, though, I do think it's sometimes a little bit—not tokenistic—but it's tied up too much in our tourism industry. Now, it's very hard to go to a shop or a tourist venture and not find pounamu for sale, or at least something that's advertised as being pounamu.

Up until very recently, it was fairly common to find Canadian jade, or even Chinese jade, sometimes being shaped into things that were definitely Maori. But this misrepresentation of it as being genuine New Zealand jade, New Zealand nephrite, or New Zealand pounamu, can be a little bit misleading.



Heiti tiki (pendant in human form). Te Aika whanau (family), Ngai Tuahuriri, Ngai Tahu.

land nephrite, or New Zealand pounamu, can be a little bit misleading.

There's a big difference between buying something that has been mass-produced and something that has been shaped by an artist, a carver of pounamu. It's very easy to produce a "heiti tiki" figure, a pendant in a human form, but the story and symbolism behind it is a little bit different when it has come from somebody who has worked that particular stone using traditional methods, or even with modern tools.

I suppose it's the idea that the life force of the artist or carver has been imposed on the particular rock that they have been shaping, and that's a little bit different from something that has just been mass-produced.

THE EPOCH TIMES: My New Zealand friends who own a piece of pounamu say that every owner has a story behind their pounamu—it's either that you've been guided to it or you've received it as a gift. Do you believe that?

MR. TE AIKA: Yes, I do think that's quite accurate. Every stone has its own story.

There are a few well-known stories of the different greenstone clubs, called "pounamu mere." There may be three or four that may be carved from the same boulder, and they might all be used in the defense of a particular fortified village, called a "pa site," or things like that, historically. It's that type of story that can often get lost in the mass-produced items.

Mass-produced items would usually have a label that describes the symbolism behind that particular shape or form, but I don't think that's giving you the same narrative that you might get when you are dealing with a carver and an artist, and you can hear the inspirations as to how that particular piece of art came to be, or the story around the stone. The stories are endless on that front, really.

THE EPOCH TIMES: There's a geological way of classifying the pounamu and a Maori way of classifying the pounamu. Can you please tell us a little about that?

MR. TE AIKA: The Maori classification of pounamu basically comes down to the colors, the hues, and the variations that you get in each rock. No two boulders are ever identical across the six or seven major waterways where you can find pou-



namu; each river has a slightly different form of pounamu that emerges along it.

A lot of the traditional names of pounamu are determined by the attributes from within the stone that can be related back to the sort of phenomena within the environment or a species. As an example, there is a type of greenstone that actually isn't green at all. If anything, it is kind of gray or brown with a series of black dots on it, and the traditional name for that is "kokopu." A kokopu is a type of fish, which, if you look at its underbelly, is nearly always a brown-gray color with a number of black spots over it.

“If the pounamu deems you worthy enough, the pounamu will reveal itself to you.”

Corban Te Aika, curator of human history, Canterbury Museum

Another example is a type of pounamu which is almost translucent, a very pale light green, sometimes even blue. The traditional name for that is "inanga," and it takes its name from whitebait, or juvenile fish.

THE EPOCH TIMES: If I went to the areas where pounamu is found, how could I find some?

MR. TE AIKA: If you ask the traditional guardians of pounamu, Ngati Waewae and Ngati Mahaki iwi, they will tell you that you shouldn't go out looking for pounamu, but that the pounamu will reveal itself to you.

If you go out with the intent of "I need to find pounamu so I can make some money off of it," or whatever, you're not going to find any. You're better off interacting with the landscape, taking in the environment, and if the pounamu deems you worthy enough, the pounamu will reveal itself to you.

THE EPOCH TIMES: How is pounamu traditionally carved?

MR. TE AIKA: All of the knowledge of how to shape pounamu and work it is tied up, or at least recorded, in our oral traditions.

Sandstone is the main stone used to shape pounamu. According to the old traditions, the guardian of pounamu is fearful of the guardian of sandstone, and whenever sandstone and pounamu see each other, they take off in opposite directions. They don't like being near each other.

When shaping stone, you have to keep the surface of the pounamu moist.

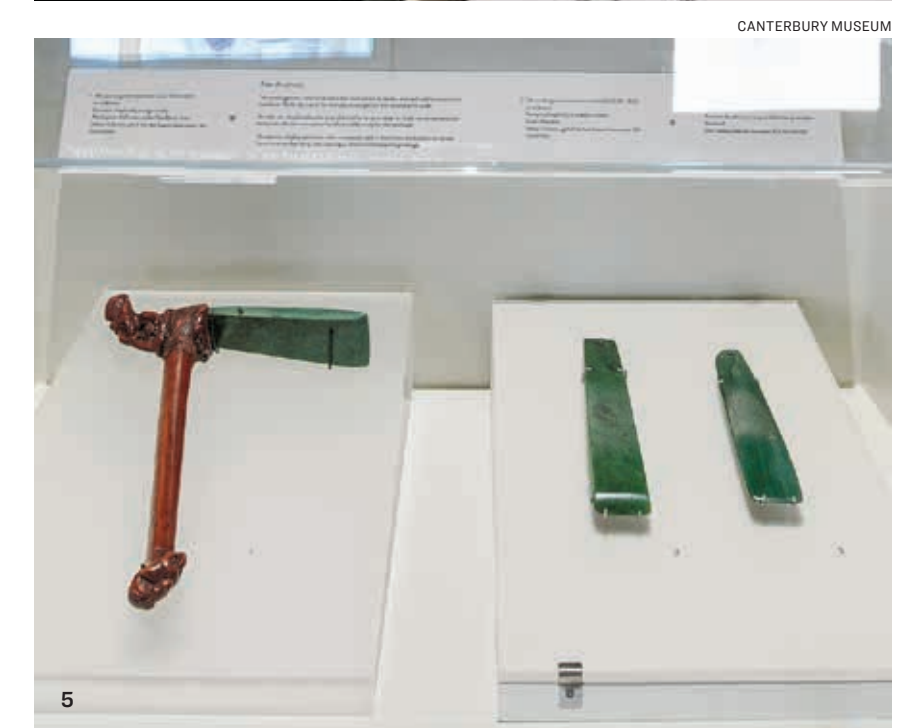
You might have to go through several pieces of sandstone in order to get the general shape of a heiti tiki, and then you are going to need smaller pieces of sandstone in order to do all the finer shaping. It's something that you wouldn't finish in a couple of days. You're probably looking at months, if not years, to shape them.

We have a saying in Maori that when translated into English says, "That which consumes sandstone, consumes people," and so that reiterates the idea that shaping with sandstone is a very labor-intensive process.

If you take a stock standard heiti tiki that you would buy in an artist's shop, you're looking at upward of 3,000 or 4,000 New Zealand dollars (about \$2,030 or \$2,700) to purchase it, and so there's potentially upward of 60 or 70 hours of work that have gone into shaping that heiti tiki.

THE EPOCH TIMES: The woodworking tools made of pounamu in the exhibition, called "toki," date back to the time New Zealand was settled, some 700 to 800 years ago. Please tell us about these adze blades.

MR. TE AIKA: The toki shape and form is found right across the Pacific, and so nearly every Polynesian culture has some sort of tool or implement that is similar, if not identical, to a toki. In fact, its general shape and style hasn't actually changed that much. There are a few different types of toki, but they're essentially, for the most



1. A selection of "heiti tiki" at the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, New Zealand.

2. The different stages of carving a pounamu "heiti tiki."

3. A variety of pounamu touchstones show the beautiful marbling of New Zealand's greenstone.

4. Different shades and shapes of "pounamu mere," or greenstone clubs.

5. "Toki" or greenstone adze blades, on display at the Canterbury Museum's exhibition "Kura Pounamu: Our Treasured Stone."

part, one and the same: a large chisel-like tool. A lot of the earlier toki that you'll find in archaeological sites and in museum collections are usually made of basalt or argillite.

After people discovered pounamu and its superior qualities, naturally they started to make tools and implements based on the cultural norms and their understanding to date, so they started to experiment with pounamu.

Generally, the wider and the bigger the toki, you're going to get a deeper groove on your carving, so the smaller toki, the finer ones, are obviously for finer details and intricate patterns. But eventually, it's a go-to tool that you find up and down the country in New Zealand and, in fact, right across the Pacific.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Please tell us about the pounamu touchstones.

MR. TE AIKA: Generally speaking, Maori view pounamu, or rocks and boulders of pounamu, as having a "mouri," a spiritual life force, within them, and so quite often, people will use pounamu as touchstones or mouri stones.

If a building has a mouri stone, the idea is that it's protecting the life force of the building that you are in. And so it kind of comes back to that idea of you can't find pounamu, the pounamu will find you; it's got this life force in it.

There are number of touchstones in the exhibition that people can touch and feel.

One of the touchstones is sitting in water and sandstone gravel, and so visitors can actually have a go at removing the outer rind of the stone and polishing the piece of pounamu. So it's that idea that if it has a life force, then there is more to it than just trying to chisel, or shape it, or work it.

We've had a couple of people who've taken a little bit of sandstone and they've literally stood there for half an hour going backward and forward on the same spot, and they've made the smallest indentation on the surface of the rock. And in doing so, they've started to expose the surface of the stone.

That particular touchstone is a really cool interactive exhibit for our museum visitors and the community as a whole, to contribute to shaping and polishing this particular stone.

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

To discover more about "Kura Pounamu" at the Canterbury Museum, go to CanterburyMuseum.com



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.

'MASTER Z: IP MAN LEGACY'

Serviceable Chopsocky Fix

MARK JACKSON

Bruce Lee's teacher, Ip Man, master of Wing Chun Kung Fu, was so awesome that he's now had seven movies made about him. Bruce was awesome, teacher Ip was awesome, and fight choreographer Yuen Woo-ping is awesome. And Michelle Yeoh ("Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon") is awesome. Is "Master Z" awesome? It is less than awesome. But not bad.

"Master Z" is about Master Ip's last challenger to the throne of Wing Chun top practitioner—Cheung Tin-chi. He's the titular Master Z. He was played by Zhang Jin in 2015's "Ip Man 3," about that particular challenge. Zhang here plays in, basically, The Further Adventures of Cheung Tin-chi.

What You Get

You get a fair amount of bang for your kung fu buck: decent Fu-fights, the classic scenes of the

Master Z, also known as Cheung Tin-chi (Zhang Jin, L), saves his son, Fung (Henry Zhang), in "Master Z: Ip Man Legacy." (Well Go USA Entertainment)

chopsocky genre, wherein, inevitably, large crowds of Hawaiian shirt-clad men run into either a brothel or a restaurant and proceed to gesticulate wildly with kung fu territorial threat/dominance displays, and then one quietly heroic man of greater alpha dominance (who would always prefer to be left alone) runs amok among them and dominates them.

At the outset, Cheung Tin-chi, who got his hubristic behind handed to him by Master Ip Man, has decided to pack up his ego, run a grocery store, and quietly take care of his kid. His wooden Wing Chun practice dummy starts gathering dust.

But one day, while minding his own business, he comes across a good deed to do: Two women—Nana (Christie Chau) and Julia (Liu Yan)—are being smacked around by a slick, ponytailed, suit-wearing drug dealer (Kevin Cheng) named Kit. Cheung Tin-chi prevents this smacking around and, instead, smacks around some Hawaiian shirt-clad men.

This, however, immediately changes the local perception of Cheung Tin-chi from harmless



storeowner to someone you clearly do not want to mess with.

Slick ponytailed gangster man retaliates and saves face by burning down our hero's grocery store.

Mr. Ponytail is very concerned with his rep: he's got a chip on his shoulder about being a

Kit (Kevin Cheng), the bad guy with something to prove.



ALL PHOTOS BY WELL GO USA ENTERTAINMENT



Kwan (Michelle Yeoh) is a classy gang leader who wants to go straight, in "Master Z: Ip Man Legacy."



The first good deed Master Z runs into. Nana (Christie Chau, L) and Julia (Liu Yan) need help.



The confrontation between the good and the bad: (L-R) Xing Yu, Zhang Jin, Michelle Yeoh, and Kevin Cheng in "Master Z: Ip Man Legacy."



Two good guys: Cheung Tin-chi (Zhang Jin, L) and Fu (Xing Yu), in "Master Z: Ip Man Legacy."

small fry compared to his classier sister Kwan (Michelle Yeoh), who heads up the local triad gang but wants to stop being a bad person and go straight. But little brother Kit thinks the triads should be expanding their territory and get into drug dealing.

Then Cheung Tin-chi runs into Julia again after Kit burns down his store.

She offers Cheung Tin-chi and his young son, Fung, a roof over their heads, living with her brother Fu (Xing Yu), who's a bar owner and not so shabby in the kung fu department himself.

What will happen? Will the single Julia and single-dad Tin-chi find love? Will bad sister Kwan become a good person? Will stupid little brother Kit get smacked around some more because he's so annoying? Will the massive American businessman and heroin magnate Owen Davidson (former World Wrestling Entertainment Inc. star Dave Bautista) also get a much-needed smackdown?

"Master Z: The Ip Man Legacy" is heavy on the chopsocky, including some very delicious nuanced chopsocky wherein the offering of a glass of whiskey turns into a mini-fight/sparring session

between Kwan and Cheung Tin-chi. She pours him a drink and whisks it across the table too fast, only to have him kick it precisely back to her, and they proceed to roll it around the table in a sort of display of tai chi push-hands, without spilling a drop. Engrossing stuff.

It's quite good fun, although, instead of subtitles, I would have preferred the usual Chinese-to-English dubbing and the incredibly bad voice-acting that accompanies it, which usually provides an unintentional comedic soundtrack of its own.

The only thing that's really bad here is the ridiculously small role given to the magnificent Muay Thai practitioner Tony Jaa of the "Ong Bak" series. That and the fact that this is now seven films about Ip Man. As one fan commented on social media: "What's next, 'Ip Man Rising' with Ronda Rousey and a guest appearance by The Rock?"

Probably. But my guess is that Ip Man will appear in the next "Matrix," wherein he teaches Keanu Reeves's Neo, in another dimension, who will then come out of his trance state and proclaim, "I know better kung fu."



'Master Z Ip Man Legacy'

Director Yuen Woo-ping

Starring Zhang Jin, Liu Yan, Michelle Yeoh, Xing Yu, Kevin Cheng, Dave Bautista, Christie Chau, Brian Thomas Burrell, Tony Jaa

Running Time 1 hour, 47 minutes

Rated R

Release Date April 12

★★★★★

Former pro wrestler Dave Bautista in "Master Z: Ip Man Legacy."

THEATER REVIEW

An Exhilarating Hodgepodge of the Unexplained

JUDD HOLLANDER

NEW YORK—"Expect the unexpected" are words to live by at The McKittrick Hotel. The location is home to various flights of fancy and intricate sleights of hand, where the most important connections are made deep inside the audience's imagination. This is especially true of "Speakeasy Magick," an evening showcasing some amazing examples of prestidigitation, now at The McKittrick's Club Car venue.

Acting as ringmaster for this thrice-weekly event is former carny and self-described con man and charlatan Todd Robbins. An amiable sort, he's an expert in exploring and explaining the art of the con, while also demonstrating some rather interesting feats of his own. One of these involves a hammer, a six-inch steel nail, and part of the human anatomy. He also comes armed with some well-timed, very old puns that never fail to elicit a loud, albeit good-natured, groan from the audience.

Going on the theory of "more is more" (at least when it comes to confusing and confounding those in attendance), Robbins has brought together over a half dozen of his fellow magical practitioners for this event.

Rather than having each magician simply come up on the stage and, in turn, demonstrate their own particular tricks, in a wonderfully intimate turn, the magicians instead take part in what Robbins calls a "speed magic" process. Each of them goes to one of the different tables where the audience members are seated and presents several sleight-of-hand offerings.

This method enables the performers to establish their own connections with certain audience members—something essential for magicians to make the display of their talents a success.

The prestidigitators also make sure to involve as many patrons as possible in their routines. Among the roster of performers the night I saw the show were, along with Mr. Robbins, Matthew Holtzclaw, Prakash Paru, Peter Samelson, Jeff Grow, Mark Calabrese, Jason Suran, Matias Letelier, and Eric Brown.

There is also some more active audience participation at points. Robbins selects several people to come up on stage with him and take part in the building of a rather unique structure.

Most magicians will tell you that when it comes to the old adage of the hand being quicker than



Master magician Todd Robbins performing as the master of ceremonies at The McKittrick Hotel's Club Car.



Matias Letelier performing at an individual table of guests.

the eye, the real key is misdirection. The performer has the audience focus on one particular area of the action while the real sleight of hand occurs unnoticed nearby. Yet even with this forewarning, not to mention the performers' taking pains to explain how some of their tricks actually worked—before, after and during their feats—not one person at the table where I was seated, myself included, was able to figure out exactly how they did what they did.

These feats include having playing cards seemingly change color or turn completely over of their own accord; and making objects appear, disappear, and reappear in new locations, albeit occasionally somewhat the worse for wear.

There are also some very amusing representations of a few golden oldie carny routines, such as The Shell Game and Three-Card Monte.

As the show's title suggests, the entire atmosphere calls to mind a bygone era. Those entering The Club Car find themselves in a smoke-filled room with tables all about, and the area is illuminated by overhanging globes. Those with such a desire can avail themselves of the libations at the long mahogany bar on the far wall, or from the roving drink cart managed by the local "intoxicologist," as Robbins calls him.

Adding to this yesteryear flavor is the accompaniment of a player piano—alone onstage—happily emitting one tune after another. The musical chores are soon taken over by a gentleman Robbins calls Professor Jesse Gelber. Gelber plays "As Time Goes By" and "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," adding vocals to pieces such as the folk song "Fifteen Years on the Erie Canal" and the Jelly Roll Morton tune "Oh, Didn't He Ramble."

Due to time constraints and the number of tables in The Club Car, you probably won't get to see every magician perform. So you may just have to make a return visit to find out what you missed the first, or second, time around. Such a possibility is not a displeasing thought at all.

The true pleasure in watching a demonstration of magic occurs when the audience members are so engrossed, they don't even want to know how they were so completely fooled. This is continuously the case with "Speakeasy Magick," a show offering nothing more or less than a wholeheartedly enjoyable evening of entertainment.

Judd Hollander is a reviewer for Stagebuzz.com and a member of the Drama Desk and the Outer Critics Circle. He may be reached at bnchpeop@aol.com

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CHINESE IDIOMS

Already Having a Plan in Mind

DUOYU ZHONG & TANYA HARRISON

Wen Yuke, also known as Wen Tong, was a master artist during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and was famous for his bamboo paintings. His reputation became known far and wide, and many people sought to study under him.

When Wen was young, he was especially fond of painting bamboo. He planted a grove of bamboo in his yard so that he could observe its growth and appearance at all stages of development and under all kinds of weather conditions.

Over a long period of time, images of bamboo in different seasons and at different moments in its life cycle became deeply imprinted on his mind.

Each time he took up a brush to paint bamboo, he already had a suitable image in his mind. As a result, all of his paintings were unique, vivid, and lively.

When people asked how he could paint bamboo so well and so fast, he would answer with a shy smile, "I just paint the bamboo that appears in my mind."

It is said that Wen was so skillful that he could hold two brushes in one hand and paint two different bamboo plants simultaneously.

When Wen passed away in 1079, Su Shi (1037-1101), one of Wen's good friends, missed him very much. Su Shi is recognized as a master of literature from the Song Dynasty and famous for his poems, essays, rhapsodies, and calligraphy.

In memory of Wen, Su wrote an essay about him and his bamboo paintings that included the poetic line, "When painting, there is already bamboo in Yuke's mind."

Poetic description from that line, literally "having a complete bamboo in mind," later became an idiom.

The idiom originally described someone who is calm and cool-headed when dealing with different matters, already having the results in mind.

Today, it is used to indicate the state of already having a well-thought-out plan before setting out to achieve a goal. It also describes someone who looks at every angle before deciding to take action.



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