Mormon Artist

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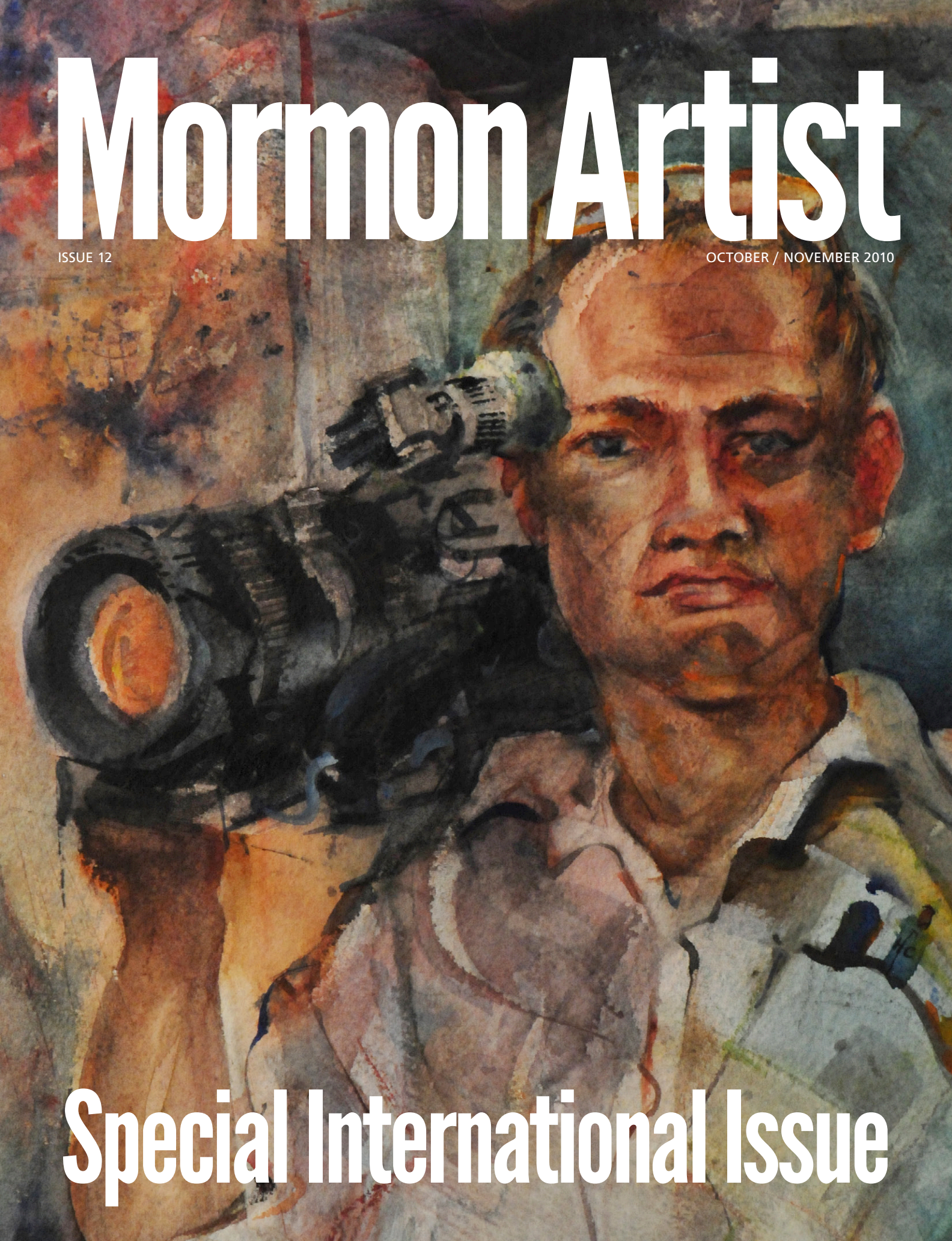

Special International Issue

Mormon Artist

COVERING THE LATTER-DAY SAINT ARTS WORLD

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Editor's Note

Ever since the beginning of this magazine, one of our goals has been to feature more and more international Latter-day Saint artists. We've featured a handful already—Jonna Pirinen (issue 3), Christian Vuissa (issue 3), Lorenzo Rossato (issue 4), and Tomoko Shimada (issue 8)—but we've wanted to do more. There are a lot of LDS artists out there, after all.

Enter this special international issue, featuring ten artists from England, Peru, Austria, Australia, Japan, Belgium, Norway, and Russia. We've also got an excellent interview with Richard Oman, former curator at the Museum of Church History and Art.

We realize that we're only scratching the surface here. As we continue into the future with the magazine, our hope is that we'll be able to feature an increasing number of international artists. If you know of anyone who fits the bill, please let us know. (And we will of course still continue featuring U.S.-based artists.) ❧

Ben Crowder
Editor-in-Chief

Joan Merrill is putting together a conference for LDS visual artists. For more information, see

http://mormonartist.net/2010/09/conference-for-lds-visual-artists/

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Richard Oman

INTERVIEW BY **COREY STRANGE** | PHOTO COURTESY **PAM OMAN**

Richard Oman recently retired as curator at the Museum of Church History and Art.

Tell us about your background.

I grew up in a little farming town called Moses Lake, Washington. I used to go to the library a lot and I remember getting a book—one of these big coffee table books, a book about Gothic cathedrals. I had never seen anything like it before.

It wasn't until quite late in my college studies at BYU that I first took a class in art history. Then I ended up taking another one in architectural history. It was like all kinds of lights went on. I loved history, but here I was looking at history not in documents or words but with visual images. I thought, "What a fascinating way to study history, by looking at all this gorgeous stuff!" I ended up going up to the University of Washington in Seattle for graduate school and I was in hog heaven up there.

One of the things that was seminal for me was an art history class I had at BYU from Cohan Matthews. Professor Matthews told me, "When you go up to the University of Washington, take a class in Northwest Indian Art." He had taken some kind of sabbatical up there and one of the things he did was study the art of the Indians up there. So, in deference to my fond feelings for Professor Matthews, I signed up for a class on Northwest Indian Art.

What I learned is that the incredible aesthetic visual system the Northwest Indians had developed was kind of like a Bach fugue. It was a very illuminating experience for me to understand how aesthetic structures work in different cultures and why it was important to carefully study and learn how their system functioned.

You're talking about the system of symbols—animals and totems—they use to tell stories?

Yes, I'm talking about how they make lines, eyes, mouths, how they design it. There is a design structure. It has very strict rules.

I learned that sometimes the greatest art comes, not by "anything goes," but by working within a highly sophisticated system. That's why I compared it to a Bach fugue. Bach wasn't just writing a bunch of notes. The way he wrote and put them together was an important part of the cohesion of the art form.

The other thing I learned was to expand my concept of what art is. I had thought that art was an oil painting with a big, gold frame on it or a marble sculpture or what have you. I realized that it could be the carved horn of a mountain goat in the form of a spoon or a huge cedar log carved and made into a canoe and the way the canoe was designed and embellished.

Then I went on to study more tribal art with various aspects of Native

American art, Spanish Colonial art, modern Mexican muralists, Melanesian, Polynesian, Chinese, Japanese, Middle Eastern, African, then the European tradition, and a couple of those that really caught my attention were the Byzantine and the medieval tradition.

I think one of the reasons for that is those were art traditions that were profoundly religious. The more I studied the history of art, the more I came to understand that most art in the history of the world has been religious art. That was another illuminating realization, especially being an active Latter-day Saint.

When you study those Western traditions, you realize they had their own aesthetic structure but what was driving the art was a religious faith and a cultural cohesion. It was no longer a fringe decoration of the culture, it was the art that expressed what they most profoundly believed and who they were. Those are tall orders and these were orders that were usually met quite eloquently.

How did you end up at the Museum of Church History and Art?

There was a job opening in the Church Historical Department. My friend told me they were looking for somebody with a background in history and museum studies. I had worked at the Seattle Art Museum as I went through grad school, so I applied and they ended up sending me a plane ticket to come down and interview. The rest is history. I became a member of the Church Historical Department and I've been doing that for thirty-four years. I retired a year and a half ago.

My responsibilities were to basically draw up the parameters of what a museum program should be for the Church, then work at developing collections. What an exciting thing! I thought this was kind of strange, putting together an art collection for the Church. Here's this American church, and the one class I'd never taken was history of American art.

It was interesting when I started studying the demography of the Church, realizing that the Church is expanding in places mostly outside America, most rapidly in the areas where I tended to do my academic study. So I feel like it was the hand of the Lord guiding me and saying, "You have to give voice to all these folks out there coming into the Church, and our definitions have to broaden sufficiently to embrace a broader sweep of His children." So I became a crusader in that area to do what I could to broaden our perspectives so the Saints all over the world would be celebrated.

The Church has a huge collection of Polynesian art that has come by way of gifts to General Authorities, so much so that we have loaned pieces to the Bernice Bishop Museum in Honolulu and the Smithsonian Museum. It really is a world-class collection in the art they have.

I went down to Tucson, Arizona for a museum conference one time and I thought I'd take the scenic way through the reservations—the Navajos and Hopis and pueblos in New Mexico. I found out we have branches all over the place down there, and what I discovered is that some of the finest artists within those cultures are Latter-day Saints, particularly among the Hopis for their pottery. Eventually that discovery led to an exhibition at the Church History Museum. It was part of this ongoing process of discovering the wonderful art made by Latter-day Saints in all different techniques and mediums all over the world.

This interest in LDS artists around the world eventually led to the creation of a worldwide Church art competition. The impetus for that was that we were developing collections pretty well in terms of the Wasatch Front, Utah, Idaho—the old geographical core—but what about the Saints in Nigeria or Peru? So we came up with this idea of having an international art competition and opening it up to LDS artists all over the world, having the competition play a role in expanding the Church's collection. When I look at my legacy at the Church History Museum, one of the more significant things I did was getting that started. It's still going and goes every three years. We've discovered some phenomenal artists from around the world as a result of that.

What were some of your favorite experiences or realizations while working at the museum?

One of the more exciting things was working with the temple and the Physical Facilities Department looking at the paintings in temples. These are our great cathedrals and we decorate them.

I've learned that landscape painting can be significant religious art. We use beautiful landscape murals in our temples again today, reviving that old tradition. These big murals are landscapes, and that's interesting because I don't know of another tradition that sees landscape painting as religious art. What we're doing is celebrating God's creation, and much of the temple revolves around the creative process of the world. Here we have these beautiful landscapes that tend to localize the temple. We do a landscape painting of the land the Lord has made. We don't put cities and people all bustling around. It tends to be pure nature because what we're doing is celebrating not what we have done but what the Lord has done.

It starts making sense when you understand the theology structure and the temple ritual structure, but it also makes sense when you learn that in the early days of the Church, President Brigham Young sent a group of men to Paris to learn how to paint murals in the temple. They came back doing these beautiful Impressionist landscapes.

The beginning of our art tradition here in Utah was very dependent upon the converts coming in from Europe—the majority of our painters and sculptors and furniture makers were British and Scandinavian. As I saw the modern expansion of the Church internationally, I thought of this wonderful phrase: "The more things change, the more things stay

the same." The growth of artistic tradition in the nineteenth century was internationally based, and much of our expansion in the last years has been internationally based. So we have a continuity going on.

I studied and built a collection of early Mormon pioneer furniture. I expected to find a collective style like the Shakers because it was preached from the pulpit in the tabernacle that we should build our own furniture to be provident. What I discovered is that there wasn't a great Mormon furniture style, but there was great Mormon furniture. The Article of Faith that says, "anything virtuous, lovely, praiseworthy, or of good report, we seek after these things"—well, that's a very open-ended kind of belief. Brigham Young used to say that it was the job of the elders of Israel to go out and gather truth wherever they could find it. He said to go into the jaws of hell if there was truth down there because the gospel embraces all truth.

Hartman Rector was asked by an Acoma Indian one time at a stake conference down in Albuquerque what he would have to give up in order to become a Latter-day Saint. Hartman replied very wisely, "Nothing that is true." If we see that in terms of our artistic traditions, that's pretty expansive.

We can see that in an eternal perspective of an ever-widening circle of truth. It just continues until it embraces everything.

Zion implies a strong sense of community. One of the things I learned in tribal art around the world is that it's very deeply embedded in the cultures that created it. It's not "Look at me, I want to be different." It's "This celebrates us," this embracing of the audience by the artist and the audience embracing the artist. There's a strong sense of connectedness, and I see some strong components of that in the gospel.

What makes Mormon art distinctively Mormon? What I came to is that it wasn't a question of technique or style or medium, it was a statement of ideas. What makes Mormon art "Mormon" is the Mormon-ness in it. What stories are they telling? What ideas are they trying to communicate? That became a significant part of our collection development at the museum. We tried to reach out and encourage, search for, and collect art that was saying something about the Mormon experience.

I did a show at the museum one time on Lehi's vision of the tree of life. We had art from all over the world with an incredible range of styles, all on a common theme. I thought it was very interesting to watch people go through the exhibit. We had a wide range of backgrounds socio-economically, educationally, etc., yet they were all relating to this art. It told me that if we have art that has a common denominator of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it builds incredible bridges. If you were to say, "We're going to have an exhibit on the folk art of Peru or West Africa," my guess is that you'd have a really small audience. But say, "We're going to have an exhibit on Lehi's vision of the tree of life," and it's like walking into a testimony meeting with people from all over the world. They're bearing their testimonies in their native languages but they are bearing their testimonies. The spirit of that resonates and reaches out and connects.

I think of the international art competition—they have an incredible range of styles and techniques and mediums yet put together a remarkable exhibit with cohesion because it has a common theme of Mormon lifestyle, history, beliefs, etc. I don't know of another institution that could pull that off. The logistics of getting the art here from all over the world is quite a feat, but to create a sense of cohesion within the exhibition with all the ranging styles is an amazing thing. It speaks well of the logistical communication system of the Church. The result is this huge, international, diverse exhibit. The gospel really does pull people together and there are cultural and aesthetic components of what it means to build Zion.

Most art in the history of the world has been religious art.

The past is this incredible university for the arts.

I think that's a great example of the individual meeting the community. We've been commanded to use our talents. I think of Captain Moroni and all the work he did for his people—he took the great talents that he cultivated and threw them into the community-consecrated pot.

Theologically, Latter-day Saints are supposed to be involved in a process that eventually leads to creating worlds themselves. When we say that the Lord is our light, he is also our role model, and one of the names of the Lord is the Creator. We as Latter-day Saints have an imperative to create. It's up there with things like love. We have to learn how to love. We can't just say, "Well, I'm just not that into love. I'm just not that into service," because those are things we're supposed to do. We can't really say, "I'm not into creating things," because that's also an imperative for us.

I started looking at what it means to create. How does the Lord do it? The most obvious thing is to look at the world here and ask, "How did he know what to do?" Well, of course he's God and knows everything, but he gives us some good clues for how to go about the creative process. The way he did it was to create "worlds like unto worlds heretofore created." In other words, he looked at the historical tradition of his Father and so on and thought, "There are things we can learn here."

Then I looked at the scripture in D&C 121 where the Lord is telling the Prophet Joseph how to go about building the Nauvoo temple, and one of the things that I find very interesting is that God tells Joseph to bring men with the "knowledge of antiquity." You start getting quite a historical celebration here.

Look at the very last verse in the Old Testament. We usually see it in terms of genealogy, but look at it for a minute in terms of art. Malachi is telling us why all these 1,200-some pages of scripture are important: "To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." I thought of this in terms of art and wondered what we learn from this. How do you turn the hearts of children to their fathers? We're back again to how the Lord created the world using historical precedence. Are there some ideas our ancestors had that might be applicable today in what I'm making? Might I learn from these people? The whole idea of scripture is that old, dead people have things to teach young, live people. The past is full of rich wisdom that can benefit our lives. What does that mean when you start looking at art from that same point of view? Suddenly the past is this incredible university for the arts.

Turning the hearts of the fathers to the children might also mean that maybe we should be creating art that is so wonderful that it will feed our children and our children's children and so on. I think of looking at the Sistine Chapel years ago with my family. We went there and I thought, "Michelangelo did this half a millennium ago and it's still feeding us today." The same goes for Egypt. The architecture is still pretty awe-inspiring, or you look at the bas reliefs in the tombs of Saqqara with the daily life of the people four thousand years ago and it's still as fresh and inspiring as the day it was made. When we create, we can ask ourselves the question, "Am I doing something that will still have meaning and still inspire untold generations to come?" In reading Malachi we have that imperative to reach back and embrace good and truthful things wherever we find them, not just in a broad geographical spread but also in time as well. To me that's a really expansive way of looking at art.

And then we have connecting. Notice it's talking about fathers and children. Well, there's a familial connectedness here. It's embracing those who have come before us and those who come after us as family, and there's an affectionate aspect there. I think there should be a desire to communicate profoundly and clearly that our audience is worth connecting to.

That brings me to the idea of what it means to be a community of Latter-day Saints. We reach out and connect in some profoundly complete kinds of ways. We do home teaching to people who may be, in many respects, quite different than we are, but we have our home teaching beats and out we go. In the process we learn about the shared humanity that transcends all kinds of socio-economic divisions within our society. As children of our Father in Heaven, we feel a profound connectedness. There's a respect for our audience that that should generate.

We do the same thing with missionary work. We carry the gospel all over the world and ultimately we have to love the people we are carrying the gospel to or we won't be able to carry it to them. That sense of love and affection for the audience is something that also is part and parcel of creating gospel art.

Impressionists seem to have an interesting connection theologically. They, with few exceptions, were interested in their landscapes, like the Mormon artists you mentioned. Also, we understand that the literal, divine light of Christ permeates all things and showers over all things. Do you think there's any kind of connection there?

We have paintings in temples, murals of the West. We are at ground zero for some pretty spectacular mountains and canyons; we have the rural, Mormon-built landscape; and we have the idea that we'll help the desert to blossom as a rose. There's this kind of theology around landscapes in relation to building Zion. I think those are some of the reasons why, as Latter-day Saints, we developed a rather rich landscape tradition in painting, and it continues in our time.

I think your idea of light is another one. A lot of Mormon art tends to be somewhat optimistic and our theology tends to be optimistic. We can understand the persecutions the Saints went through, but we look at them as a kind of refiner's fire. Thinking of Elder Maxwell's talks where he talked about personal trials and the bottom line was "What does the Lord want to teach me from this?" Even in the midst of really hard things we think, "This too shall give thee experience," and this will ultimately make us stronger and better people if we respond as the Lord would have us respond.

We look at the future history of the world and we know that much of the world will be cleansed for the Second Coming of the Lord. The prophets basically say, "Live the gospel and things will go well for you." Even though our eschatology could be a morbid fixation, we don't have a morbid fixation. There's an ultimate sense of buoyancy and optimism.

This whole idea of celebration works its way into Mormon art. The existentialism and angst of darkness and despair really is not very compatible theologically with the optimism of the gospel, and I think that translates across into art. Some art critics out in the big world could look at our art and say, "Oh, it's just superficial," and they might say that because it's so darned optimistic.

In much of contemporary art criticism is the idea that art is supposed to be about despair. If you want to do "serious art," you have to do art about death and destruction and suffering and despair and hopelessness. But if you're doing something about love, affection, families and children, loving spouses, then it's "sentimental tripe." That's not so much a comment about art as it is a comment about the commentators. If we have to look at our souls and reject all the parts about hope and love and commitment—if you have to throw out some of your best self to be considered a legitimate artist—then it seems like that's a pretty heavy price to pay.

When we go back to the teachings of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and others, we learn to gather up the good stuff, and I don't think hopelessness is part of the good stuff. It's a misunderstanding of the purpose of life. That will probably affect how some people may view LDS art or work by LDS artists, but the truth of the matter is that most of the public doesn't go along with that stuff. An old poem says, "Laugh, and the whole world laughs with you. Weep, and you weep alone." I think it may be why some artistic traditions in our time don't have much traction—because they don't feed the soul very much.

In a world where there is a lot of despair, people say, "Yikes! I've got enough of that already! Give me something that feeds my soul and gives me some hope." Some of the critics might be back there saying, "Oh, we just have to bring on the despair," but that's not what the people are saying. Frankly, I think that puts LDS artists in a rather good position because we actually believe the hope. In a time when the social fabric is being rent, even as families disintegrate or never get off the ground, LDS artists are doing work about family life that resonates with people.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary Mormon art?

One thing we need to do as a Latter-day Saint people is expand our incorporating of art into our own home environment. The Church History Museum has helped that a lot, I think. We have hundreds of thousands of people go through the museum and they see the art and there's an increased interest in that. There's a wider range of art prints showing up in chapels than we used to see. Now we're seeing murals in temples and original easel paintings in temples. There's a trickle-down process of education—first seeing and experiencing the art, then wanting to make that part of your own physical environment. We're still on a big curve there, but it's coming along.

I think another challenge for us is to more fully understand that just as we translate the gospel into lots of different languages, there are also different visual languages that are being created and we need to learn some of those if we are to share in the ideas being expressed.

Another challenge is raising the expectation of our artists to create

things that express profoundly religious ideas of the gospel that can nourish us. The thematic content and ideas expressed should feed us not only aesthetically but spiritually. If you look at the history of world art, that's mostly what it's doing. Given the light they had, that's what they were trying to do.

I think those are things that Mormon consumers of art need to expand on. If we're going to have a wonderful art tradition, somebody needs to support the artists so that can happen.

We have a lot of artists who are making fine art, but it's not to Latter-day Saints, so the Mormon aspect of it sometimes has to go underground, although it's often there.

Brian Kershisnik is a good example of that. His work is profoundly religious, and I think people really resonate with that. He teaches some profound gospel ideas in his art. Jim Christensen is doing some of the same kinds of things. It's possible to get Latter-day Saint messages out there.

From a standpoint of LDS artists, one thing we need to realize is that we need to be really good at it if we're going to make it. We can't be almost as good as other people. We have to be very, very excellent. We have to look at the options the world gives us out there, tread through the minefield, and pull out the jewels. There are some aspects of contemporary art that are mines—they'll blow your foot off! But there are also some jewels.

Let me give you a story to explain this idea. When I was in graduate school and would talk to my fellow students about an upcoming holiday, I noticed that most of them had very little connection with their extended families. If you'd ask them about their great-grandparents or their second or third cousins, they almost never knew them. There was a lot of social disconnect. If you talked to the art historians, the other people they knew were the other art historians. I was going to a married student ward there in Washington and I knew people who were dental students, law students, people getting their degree in music—an incredibly wide range of academic disciplines. The gospel does that. It puts us in contact with lots of different kinds of people.

LDS artists need to be careful not to buy into the isolationist idea that is part of the contemporary art movement. If we're spending our days creating, then eventually we'll want to sell that art if we want to eat any food or put a roof over our head. I think the social component of being LDS gives us a connection with our brothers and sisters, teaches us about the universality of the human soul, and teaches us how to connect with people. It's a great asset to LDS artists in creating art that actually communicates with people as opposed to just piling up in the studio.

If you go to a party and talk to people that graduated in English, if they're sitting around talking about style in literature, you know these guys probably aren't making it. Listen to the people talking about copyrights and royalties because they're the ones most likely supporting themselves with their craft. That isn't to say that everything has to be economically driven, but artists have to eat food and stay dry in the midst of storms, so there has to be a financial component somewhere.

Also, if someone wants to be good at something, they have to spend some time doing it. If they're going to spend a lot of time doing it, they've got to be recompensed for that or they can't afford to do it. One way to be recompensed is to sell it.

Besides that, the world needs the art. Heaven knows there's enough ugliness out there. They need the beauty, the insights, and the inspirational quality that art has to offer. So I don't think the commercial component of art is a negative thing. I think one of the tragedies art students have is they go through an academic experience of making art, but they're not exposed to the part that teaches them how to make a living at it. Then they go out and have to do something else because they don't know how to make art that can connect with people.

If artists can look at themselves a little bit more as a service industry, they'll probably connect with a lot of people, and the next thing you know, they might actually start supporting themselves with their art in the process. As opposed to making art for three hours on a Saturday afternoon, they're doing their art sixty-eight hours a week and enjoying it. There's something to be said for that.

I read recently that President Young was interested in having symbols out in the general community. I don't think he meant just abstract symbols—circles and squares—but symbols: bread, light, and all sorts of things that refer back to God. Do you think that bears any relevance on our situation?

Brigham Young used to say that the beehive was our communal coat of arms. It reflected the ideas of working together and cooperation and building something sweet. Beehives were all over the place and it's not coincidental that his own house is called the Beehive House. The most ubiquitous symbol on the Salt Lake temple is the beehive. It's on every door handle and every piece of etched glass, and there were beehives built into the decorative elements of the plasterwork inside. When the Conference Center was built and President Hinckley walked through and saw the pulpit, one of the first things he said was, "Where are the beehives?" They quickly put beehives on it.

One of the tragedies is that BYU has retired the beehive from their seal and just put "BYU" on it. There's something good there about spelling out the name of the school, but to lose the symbol of the beehive… It says something about the administration or whatever committee it was that came up with that, being kind of naïve about the nature of symbolism and having a case of historical amnesia. Universities are supposed to be the

carriers of our collective meaning, and when they care so little about their history that they discard their own visual symbols that have historical connection, it tells me they probably missed on that one.

If you look at our temples, one of the things you see is an angel Moroni statue at the top. There was a time when we didn't have angel Moroni statues on the top of all our temples—that's something that we've started to see in our own lifetime. It's an interesting idea that one of our most beloved identities of our most sacred buildings is a piece of art. And we have lots of different shapes and sizes of buildings, but the way you know it's a temple is there's an angel Moroni up there. A piece of gold-leafed sculpture!

The idea of communication through symbols and visual imagery, that's good stuff and it preaches to the eyes as well as the ears, and I think that's an important thing to do. There's probably a greater expectation for visual communication than there was half a century ago. Our culture as a whole is becoming increasingly visually oriented.

There are a lot of Latter-day Saints who paint spiritual pictures, but there are also a lot who work in not-overtly spiritual themes, even entirely in secular themes. In what ways do you think artists can connect with a broader audience, both in and out of the Church?

One of the ways that is useful to connect within the Church is the Church-wide art competition that happens every three years. LDS artists ought to look very carefully at that. Art competitions give the artist opportunity to speak directly and sometimes it's kind of nice to be able to do that. So I would strongly encourage artists to take advantage of that. The door's open, the welcome mat is out.

It's becoming increasingly competitive. The Church art competition gets about a thousand entries and they've got room for about 120. The art comes from all over the world, but they tend to weight it a little more with art from other countries because it's playing an important role in acquisitions. If you actually had to travel around to all those different places and dig the art out, that would be really expensive, but in this case the artists dig themselves out and present themselves, which is nice.

Say somebody is living in a town where the only restaurant is a McDonald's. They might say, "What if I opened a nice Middle Eastern or French or Chinese restaurant? There seems to be a need for one of those." Artists should look at the culture and the community in which they live and ask themselves, "How can I serve here? What can I do that meets people's needs in every way—aesthetically, emotionally, and spiritually?" Some people might say, "Let's give them one more quick hamburger stand," but you don't have to do that. Artists need to be connected to their community and serve their community and see their art as a way of service, and if they do, they'll probably start making a living at it.

There's this idea you hear from more mature artists about just getting out of the way when the inspiration comes. All sorts of artists have said that the Spirit moves them to make music or visual arts. The talents you develop and cultivate enable you to be a better vehicle for the Spirit to speak through.

That's true. Bach was certainly that way. He made profoundly spiritual compositions, but he was also the musician for various religious and political leaders and he'd have to make a significant composition every week. You could say, "Well, it's a job," and yes, he had to support his family, but look at the result of that "job"! We're still reaping the benefits.

Almost all of the great art of the past was from a commission. That means a patron came to an artist and said, "I want you to do such-and-such a work of art in this style, in this subject, etc." It got us a lot of Bach cantatas. It got us the Sistine Chapel ceiling. When artists reject that option, they marginalize themselves. The broader public doesn't sit around saying to themselves, "Oh, I feel so bad, I've marginalized an artist." The artist doesn't even show up on their radar, and the public sits around eating junk food when there's someone who could have made a great meal for them.

The problem I've had with my art personally is feeling like I don't want to paint scenes from scripture or other things that would sell. I wasn't concerned with being a "sellout," but authentically I didn't feel like I could conjure up that kind of subject matter and convey it in a message. And so I'm in a position where I've made that decision and now the other decision is made up for me to get a "regular job" to feed my family.

You might want to rethink your decision. Look at your life and ask yourself, "What do I value? What attitudes, what truths, what religious insights, what family insights, what psychological insights are most deeply moving to me? How can I communicate that to others?" There might be some people out there who share those same views and ideas.

I've heard you talk about your attitude towards your little girl. My guess is that virtually every family out there has some of those same kinds of feelings about their children. How would you express that visually? It means something to you, so how would you communicate that to somebody else? You may have a vehicle in your aesthetic tool chest or you may have to go out and buy some additional tools. It's a challenge for growth on the part of artists as well as the public and you may need to broaden your skill base in order create something that's in big demand. One of the beginning aspects of art is maybe a sense of humility to develop the skill package necessary to communicate. ❧

Anne Perry

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WEB: **ANNEPERRY.NET**

Anne Perry is the author of two acclaimed crime fiction series set in Victorian England: the William Monk novels and the Charlotte and Thomas Pitt novels, as well as several shorter series and stand-alone novels. She has sold over 20 million copies of her books worldwide, and her titles often appear on the New York Times *Best Seller list. She was selected by* The Times *(London) as one of the twentieth century's "100 Masters of Crime." She is originally from England and now resides in Scotland.*

You've said that while you've had various jobs, there is nothing that you ever seriously wanted to do except write. How long have you been writing and what experiences have you had that have influenced your desire to write?

I have been writing since I was in my mid-twenties, but my first published book was written in 1976 and published in 1979—*The Cater Street Hangman*. It was the first Victorian story and the first mystery. All experiences, good, bad, and indifferent, affect who you are. Everything you believe goes into your writing, sooner or later.

You are quite well-traveled. You've also held a number of different jobs from flight attendant to insurance underwriter. How has this wide range of experience influenced you?

I have been lucky enough to travel quite a lot. I have been to the Bahamas, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Africa, and many countries in Europe, especially France, Spain, and Italy. Again, all experience, all people you meet eventually feed into what you write.

Travel especially sharpens your interest in other cultures. You realize the richness and the contributions they have made to all our lives. Look for what is good and you will certainly find it. Most especially you will find kindness.

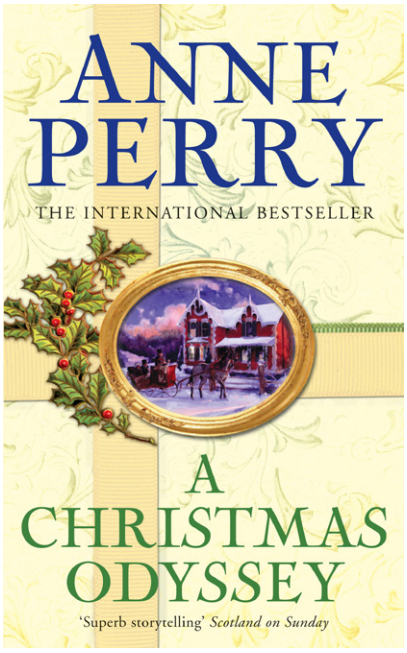
Of course it helps if you already know something of the history and geography of a place, and a few words, at least, of the language. However badly you speak, people usually appreciate the fact that you are willing to try.

What was it like getting your first novel, *The Cater Street Hangman*, published?

Getting the first novel published has an unreal quality. I kept on thinking any moment I was going to wake up and find it was just another dream. The first time I was in a bookshop and saw someone buy a copy, it became real. Only now, after sixty books, am I accepting that I am professional!

What is your writing process like? How do you get your ideas, and how long does it take to finish a book? When and where do you write?

To describe the writing process would be a ten-page essay at least. Very briefly: Get the one sentence idea, the key to the underlying passion, the thing you want to say. Then plot out a storyline that is tight, logical, carries emotion, incident, and pace. Go over it in closer detail. Make sure it is all historically possible. Write a biography of all your main characters, especially how they change in the course of the story, how they affect events and how events affect them and their relationships with each other. Then do a detailed plot, possibly thirty or forty pages. Write the first draft. Go over it and then write the second draft. Write the third draft and send it to your



literary agent. When you receive his or her comments, write another draft--which we hope is final, at least until the editor asks for a rewrite, which will be minor. At last, do copyeditor's notes and rewrite as necessary. That should be all until you come to touring with it, if you are so fortunate.

How long does it take? Four or five months until you send it to the agent. After that, it's out of your hands. Probably a year or two before it's published.

Where do I write? In my study—or if travelling, wherever I happen to be (hotel room, airport, etc.).

I write 8:30 AM to 5 or 6 PM. Usually Monday through Saturday, fifty-two weeks a year.

Who are some of your influences?

It is very difficult to know who influences you. My favourite writer is G. K. Chesterton, but that is largely for his poetry, his philosophy, and his use of language. Everything I read has some influence. In mysteries I admire Michael Connelly, Robert Crais, and Jonathan Kellerman. More recently also Mark Gimenez and Scott Frost. They are all American men writing in present-day setting, I know. I also like the philosophy of Terry Brooks. I like different people for different reasons. It could be humour, pace, character, sensitivity, compassion, descriptions—all sorts of qualities.

You've said that you couldn't be paid money not to write. What is it about writing that inspires that kind of drive and commitment in you?

I think anything creative—writing, painting, music, etc.—is a natural outlet for those who wish to do it, just as running is for an athlete. We all have a powerful need to do whatever it is we have the ability for. If we are created in the image of God at all, then we must have the will to love and to create.

You've been praised for your accurate depiction of Victorian London, which is the primary setting in which you write. What attracts you to this time period?

The first thing that attracted me to Victorian London was the fact that the first story I wrote in that setting was the first one I sold. Any writer would tell you "yes" from a publisher instead of "no" will do that. I continued to set stories in that time and place because that is what I was contracted to do.

I continue to like it because it is a complex, sophisticated, and optimistic time close enough to our own to be understandable, and yet far enough away to have a certain glamour. Also, that was the height of the British Empire and London was the centre of that Empire, so, in a sense, of the world. Anything you wanted could happen there, and it would never grow boring.

A third element is that it is before most forensic science, so crime stories could still centre on detection by observation and common sense rather than ballistics, finger prints, blood types, etc.

How do you do research for your novels? How much time do you spend researching each novel? What are some of the things you find enjoyable about this part of the writing process?

I research by reading, and I have a researcher who works for me four days a week to find many of the sources of information and look for particular facts and backgrounds.

It is not something I do in a block of time separate from writing, so I couldn't tell you hours and minutes. I am too busy doing it to keep a check.

Research is always interesting. Part of the skill is knowing what to include and what to keep only as a guard against error. I would say about three-quarters at the very least falls into the latter category. One wants to write a story with the sense that "you are there," not a history book. It is easy to become very boring.

You have several successful series. What are the benefits of writing a series and what are some of the challenges?

The benefits of writing a series are that you can develop characters and watch relationships over a period of time, usually years, and make people grow and learn in real time. Of course you don't have to. In the past several very successful writers have left their characters pretty well static, but I think these days it is unacceptable.

The disadvantages are that you have to keep changing something about the stories—theme, background, specialist skills, etc., or you risk becoming boring.

How did the ideas for your characters Thomas Pitt and William Monk come?

Thomas Pitt simply developed. There was little planning in advance because I had no idea he would become a series character.

I intended Monk to begin with no memory of his motives but to discover his actions through detection, therefore judging himself from the outside only—as we judge other people. He will grow gradually to judge other people with the compassion he wishes to judge himself—i.e., with the compulsion to know the reasons and understand actions from the point of view of the person taking them.

Your book *The Cater Street Hangman* was made into a film. How were you

involved with the project? How did you feel when you saw the finished film?

I was not very much involved in the filming of *The Cater Street Hangman*, but I did go down to watch filming one day, and I enjoyed it very much. Very educational as well as exciting to see my own story come to life. I was delighted with the finished film in almost all respects. Some of the scenes they added (not from the book) were excellent. I wish I had thought of them.

What has your experience writing your standalone novels *Tathea*, *Come Armageddon*, and *The Sheen on the Silk* been like? Particularly, what were some of the challenges of breaking out of your standard genre?

It is really almost impossible to describe the experience of writing *Tathea* and *Come Armageddon*. The nearest would be to liken it to taking a journey of spiritual exploration of existence such as a retreat out of time or physical context of the present. But any journey of the mind can be like that, if it is profound enough. It is exhausting, exhilarating, dangerous, and infinitely rewarding. It has nothing to do with writing technique or skills and everything to do with plumbing the depths of my own belief.

The Sheen on the Silk was simply a technical challenge of dealing with a new period of time, five separate point of view characters and five storylines which have to come together, the pacing, the different settings, and the real history. Most writers will deal with such things at one time or another.

While your books have been translated into several languages and sell all around the world, I understand that your largest readership is in the United States. Any theories as to why that might be the case?

Yes, my largest readership is in the United States. That may be partly because it is a very large country indeed and has several times the population of most other individual countries. I think it may also be at least in part because it is my belief and experience that Americans are largely an optimistic and open-hearted people. I found this when I lived in America in a very formative part of my life, and something of that attitude has become natural to me. I don't really know the answer, but that seems possible.

What are some of the things you do to engage with and expand your readership?

I keep a website, travel and lecture, do signings, answer correspondence. My publishers send me on book tours in America, Italy, France, and Spain. Occasionally I speak at libraries. Mainly I try to be honest to my beliefs in what I write, and to explore the issues I believe matter and are common to most people.

Do you have any projects coming up that you're particularly excited about?

I always have projects coming up—ideas, plots, dreams, and hopes. At the moment I have four book outlines and am working on ideas for television which may or may not work out—and a film script to do with the Pitt series.

Any advice for beginning writers who would like to get their work published?

My advice to beginning writers is to write about whatever you feel most passionately. Technique can be learned, but without passion it is empty. Write and rewrite, and re-rewrite. Get a good agent. Never give up.

In very practical terms, read something you do not enjoy, then analyse why you don't enjoy it. I think mostly you will find it is because the plot is unbelievable—or you do not care what happens to the people. The first is fixable and the second is not. You must care! If that is the case—create different characters drawn out of your own feelings.

You've been a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for forty years now. How were you introduced to the Church, and can you tell us something about your conversion process?

I always knew I was a Christian, but most Christian churches hold certain beliefs I do not agree with. I worked out for myself what I believe—and then when I was living in California, my next-door neighbours were strong members of the Church, and I discovered that the doctrines at the heart of the Plan of Salvation are exactly what make sense to me.

I recently wrote a piece for Deseret on "Why I am a Mormon" which answers your question exactly.

You've said that *Tathea* and *Come Armageddon* reflect some of your religious beliefs. How is that the case? Do you see your beliefs influencing your other work?

I said *Tathea* and *Come Armageddon* reflect *all* of my beliefs, not some of them. I do not mention the Saviour by name, but He is implicit. If you ask how that is the case, all I can suggest is that you read the conversation between Man of Holiness and Asmodeus at the end of both books, and your question will be answered.

Yes, of course my beliefs influence all my work. I think that has to be true of any writer at all, whether you mean it to be or not. ❧

Adele Thomas

INTERVIEW BY **ASHLEY WILKINSON** | PHOTOS COURTESY **MIKE THOMAS**
WEB: **ADELETHOMAS.BLOGSPOT.COM**

Adele Thomas is a textile artist, creating decorative textiles out of natural fibers such as cotton, silk, and wool. She and her husband have three daughters and live in Devon in the United Kingdom.

What came first, textiles or art?

Textiles came first; as far back as I can remember I was drawn to colourful fabrics with wonderful textures. There was quite a strong craft movement in the 1970s in England—many clothes had embroidery on them and I really wanted some embroidered flares. It was a very colourful time. At school we were allowed to "make things" every Friday afternoon and that was one of my favourite memories in my childhood.

Is there any other profession that you've thought seriously about pursuing or perhaps just dreamt about?

Before my husband became ill I was a behaviour support worker for children with behavioural problems and/or learning difficulties. I enjoyed that job for the most part. It was extremely challenging sometimes, but I felt I was making a difference in young people's lives.

When I had to give that up, I had the opportunity to study something I really loved passionately, so I decided to go back to school.

I had no idea how intense the amount of work was, though, and I am not too sure whether it was good for my family or not to have me that busy. But we survived, and I'm sure that for my two daughters who still lived at home, it set a good example of getting an education, working hard, and sticking at it however difficult it gets. I also want them to follow President Hinckley's advice to get as much education as possible.

When do you feel most like an artist?

That's a good question. I wish I felt like an artist more of the time. I feel most like an artist when I am still enough to be inspired by the beautiful countryside around me, when I can absorb the wonders of creation and the power of God's hand, when I can then record the impressions down into a sketchbook, stick things in—leaves, photos, seeds—and, when I have the time, develop some work to come from that.

The advice to ponder is essential to me. With the hectic lives we live in the Western world, our culture is not conducive to having time to think, ponder, and pray, and this interferes with my creative process. I have been told many times there is a season for everything and I have faith that time will come eventually. Managing multiple demands is not my strong point, obviously.

When you are creating, how is an idea born?

I have quite a methodical approach to my work. I would love to say my work is spontaneous, but that would not be true. I start off with a design source—that can be from a walk, a thought, a memory, or even something someone says. I put those ideas into a workbook, trying to capture the feeling of that inspiration. While this happens, ideas come to me of ways to interpret that into fabric. There are many techniques to choose from and I experiment until the right one leaps

out. The design begins to take on a life and spirit of its own. Sometimes, if I have to produce work too quickly, this gets cut short and I feel I could be missing something important.

What goals do you have for your career as a textile artist above and beyond what you've already accomplished?

I have many goals to develop my career. I believe it is an intrinsic part of womanhood to create, but so many are put off through bad experiences or lack of time. I would like to write a book or DVD to show how wonderful results can be achieved very easily. The sense of achievement when you look at your own handiwork is enormous and is excellent for increasing self-worth.

Knowing how to make elegant clothes and how to beautify our homes by our own hand is, I believe, important to our spiritual and emotional well-being. I would like to talk to women in developing countries and encourage them to keep their traditional arts and crafts alive and not to abandon them.

What role do your beliefs play in your art?

My beliefs play a huge role in my art. I am aware that this amazing world was created for us and I never feel closer to my Heavenly Father and Saviour Jesus Christ than when I am in nature. It brings peace and comfort into my often hectic life. Nature is frequently the inspiration for my work—I think of the Lord's hand in creating it, and I feel his hand in my work also.

What's your ideal day like when you are creating?

I have not had an ideal day for creating yet. I like to concentrate on one thing at a time, but I juggle being a mother and wife, having two or three callings, and teaching for West County Embroiderers. So if I were given an ideal day to create, I would go for an early morning walk, make some sketches, go into my art shed, and spend several hours playing around—felting, dyeing and

stitching. Textiles are very time-consuming. I would hopefully have a good bank of samples by the end of the day and know where I was going for the next day's work. So maybe that's something I have to look forward to one day.

You wrote about fear on your website and how it affects you as an artist. How do you usually overcome this obstacle?

I overcome my fear with faith now. It has taken me some time to realise I can do that. There are several scriptures that give me confidence, and prayer really helps too. I know those are the typical answers but they actually work. I want my art to uplift those who see it, and who better to ask for help than the Lord of creation?

How does your family support you in what you do? How do they inspire you?

My family has been a huge support to me, especially while I was retraining—particularly my middle daughter Tamara and youngest daughter Enya. They helped cook, clean, shop—just about everything. In fact, the last project I made fell apart in my hands the day before it was due in for assessment. Enya help me get organised enough to start again at 10 PM. I can honestly say that without them, I would not be where I am now.

On your website you talk about having time to take walks on Fingle Bridge and visit Corfe Castle. How does your love of Devon affect you creatively?

I make the time to walk in the countryside because in a lot of ways it is the heart of my inspiration. It is damp and grey for most of the year here, so if I don't make the effort to get out in spring and summer and enjoy the greenness, I miss out on some of the best blessings in my life. I feel God's love through nature and I want to share that through my work.

Tell us about your favorite piece.

I do not have a favourite piece of work, since each piece almost gets a personality and spirit of its own. If I were really pushed then maybe the abstract "A Day at the Beach," made from my dad's recycled work shirts. It ended up being a very personal work because it was like stitching my memories together.

What is frustrating about your work and what do you find most rewarding?

The most frustrating aspect of my work is that I lack somewhere fit to work. A shed at the bottom of the garden sounds lovely but it would likely get too cold and damp in the winter.

The most rewarding time is when people look at my work and the colours and designs make them feel happy. Colour is very emotionally healing and is good for uplifting mood.

What was it like creating your piece based on Walter de la Mere's poem "When the Rose is Faded"?

It was emotional. Because I am middle-aged now, my face is different than it used to be. My body's different, too. Inside I still feel like I am eighteen and I always get a little shock when I look into the mirror.

Talking to my friends, I find many of us feel that we have faded from the beauty of our youth, but inside we still feel the same. It can leave me feeling a little sad but inside there is still beauty.

What are your favorite parts of the creative process?

My favourite parts of the process are getting out of the house for the initial inspiration, the design development, and the creating of the piece.

I am never as happy with the finished work as I would like to be. I am very critical of my work and I always wish it were better.

What's your favorite medium?

I have no favourite medium other than natural fibres. I like to work with wool, cotton, linen, and silk. They can all be dyed and they feel right in my hands. I use many different techniques that give my work a varied look. I do not have a certain style and I am thinking now my work never will.

How does your art make you more complete or whole as a person?

My grandfather told me to choose a job I love and I will never work again. I can say this is exactly how I feel when I am working. When I come out of my shed I feel so happy and I know I am doing exactly what I should be. That feels good to know. ❧


PENDLETON
LIFE MEMBER

Jeronimo Lozano

INTERVIEW AND PHOTOS BY **VALEN HUNTER**

Jeronimo Lozano creates retablos, an Incan/Spanish folk art tradition. He was born in Peru and joined the Church after immigrating to the United States. He now lives in Salt Lake City.

Tell us about your background.

From the time that I was a child in the village of Huamanga, Ayacucho, Peru, I was exposed to various folk art traditions of the Andes. This is an area rich in ancient Inca culture and traditional beliefs. I had a natural disposition toward art and was encouraged by my elementary school teachers to further my art education.

I was selected to attend various colegios that specialized in art training, and eventually I was admitted to the School of Fine Arts at the University of Peru.

It was during this time that I was directed back toward my indigenous heritage and was encouraged to make systematic study of the folk art traditions of the Peruvian people. For twelve years, from 1967 to 1979, I traveled throughout Peru to study and learn from the traditional folk artisans of the Andes.

In December of 1979 I returned to the city of my birth and founded an artists' studio named Artists Workshop Guamangensis. There I worked and studied to perfect fifty different specialties of handmade Peruvian folk-crafts from all parts and peoples of Peru.

In my attempt to rescue some of the forgotten crafts of the past, I became especially interested in the art form called retablos. It's a combination of ancient Incan and colonial Spanish art traditions in which a series of pictorial scenes are arranged in a single work to relate a mythical or historical drama. The scenes consist primarily of handmade figurines, modeled and painted to convey the appropriate sense of action, drama, or humor.

The retablo has long been loved by the common people of Peru, as it reflects their customs, beliefs, and personalities in a concise visual narrative. I have made it my specialty and have created retablos in such diverse formats as handmade wooden chests, gourds, matchboxes, sea-shells, reeds, and tree trunks. These serve as the box or container in which the various scenes are displayed. They may be decorated in a variety of ways and are usually hinged to open and close.

The original purpose of the retablo was to instruct, so I have continued this tradition by including scenes of the Peruvian people's struggle for independence and current political events. During my years of study I also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learned the traditional dances and songs of my country and frequently depict them in my retablos.

After enduring several years of harassment by terrorist groups, I was warned not to return to my village. I came to the United States as part of a performing arts group from Peru. I have since received official recognition by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service as an "Artist of Extraordinary Merit." I view myself as a cultural ambassador of the culture of my native Peru and through my retablos I wish to preserve the myths of the ancient Inca and document the traditional life of the Andean people.

Some of my recent work reflects my more recent experiences and observations of the intriguing cultural traditions of the United States.

What is your favorite retablo of those you've done?

Perhaps my most significant work of the summer is a retablo depicting my recent surgery to place synthetic bones in my middle ear and graft a new ear drum. While recovering from this operation, I conceived of a symbolic representation of this event. The retablo that I made shows a South American llama lying on the operating table, representing me. The doctors and attendants are represented by animals typical of North America. The surgeon, in the form of a wise rabbit dressed in green surgical scrubs, is delicately lifting my ear with his scalpel while his assistants, also in green scrubs, are depicted as a deer, a buffalo, a cow and a bear. Four University of Utah medical students are observing and taking notes on the operation. They are shown as a horse, a rat, a wolf, and a duck wearing t-shirts with a large red "U" on them.

Since Dr. Clough Shelton of the University of Utah Medical Center, donated his services and Intermountain Health Care's LDS Hospital accepted my case as a special charity, I have made two copies of this retablo and am giving one to each of them.

By the way, the operation was more successful than anyone expected and I am now able to hear birds singing again. In fact, the hearing in my left ear is now better than in my right ear.

Tell us about your conversion.

When I lived in Peru, I had never heard of the LDS Church. Before I boarded the airplane to come here, I heard that they were building a church in Lima. I came in a big group of folklore artists and went to Miami, then to Salt Lake, and I saw the temple there.

After traveling around with this group, I lived with some people in Salt Lake and they would go somewhere every Sunday and I didn't know where they were going, so one day I asked if I could go with them. When I got to church, a sister gave me a Book of Mormon and a paper of chapters for me to mark off as I read. I read the Book of Mormon in three months.

The Book of Mormon was very interesting to me, so I met some missionaries who were really good to me and taught me every week. I went to church every week and the missionaries talked to me about how I needed to be baptized because Jesus Christ was baptized, so I decided to be baptized.

On the day of my baptism, it was really dark outside, like it was going to rain. There were a lot of dark clouds everywhere. After I was baptized, after the meeting was over, I went outside and the sky was clear and the sun was shining really bright and it was such a beautiful day. It was like a miracle. My baptism was really special.

Then I learned about baptisms for the dead, so I spent a lot of time trying to find out the names of my grandparents and great-grandparents, which was hard because I had never met them. But after finding some of their names, I submitted them to the bishop and he helped me through the process of getting those names submitted so I could be baptized for them. I've done

baptisms in the temple fourteen times so far. I felt special being able to be baptized for those people who never had the opportunity to know Jesus Christ and be baptized in his name.

Then I was given the priesthood and became a high priest.

I met a friend, Mary Agusta. She taught me about family history. She had bad health, so I had compassion for her and took care of her. Then some sister missionaries came over to teach her the gospel and she was baptized and I confirmed her in church.

After she was baptized, she was very happy, but her health deteriorated so she went to a nursing home. I visit her three times a week and take her to sacrament meeting, then I take her home and go to my sacrament meeting.

When I lived in the mountains in Peru, my mother used to be a missionary and would go around and teach about God—Catholic doctrine mostly, but I was surprised that what the LDS believed was what my mother taught me.

Can you explain how you make the retablos?

First, I buy flour and mix it in a little bowl with cold water very slowly, and then I also cook it slowly so it makes a paste. I take a spoonful of that paste and put it in flour and roll it around and that converts it into a plaster. It looks like clay, but it is the plaster used to make the little models.

What kind of models?

My favorite models to make are animals, plants, and different customs which are sacred. After they dry for one day, I paint them with watercolors or acrylic paint. If I didn't have any money to buy paintbrushes, then I would make the paintbrushes out of hair. I would cut hair, maybe my hair—boy or girl, it doesn't matter—but I just get little hairs and tie them to a little stick and use that to paint.

Is using real hair better?

Yes, it's better because in the mountains we have many animals like horses, cows, dogs, and goats, so when they're sleeping you cut their hair to use to make paintbrushes. When I lived in the mountains, I only used the natural colors. I never bought anything. I always made my own brushes and made paint out of plants, dirt and earth, fruit, things like that. And I used those for colors so all my colors were natural. Now I buy paints and brushes to paint the little figures. They work a little differently, but it's easier now to do that.

Making your own paints sounds very hard, though.

Yes, it is difficult. It takes patience to make paint.

What happens next?

After I finish coloring and painting, I make cabinet boxes of wood, like a carpenter. I mostly make them with wood, and after I make them they need to be whitened—painted. So I paint them and paint flowers or something to decorate them.

What kinds of different things have you found to make your boxes with?

Matchboxes, chicken eggs, and other different materials. Sometimes the boxes are very small so I have to make the figures small enough to fit inside.

You've used a chicken egg?

Yes, and an ostrich egg. I've used seashells too—clams. I open the shell and eat the clam, and then I use the shell to make the retablo box.

So, you paint the outside separately. You paint the cabinet—or the box or shell—and then you put in the figures?

Yes. After coloring all the figures and the painting, I glue them inside the cabinet and decide what scene to do. The figures will maybe represent a Christmas scene—a nativity—maybe folk dances, maybe history, or something happening in the community.

I've noticed you make a box for every place that you've gone, so for different events you kind of document them with your figures in a box.

Yes, I use them for documenting. The first model I made when I moved to Utah was of Joseph Smith and the First Vision. I also make many retablos with religious themes. I've made some of the pioneers crossing the plains guided by Brigham Young, and lots of Book of Mormon stories. And Bible stories, so people from many religions like my work—Catholics, Presbyterians, everybody likes the Bible stories.

What are you making now?

Right now I'm preparing for a big traditional festival at the end of the year in December, so I'm making many traditional retablos, Bible stories, and things like that for the festival.

What are your retablos representing for this festival (the Indian Art Walk)?

The Christmas customs from where I come from in the mountains, so here I am representing the birth of Christ. I am also making rodeo scenes with cowboys, Native Americans dancing, and other things.

Which ones have you most enjoyed making?

I love them all, but I'm really proud of the one I made about the First Vision, and also the one of my surgery at the University of Utah.

How has the gospel affected your work?

After I was baptized, I didn't change anything in the technical aspects or the process, but there have been changes in the type of models I make and the scenes I do because I produce a lot more gospel-related work. But I haven't changed how I do it because you can't change that. This type of artwork has over five hundred years of history, so it's important to preserve it and keep it traditional.

The gospel is full of marvelous stories. They are marvelous by themselves, but I like to portray them through my work as well, and I am going to do it my whole life.


Chiclets

Alex Boyé

INTERVIEW BY **MICHAEL YOUNG** | PHOTOS COURTESY **ALEX BOYÉ**
WEB: **ALEXBOYE.COM**

Not many people would feel dissatisfied after their album hit number twelve on the European charts, but Alex Boyé was. Redirecting his musical career, Alex doesn't want to just rock the music world—he wants to change it.

"Is this really for the Lord, or am I just doing it for myself?"

What inspired you to pursue music as a career?

I actually started as dancer, going to dances and nightclubs with my friends when I was younger, and we would dance all night. That was where I'd get my release. My mum moved to Nigeria for about eight years, I never met my dad, and I lived with an uncle who was always drinking and smoking. It was a pretty tough situation, so I found my release dancing.

What musicians did you look up to growing up, and why were they pivotal for you?

When I was younger I was heavily into Motown. I loved all of it—the Al Greens, the Stevie Wonders, and the Marvin Gayes. Then I got into Smokey Robinson and the more modern-day soul and R&B music in a really big way. They're all different artists—some of them you don't even hear about any more. It was more the music that I was influenced by, as opposed to the artist.

I had white foster parents for a while, and I lived in a place called Kent, which is in England, about two hundred and fifty miles out of London. My foster parents started introducing me to Sting, Paul Simon, and 10cc. They taught me a whole other style of music that I didn't even know about. From then on I had all types of music in my head—from rock to rap to jazz, fusion, stuff like that.

How were you discovered?

After my mission I got into a boy band. I was the only singer; the others were dancers. Our band was called Awesome. We got ourselves a gig as dance mascots for a semi-professional basketball team in London. Basically, we'd make up routines for half-time in between the cheerleaders' performances. We started dancing, and then I started singing my own songs at the half-time slots. Because we had to entertain the crowd, we performed to songs that had chants and heavy beats so the audience could sing along. I'd put calls and responses into the songs, and the guys would dance behind me. We were just a gimmick, but we started taking it more seriously when we saw that we were getting a following.

Our band was together for about eight years. We started from scratch and toured all over England. It started off as a hobby; then it became a really serious hobby; then we found ourselves with a recording contract with Universal Records; and then it became really, really serious. That all occurred within the space of eight years, and for probably the last three years we were doing it professionally.

What influenced your decision to go solo?

We had a huge hit in Europe back in '97, and then the whirlwind started: big gigs, performances, limousines, and all the stuff like that. But I remember that one of the apostles said something at a conference that really resonated with me, and this kind of describes one of the reasons why I left the group.

He said, "Sometimes we find ourselves climbing up the ladder of success, and when we get to the top we find ourselves leaning on the wrong side of the wall." That was me—that was totally me. So I had to get back down, take the ladder, shift it onto a much better wall with a firmer foundation, and start climbing up that wall.

Spiritually, my career was taking me down the wrong road. I was a returned missionary, but being in that world . . . it was just not conducive to being a member of the Church.

I had to start making some decisions. Even though we were doing really well—spiritually, I wasn't. It's kind of funny, but when you have amazing amounts of success, if you're not spiritually right, all that success doesn't mean anything.

When you want to excel but it's not something you're chasing—when you want to live the standards—then when you find success it becomes sweeter. You appreciate it more.

How did you join the Mormon Tabernacle Choir?

That was another big accident which totally changed my life. Iit was nothing I expected. At the time, I was trying to get into the LDS market, and I had a phone call from an LDS artist, Jenny Frogley, who's the manager at LDS Artists. She called me up and said, "Hey, I've got this gig, are you interested in it?" She explained that the Choir was producing a Broadway album, and that one of the songs on the album was a duet of "Circle of Life" from *The Lion King*. They wanted some guy to do the big African chants, so they were trying to find some black people. And then she said, "There's one catch. There's a ninety-five percent chance that we won't do it, because the two people who were originally slated to do it, Donny Osmond and Gladys Knight, are ninety-five percent certain that they will do it, but they might not."

I didn't hear anything for a couple of months, and I just forgot about it and thought, "Oh well, that fell through." Then I received a phone call later from Craig Jessop, and he said, "Hey, Alex, you up for doing this project?" And I'm thinking, "What project? Oh, yes!"

It was funny because when I was told that I had that ninety-five percent chance of not getting it, I remember I was praying, "Heavenly Father, please make it so that Gladys Knight and Donny Osmond are so busy they are out of the country…on a world tour…no time…"—basically that they were so busy that I would get the chance to do it. When I got the call, I was like, "God answered a brother's prayers, yeah!" So I turned up at the recording studio.

Now, usually when I turn up at a recording studio I'm in jeans, a t-shirt, whatever. But this time I turned up in my church suit—tie, tie tack, everything. Because I was like, "How do you dress to go and record with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir?" I was very conservative.

When I got in the studio, Brother Jessop was directing, and he said, "Alex, I want you do this African chant right at the beginning. I want you to sing that part." And I said, "Yeah, sure, no problem." So I started singing it, and he said, "That's fine, but I need some more energy from you." I thought to myself, "Okay, a little bit more energy. No problem, I can do that." I sang that opening line with a little bit more energy, and he said, "You know, that's fine, but I'm still not getting what I want from you. I need a little bit more energy and passion in the song." Okay, no problem. I gave it a little bit more energy.

Then he got really frustrated and said, "Alex, the reason I chose you was I heard you have passion and energy and you sing with vigor," and I'm like, "Oh, okay…really?" I was thinking I should go with conservative. So I took my tie off, I took my jacket off, I rolled up my sleeves, and I just let out this huge "Waaaan…" and then Brother Jessop said, "Yes, that's it! That's exactly what I want!" It was a great experience.

After we'd finished the whole recording session, Bro. Jessop started asking me questions: who are you, what do you do, where are you from, etc. Then all of sudden he just asked, "Have you ever considered auditioning for the Mormon Tabernacle Choir?" I paused and thought to myself, "Is this really…what? Is he… This doesn't really make sense. I don't have any classical training, I've never sung in a choir before…" It felt like a really out-of-place question. So I said, "Well, I'll think about it," and I remember in my mind I was like, "Yeah right! I've heard how tough it is."

Later I was at a conference or at church or something like that, and I had this kind of voice of inspiration that I just felt. Every now and then I'll feel it when I need to do something, you know what I mean? This voice said, "When you left the group, do you remember the promise that you made to yourself? You said that from now on you were going to seek the highest good in music." And I remember thinking to myself, "Yeah." And it was almost like I had this, "McFly, McFly! Hello, hello! It's right here, right in front of you!" I had this feeling that said, "So what's the highest good?

What can be a higher good than being in the Tabernacle Choir?" And I remember thinking, "Uh…nothing."

So I got on the phone and started making arrangements. I got the audition and started with the Choir.

First I participated in the really hard sixteen-week training school. That was one of the toughest and most rewarding things I had ever done, because afterward I saw music in a totally different way—I had an understanding of what music really, really was.

There was something that one of the teachers would say that blew me away. He talked about how, at general conference for instance, you will never have an apostle or a prophet of the Lord speak until the choir has sung. I gained this realization of how powerful music is—powerful to the point that an anointed man will not speak first until the Spirit is brought into the place through the power of music.

That changed my whole outlook on what music is and how powerful that is and my role in it. Even if I did something beyond the Tabernacle Choir, or if I do my other projects, I always remember that—even if I'm not necessarily doing songs about God or if I have a project that's a secular project. It's always uplifting, the lyrics are always clean, and it's always in a place where I can stand up and say, "Yes, I can sing this in front of a prophet. I can sing this in front of anyone," no matter what style of music it is. That has been something that has changed my life and really put me in a place where I can use music to serve other people as opposed to serving myself.

Do you have a favorite experience from performing with the Choir?

There's been quite a few. One of them was singing on the Midwest tour that we had last year, where I had a chance to sing solos. One of the standout songs for me was, "I Want Jesus to Walk With Me."

The last day of the tour, we performed at Denver at the Red Rocks, which is a beautiful venue, and sitting out there in the audience about twenty feet away from me was President Monson. So I'm singing to President Monson, and it was the most surreal, daunting, amazing, nerve-wracking, exciting feeling I've ever had in my life.

Another experience I had took place when I had only been in the choir for a few months. President Mac Christensen came into rehearsals and said, "We're going to cut the rehearsals short. We'd like every single one of you to grab hold of your hymnbook and come with me."

So we went for a walk right through the tunnels and out through to the Conference Center. We headed up the stairs and walked out onto the floor, and there was President Hinckley's casket. We sang three hymns. The last one was, "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet." We all gathered around President Hinckley's casket and looked at his face. It was the most amazing feeling. I had a strong testimony of the power of the resurrection—that President Hinckley was not there. He was not dead, but we saw his body. We knew without a shadow of a doubt that he was not there. He was out and about the Lord's business.

Another thing we felt was that the man we sang to was a prophet of God. It was one of the most powerful musical experiences I've ever had in my life. Now, I've had the chance to sing on MTV, I've had songs fairly big on the charts, and I've experienced singing to an audience of maybe sixty or seventy thousand people, with eleven million people watching the show all over Europe. All of that didn't even come close to that experience of singing to President Hinckley.

You've recently put out a religious album called *Be Still, My Soul*. How was working on that album different from working on some of your other albums and projects?

In many, many ways, big and small. It goes back again to seeking the highest good from music. The highest form of art, in my opinion, is art that praises God. There is no higher form of art than that. You can have artists all around the world doing amazing things, but there is no form of art that is higher and that is more poignant. I have always had a strong belief that I need to be a part of that as often as I can.

So, I decided to do a hymns album. It was a powerful experience, because I felt prompted that I needed to do a hymns album, but nobody asked me to do it. I didn't know how I was going to sell it—I didn't have a deal with Deseret Book or anything like that—but I kept getting this prompting all the time. I was also working on a secular album then, because I thought that's what was going to make me money. Interestingly, I spent more money on the secular album than I did on the spiritual album.

And I remember I was sitting in a Sunday School lesson, and we were talking about King Solomon and how Solomon built a temple for the Lord, and after he'd built this temple it was beautiful, amazing, and elaborate; then he built himself a temple and it was three times the size of the temple that he built for the Lord. I remember thinking to myself all of the sudden, "Well, where does his allegiance lie?"

I started thinking about my album, and I thought, "Wait a minute. I've got to remember where *my* allegiance lies." I was putting my leftover change toward doing the spiritual album, but the bulk of my hours toward the secular one. I remember thinking, "Is this really for the Lord, or am I just doing it for myself?" I came to a big realization of how I needed to use everything that I had to do this spiritual album.

I did the album, and I remember thinking, "What am I going to do with this album now?" I put it on the shelf, asking, "Did I really feel this prompting or was it just me?" After I finished

The highest form of art…is art that praises God.

that first tour with the Tabernacle Choir, doing all those solos, a week later I got a phone call from Deseret Book saying, "Alex, we would like to commission you to do a hymns album." And I said, "No way, are you kidding? It's done." So I just took it to Deseret Book and they released it. For about two months it was in the top ten of the Deseret Book ratings.

What steps go into writing a song for you?

It really varies. Sometimes I'll have a producer who sends a whole bunch of music and I like the feel of the music or the instrument, and then I'll write a song to it. Sometimes it's a process. Sometimes I'll feel that inspiration as a melody that I just can't get out of my head, and it's annoying me and I have to go to the studio and get it out before I explode.

Sometimes I'll get inspired even listening to a song on the radio. It's not necessarily that I write a song that sounds exactly like that—maybe it's just the energy I felt from that particular song that makes me want to emulate that energy in my song or whatever it is that I'm doing.

I don't have a specific way—there are so many different ways.

How do you prepare yourself mentally, spiritually, and physically to sing?

I will never ever sing a song without a prayer first. It doesn't matter what type of song it is—if I'm doing a corporate gig, singing at church, singing a hymn, singing anywhere, it doesn't matter, I always have a prayer first. Somehow, whenever I've had that, the music seems to touch people in powerful ways. There have been times when I've not prayed, and the song was just a song. Even for a secular song, a love song, or a dance song, I've found that it just didn't have the same effect. To this day I still cannot explain it. It's one thing to explain that when you're praying and you're singing a hymn at sacrament, you're hoping the Spirit is there and it becomes a powerful talk. But when I'm not singing songs about Christ, or when I'm just singing a pop song and I pray beforehand, there seems to be just great response from the audience, whether they want to dance more, or whether they enjoy it more, or whether they say, "Hey, can you come back?" or, "We'll pay you a lot more money this time," all those types of things. It's like everything is spiritual. Everything is spiritual.

How does the gospel affect you as an artist?

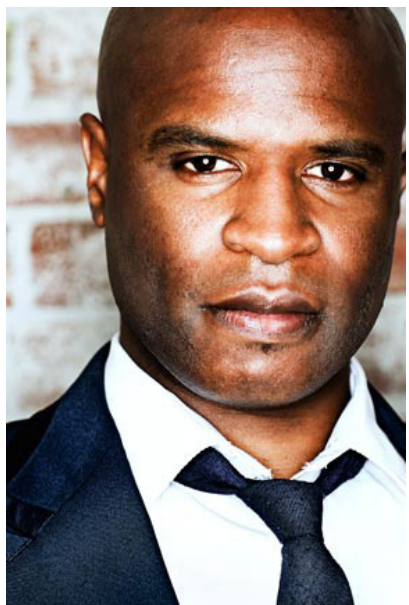
I think that when you have the gospel in your life, you use a different language, and that language changes you. When you're reading scriptures every day and feeling influence from there and trying your best to stand in holy places, it becomes a part of you, and when you do your music you think about that a lot more. There's that scripture in Doctrine & Covenants 25:12—"The song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads." If every song is a prayer, then I want to make sure my prayer is sincere. So one of my favorite things to do is doing sincere music—music that praises God. At the end of that scripture, it talks about how "it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads," and I can honestly say that I have felt those blessings from performing that type of song. I'm definitely a huge advocate of that type of song—it's blessed my life in so many different ways.

What are your plans for your continued musical career? What do you most want to achieve going forward?

One of my biggest goals is to continue writing songs, but to start putting really strong, powerful, inspirational songs into the Billboard charts. I was reading a magazine that listed the most influential artists. If you think about them, what were they doing? Overdosing on drugs, breaking the law of chastity, and putting God before themselves. And so I'm thinking to myself, "I want to get a team together and just infiltrate the Billboard charts with uplifting and good music." A lot of times I used to say, "It's impossible," but then I think to myself, "Nothing's impossible with God. The Lord says I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." I don't doubt that anymore.

So that's what my goal is, and I'm going to keep doing it even if I'm ninety when it happens, because you can change the world through music. Elder Ballard said that as members of the Church, we need to provide a quality alternative, and I love the way he said "quality." If it is quality, then people will want to listen to it—they won't care if we're Mormons. If it's quality, if it's well done, if it's well orchestrated, and it's well composed, I'm telling you it doesn't matter what faith you are, they will take the songs. I believe that with all my heart.

That's one of the things that is always in my mind: quality alternatives, quality alternatives. We can do that. We as members of the Church—me, you, everyone. We can do that. ❧




ALEX BOYÉ
My Christmas Wish

Henriette Lersch

INTERVIEW BY **DAVID LAYTON** | PHOTOS COURTESY **ANDREAS SCHULTZ**
WEB: **LERSCHGEIGENBAU.AT**

A violinmaker in Vienna, Austria, with a passion for Baroque-era instruments, Henriette Lersch finds religious symbolism in her creative work.

How did you acquire your love of music?

My mother is a very musical and music-loving person, and my father is a sculptor, so there was no way not to get into music or arts in our home. Mother taught piano at a music school and played a lot of different music at home, from classical music to the Beatles—all different kinds of ethnic and folk music. Our parents encouraged us to play instruments and to do crafty things with our hands, as well as to have our ears and eyes open for whatever comes our way.

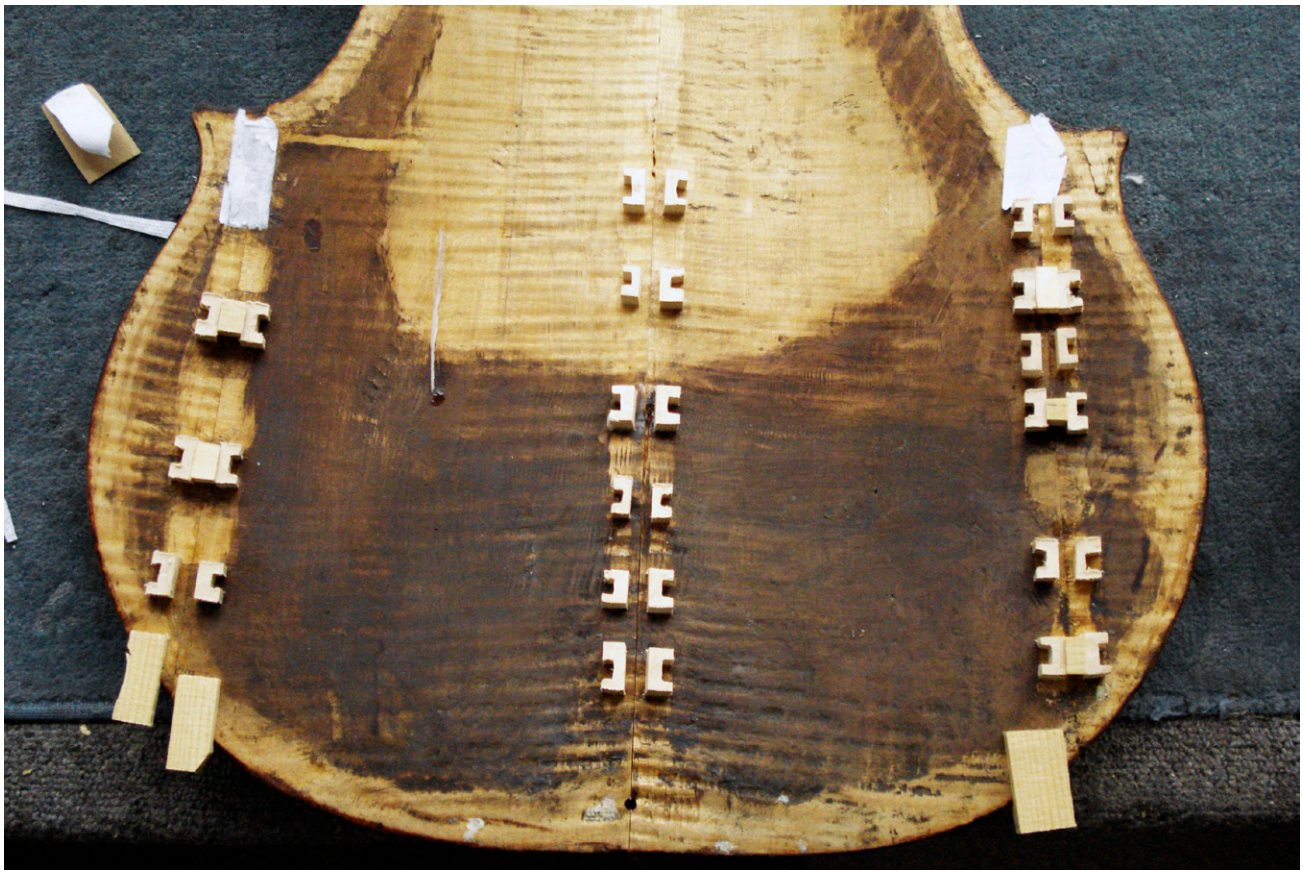
I think my own real love for music started developing later, while singing in a choir. It deepened when I started visiting more concerts. Live music is the best. I just adore the atmosphere when excellent musicians are in the process of creating music—especially when you feel that they don't have to worry about the technique anymore, when they are really communicating the intention or the message of the music.

How did you get started as a violinmaker?

My mother had a couple of friends who were violinmakers. After I graduated from school, I wanted to study a zillion subjects and couldn't make up my mind, until I had the idea of becoming a violinmaker—and that was it. I attended a violinmaking school in Cremona, Italy, for a year. I was then offered an apprenticeship by one of my violinmaking friends from Bavaria, Germany, who had seen me work in his violinmaking course a year earlier. After that followed a couple of jobs with different violinmakers. Now I have my own workshop in Vienna, Austria.

What was it like making your first violin?

My first stringed instrument was actually a viola da gamba (six-stringed



Baroque instrument). I started it during a course for amateur violinmakers that took place in a medieval castle in Germany. It was pure joy. I loved everything—the wood, the tools, and carving my first arching of the viola da gamba top was an incredible pleasure. Everything was new, exciting, and mysterious.

What is involved in crafting your violins?

Wood, tools, glue, varnish, strings, and a *lot* of time, patience, and curiosity.

What is a normal day like?

I come to my shop around 8:30, check my email, make some tea, and start to work. A couple of customers come in or call, I re-hair some bows and try to do the work I planned for the day. In the case that I don't have other appointments in the evening, I stay in the shop until I feel I've done enough. That makes some days long days.

How do you know when a violin is finished?

When I have the feeling that it has found its sound. New violins, and also old instruments after a major restoration, need some time to settle. When you play an instrument for the first time you can hear the character, but the instrument needs to get used to the pressure of the strings, and to the vibration of being played. I learned from experience that the biggest changes happen during the first three months after I put strings on an instrument, and some minor changes keep happening within the first year or year and a half when the instrument is being played frequently. During that period of time, musicians return frequently for sound readjustments. At a certain point, the musician and I just hear and feel that the instrument is where it should be, sound-wise.

What is your favorite project you've worked on?

There are many. Let me name three:

One was two weeks restoring instruments and teaching apprentices for Violinmakers Without Borders in Havana—nice colleagues and apprentices, great musicians.

The second was not a real project, more a long row of projects working eighteen months for Christophe Landon in New York. He is a very energetic person with great instruments to work on. There were many major restorations to be made under some kind of time pressure, but there was also a lot of good and constructive energy in the workshop and the curiosity to try something new—it was amazing how much we managed to do within a very limited time.

And then there was copying an old Italian instrument for a customer who wasn't wealthy enough to buy the original, and seeing him enjoy the look and the sound of the copy I made.

What do you consider your greatest achievement so far?

My survival of a 350-hour cello restoration in a time when I taught early morning seminary four times a week.

In what direction do you see your future heading?

I see my future in the world of instrument-making in working in dialogue with musicians on improving their instruments, in building new instruments, and in working on Baroque instruments—doing a lot of rebuilding and Baroque setup.

Vienna is a great place for that. It's a city with approximately ten professional orchestras, several music colleges, and a long tradition of classical music in all the different styles.

More and more, antique instruments are bought as investments, which jacks the prices and makes the instruments less available for musicians. I think this is a sad development, but it is a great chance for new and good instruments to get the appreciation they deserve. The level of violinmaking has improved a lot in the last twenty years, and it is an exciting time for violinmakers.

On the other hand, the violinmaking industry in the Far East has also improved the quality of their instruments amazingly. Nobody knows where this development will lead the violinmaking world to within the next twenty years—in the case that they keep improving the quality without increasing the prices.

How does the gospel influence your work?

I have to admit that, although there is a violin by Stradivari called "the Messiah," it's not my favorite model. [Smile.]

The gospel doesn't influence my work directly—my testimony in gospel principles doesn't make my work cleaner or the sound more pure. I think where the gospel does influence my work is more by my trying to be open and able to realize what an instrument, or the wood I use for an instrument, needs.

Every instrument consists of a huge amount of variable parameters, and I need to be able to find out how to set up an instrument so that the instrument can bring out its personal maximum of sound, beauty, and character.

I think that's how Heavenly Father works with us. He knows us and sees what we need to grow and to bring out the best we're able to do. Every individual needs something different to be able to grow, and it's the same with instruments: every violin or cello needs something else. Some need more pressure, some less; one needs this kind of strings, the other another kind. Although there are several years of experience working with instruments and there are certain things that have worked very well with seventy percent of the instruments, I need to be able to see, too, what the other thirty percent need, and I need to be careful not to tap into the trap of fast judgment or personal pride.

What is the most rewarding aspect of being an instrument maker?

To listen to an instrument I made in a concert—to hear that the instrument has come to life. ❧

Glenn Gordon

INTERVIEW BY **ELSIE BOYER** | PHOTOS COURTESY **PORTRAIT INNOVATIONS & EMILY HADFIELD**
WEB: **LDSCOMPOSERSTRUST.COM**

Glenn Gordon, an Australian music producer, has a passion for promoting LDS music throughout the world.

What exactly does a music producer do?

Being a music producer is only a part-time, occasional calling for me. I am actually a full-time Ph.D. student in Creative Writing at Monash University in Melbourne and I do musical activities on the side. Being a music producer is really about facilitating projects—making things.

All of my music production activities relate to the promotion of Mormon music. This is where my passion lies.

What would be a usual day at work for you?

At the moment I am organizing two concerts in Utah from Melbourne, so the "music producing" part of my day is usually the early part when I wake up and look at the emails that have collected from composers and performers. I then answer any questions that have arisen, collect information for programs, etc. I am working with my son on a website for the LDS Composers' Trust, an organization being established in the U.S. to promote LDS music and musicians.

How did you first get involved with producing music?

My first professional activity in this area was the production of a CD

of new hymns by LDS composers. That was about five or six years ago. I contacted a number of composers I had known or heard about and asked if they still wrote hymns. Thankfully a number of them wrote remarkable hymns and I was able to put together a CD performed by the Sydney Chamber Choir, a professional non-LDS chamber choir who did a wonderful job under the direction of Philip Chu. This project put me in touch with an ever-widening group of composers who have been helpful in later projects.

What made you decide to produce music?

I have always been passionate about Mormon music since my days at Ricks College in the early '70s as a seventeen-year-old.

I was a music major under Dr. Darwin Wolford and he has been a major central influence on me since, not only because he is a wonderful composer but also because he has always been a "doer": someone who promotes his own music, is widely published, and is not afraid to take on projects that help other LDS composers.

At Ricks I also met Dr. LaMar Barrus, whose oratorio "Ode to Libertad" inspired me to understand that LDS music was more than hymns in the hymnbook and hymn arrangements sung at stake conference. LDS composers could and did write every type of concert music.

This was my starting point, but of course I had to come home, serve a mission (in Australia Perth), and start a family after that.

What is your personal music background?

Really, my background is fairly thin. I took piano lessons for a number of years from the age of ten. As I mentioned, I was briefly a music major at Ricks (BYU–I) and at the University of Sydney following my mission.

Most of my musical training, however, has come through church involvement as ward or stake organist and working with choir directors until I became a choir director myself. I have served in every music calling in the Church—most recently as Primary pianist in our ward, where I also accompany the choir.

I do some hymn arranging as well, but nothing special. I am a great listener to music. I always have the classical music station playing in the car and love to hear new pieces.

Do you have a favorite instrument?

I love all instruments—each has a place. I love the voice because one can set poetry to music and portray deep emotions through that combination of music and text. The organ is an extraordinary instrument when well played. Every instrument can be beautiful if given the right music and performer.

What type of music do you generally produce?

I only produce LDS music as this is my area of interest. There are wonderful music producers out there in the Church and the world who can bring together whatever resources they wish, but I feel that there is a need for someone to stand up for the Mormon concert music composer and work with them to promote their music and make it available to a wider audience in and outside of the Church.

My goal is to take Mormon music to the world!

What are some of the more memorable things you've produced?

As I mentioned earlier, the LDS hymns CD was the first thing I worked on. Last year I decided to do something more adventurous and so I began working with the Melbourne Chamber Choir and its director Faye Dumont on a concert that was a series of "reflections" on the hymn text of "Come, Come, Ye Saints." You can learn more about this project at our website: www.ldschoirs.com/reflections

In the end we had sixteen composers involved who volunteered their talents to create this evening of extraordinary music. These included one

My goal is to take Mormon music to the world!

non-LDS composer, Dr. Elliott Gyger of the University of Melbourne, who wrote an extraordinary work featuring marimba and harp in the accompaniment to the choral setting.

What has been one of your greatest challenges with producing?

As with anything that involves people and funding, it is usually the challenge of finding the resources to make things happen. I have been fortunate in having had great support from professional and amateur musicians alike.

This is one reason why the LDS Composers' Trust is so important to me—it will provide, over time, a source of funds to permit future ventures.

Who are some of your musical influences?

I find my inspiration in all sorts of places. I love the great choral music of Bach and Handel and other Baroque composers, but I have recently discovered the music of Morten Lauridsen which is just wonderful.

I have an attachment to virtuoso performance. It can be thrilling to hear someone play a piece of music as though their very life depended on it.

The more I get to know LDS composers from around the world, the more they inspire and uplift me. Every day I seem to come across someone new and I love the learning, the constant surprises that come about as you continue to explore music.

What are your goals as a music producer?

Taking Mormon music to the world! On the LDS Composers' Trust website, I have set out clear goals for the Trust that include the discovery, collecting, performing, and recording of LDS concert music.

Do you have a favorite project? If so, which one and why?

Every new project is a new baby and one cannot love one above another, but I am heavily involved in the LDS Composers' Trust concerts in Provo and Salt Lake City on the 23rd and 24th of September, and these are taking up all of my time at the moment.

This will be an outstanding concert with my friend from Texas, pianist Martha Dudgeon, anchoring the concert with a raft of new LDS music for the piano. We also have Professor April Clayton, who teaches flute at BYU, and Zachary Van Houten, composer and French horn player, involved. Ruth Ellis, a well-known soprano, will be singing, and I am delighted to have composer Marie Nelson performing one of her own works accompanying Susan Goodfellow on flute.

Are there any pivotal moments in your childhood that led you to where you are now?

I began piano lessons at ten and had just begun to appreciate the vastness of music. I remember my piano teacher taking a group of students to see Bach's "St. Matthew's Passion" in Christ Church Anglican (Episcopalian) Cathedral in Newcastle, NSW, when I was just starting out on piano. It was a magical experience in that vast space of the cathedral and I have been a lover of Bach ever since.

How were you converted to the Church?

My parents and I joined the Church when I was thirteen. A colleague of my father's at work had introduced him to the gospel and we had the missionaries over to teach us the discussions as they were back in the late 1960s, on a flannel board. They asked us to read the Book of Mormon and pray and, as a child, I did that and received a witness that remains with me more than forty years later.

My parents were always active Church members, as are my sisters and their families. We were part of a pioneering generation in the Church in Australia, which has grown so much in the intervening years.

We had to travel to New Zealand to be sealed in the temple and now we have a temple here in Melbourne less than an hour away.

What sort of difficulties do you face being an active and practicing member of the Church in the music industry?

As I am not a commercial music producer and only work on LDS-based projects, I have really had no difficulties. I have found non-LDS musicians in Australia to be very helpful and supportive of the projects I have endeavoured to undertake here.

I also try to work within the Church wherever I live in Australia to "push the boundaries" a little and make musicians in the Church aware of the vast resources and music that are available to them, rather than doing the same old things year after year.

With the "Come, Come, Ye Saints" concert, I gathered a small regional choir together from among interested LDS singers and we performed some of the items with the Melbourne Chamber Choir at the Melba Hall of the University of Melbourne.

That was a unique experience for most of them and it was a wonderful event.

Who is one of the more memorable artists that you've been able to work with?

I have been blessed to work with inspired and inspiring composers—individuals such as the late Robert Manookin, who taught at BYU for many years inspired me to see the sacred in the music.

Rowan Taylor from Los Angeles has also been a great influence. He was a passionate and devoted composer who just never stopped writing, but at the same time he was a faithful Church member, fulfilling his callings and humbly using his talents at every turn.

What do you feel is the most important characteristic in a finished musical product?

In a concert of LDS music, or in a recording, the goal is always to feel the Spirit in the finished product and perhaps to be "stretched" a little bit by the experience.

Are there any unique challenges in being a Latter-day Saint in Australia?

Because the Church in Australia is still quite small, there are some challenges in a lack of understanding from others. We are perceived as a "fringe" religion by the religious mainstream in Australia, but individual Latter-day Saints have made great strides in all aspects of Australian life and so more and more people are overcoming prejudices because they know someone personally who is LDS and has had a positive influence on their lives.

I would describe the Church in Australia as "mature," just as it is in the U.S. People are now second- and third-generation Latter-day Saints. They have served missions and married in the temple. Church programs operate well in most wards and Church leadership is of a high standard. We have outstanding leaders in my home stake in Melbourne, and I always feel that the Church is in good hands here.

Are there any particular artists you would like to work with but haven't yet?

I met Mack Wilberg briefly earlier this year and was able to pass on to him the sheet music and recording of the "Reflections on Come, Come, Ye Saints" concert. There are a couple of works that were a part of that project that I would love to hear the Tabernacle Choir perform. Now that would be a memorable experience!

How do you see your work progressing the kingdom?

I would hope that by promoting the music of Mormon composers and performers, I am progressing the kingdom.

I love the spirit that is attached to each of the events I facilitate—helping composers get works performed or encouraging them to use their talents and give them some public recognition. Music is one of the great carriers of the Spirit into people's lives, whether it is sacred or secular music. It touches hearts and can change lives and I love being involved in that process.

Do you have a particular scripture or quote that comes to mind in relationship to the work you do?

I have always been inspired by President Kimball's "Vision of the Arts." I can see it slowly coming to pass in each of the arts.

One of the great lines from our hymns always rings out to me: "Join the great throng, Psaltery, organ and song, Sounding in glad adoration." That is what I am trying to achieve. ❧

Nobuaki Irie

INTERVIEW BY **ANNEKE MAJORS** | PHOTOS COURTESY **NOBUAKI IRIE**
WEB: **NOBUAKIMUSIC.COM**

Nobuaki Irie is a singer and songwriter from Osaka, Japan. He served as a missionary in the Fukuoka Japan Mission. After his mission he attended BYU in Provo, where he earned a master's degree in linguistics. In Utah he had the chance to meet LDS composer Janice Kapp Perry and worked with her to translate and record her music in Japanese. Soon he became a professional singer, recording music with a wide range of LDS artists. He currently works as a professor of English at a university in Osaka and is writing original compositions and continuing work on a new album set to come out next year.

First of all, how did you find out about the gospel?

I met two missionaries on the street when I was eighteen, a senior in high school. I grew up in a Buddhist family, so it wasn't easy to attend church, and it was probably the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. My parents almost disowned me. But the interesting thing was, my family took me to a Buddhist temple to have me speak with the priest there, hoping he would persuade me not to join this church, and I ended up almost testifying to the priest, "I read the Book of Mormon, I felt strong, I need to get baptized now." He became silent for a few minutes, then turned to my family and said, "Don't worry about Nobuaki. He has strong faith in God and Jesus Christ. When he dies, the Buddha will save him, so let him join the Mormon church." So that's how I joined the Church.

How did you get a start in music?

When I was twelve, I think, my cousin gave me a record—a single record of The Carpenters—for my birthday. That was the first English song I had ever heard. I loved the song so much that I wanted to learn English. My dream was to go to America someday and go to the concerts of some of my favorite artists and singers. I really liked dance music as a teenager, especially two groups: one was called Three Degrees, composed of three black women, and the other was a group called Tavares, composed of five black brothers. In fact, when I was seventeen I became the president of the Tavares fan club in Japan. It was crazy! I was going to radio stations, asking them to play their songs. It was really fun.

Then, when I met the two missionaries, I had no interest in religion, but I had won an English speech contest, and I had a free ticket to go to California the following summer. I was really, really excited about going to America and speaking English. That was the only reason that I stopped and listened to the missionaries: because I wanted to speak English to those Americans. If I hadn't been interested in English I don't think I would be here today.

Interestingly, after the missionaries told me about Joseph Smith, I said, "Well, I'm Buddhist, so I'm not

interested, sorry. But I want to be your friend. Do you like music?" We started to talk about music, and one of the elders—he was from Hawaii—also liked Tavares. I said, "You know Tavares! You like Tavares! Why don't you come to my house, and we can listen to some records together."

Of course missionaries aren't supposed to listen to that kind of music, but I didn't know. I remember those two elders talking to each other, "What should we do? What should we do?" They said to me, "Okay, we have thirty minutes. We can come to your home and listen to records together."

I'm so grateful to those elders who were in tune with the Spirit. If they had said, "Sorry, we can't do that," I don't think I would be here today.

A few years ago, I got to see Tavares for the first time, and I gave them my CD. I've also been writing to one of the former members of Three Degrees—we keep in touch. And it's like, "Whoa, I can't believe I'm contacting my dream stars." I've been able to give my gospel CDs to them.

Music helped my dreams come true. And English helped my dreams come true—those together brought the gospel to my life. And now I am singing gospel music.

The Lord works in mysterious ways. I never thought I would be a Christian. I never thought I would be singing gospel music. But I am really grateful. I feel like the Lord prepared me to accept this gospel so that I could be one of his missionaries to bring the gospel to other people.

How did you first get involved with performing music?

I always loved music, but mainly just listening to it—I never loved to sing or play any instruments. Then on my mission, the mission president gathered five elders who were musically talented and they did a mission tour. They did a musical fireside in every branch and ward in our mission. Basically, they told about the plan of salvation through songs and testimony. I'll never forget how strongly I felt the Spirit through their songs. And those were the songs I'd never heard—I only knew hymns until then.

That's how I learned about LDS artists, and I said to myself, "When I finish my mission, this is something I'd like to do: translate Church songs into Japanese and do firesides and share my testimony of the gospel." So after my mission I started to do small firesides with some of my good friends in the Church, and I went back to BYU. There I was introduced to Janice Kapp Perry. I asked her if she would be willing to do a Japanese album of her songs. She said, "Sounds like a good idea, but I don't know any Japanese singers," and I said, "Well, I'm here." She asked, "Can you sing?" I said, "I love to sing. I'm not professional, but I'd love to try."

This last March, I did a tour with her in Japan, and I asked her, "Sister Perry, why did you use me back then? You didn't know me. I wasn't a professional singer or anything." and she said, "When you shared your conversion story with me, I felt the Spirit and I knew I could trust you." I was really surprised to hear that. So that's how I started doing her Japanese albums.

You've worked with a lot of LDS artists. Who else have you collaborated with?

I did the first tour with a group called Afterglow, and then I worked with Michael McLean on his Japanese album. Then I worked with Kenneth Cope on his hymn project. I've also worked with Jericho Road. I translated a song for Jenny Phillips, and I recorded a song with Hilary Weeks. There's a pop group here in Japan called bless4. They're getting popular—they now sing the theme song for Disney's Stitch cartoon show in Japan. I did a couple of concerts with them.

What is it like living as a Latter-day Saint in Japan?

Very busy! There aren't many members yet. They say the membership is about a hundred and fifty thousand, but activity is probably thirty or forty percent, so maybe forty or fifty thousand active members. We are constantly visiting inactive members and teaching. Sunday's our busiest day. The missionaries need members to teach lessons with, so this week I have a couple lessons. I used to think it would be difficult to be a member in Japan, especially concerning the Word of Wisdom—men, especially, always like to go drinking with coworkers or friends—but now I find it is a chance to tell them I'm LDS. It's very unique to be a Mormon in Japan.

In a country where the Church is still so obscure, how has your music been received?

For my first album with Janice Kapp Perry, I came out with a CD. I believe that was the very first professional recording in Japanese, so I remember everyone wanted the first album. I think it was a pretty good success. It's been almost nineteen years since I recorded my first album. I also started out with mission tours. Mission presidents invited me and I did firesides and concerts in their missions for all the members and missionaries. Last year I did a concert in Kōchi Prefecture. With that concert, I figure I've done a concert in every prefecture in Japan—forty-seven of them. I've been everywhere.

Have those tours and firesides led to missionary opportunities?

Oh, yes. That's the reason I do them. You know, it's exciting when I go and sing—sometimes missionaries come to me and say, "Brother Irie, we brought our investigators today and they really felt the Spirit and they want to get baptized," and those things make me happy. I think doing concerts and firesides is an opportunity to help people feel the Spirit. Gospel music helps people feel God's love and Spirit, so it's definitely a missionary opportunity.

What are your goals?

Right now I'm working on my ninth album. Next year will make my

twentieth year, so I'm bringing some of the old songs back with new arrangements, and I'll also add some new songs. Up until my last album, all I did was just translate English songs into Japanese and then sing. With my last album, I tried to write my own songs—I wrote two songs and their lyrics. So I guess that's my goal: to keep writing my own songs. With the new album, I'd like to do a twentieth-anniversary tour in Japan, and maybe in America and some other places, too. That's my goal.

What are your dreams for the future of the Church in Japan?

I hope the missionary work goes faster. It's a little slow here. But I'm excited about our third temple, which is going to be built in Sapporo. I want to see more temples in Japan. I miss going to the temple—when I was at the Y, I could go there every week. I believe that temples will help raise the spirituality of the members and help strengthen them. I guess we have to do more missionary work.

If you could communicate any important ideas to the youth of the Church, what would those be?

These young people in the Church now are very special. All the Church leaders say that, right? It's the last days. And I know everyone has talents, given of God. I didn't really know I had talent to sing, and I had to develop it over the last eighteen years. In fact, it makes me really embarrassed to listen to my first album—I sound awful! But, you know, as I kept doing it, as I searched, I think the Lord helped me get better. So I have a message to the young people: I want you to develop your talents. I know that if you want to use your talents for the Lord's work, He will help you. He will give you more talents that will help many other people and bring you yourself a lot of joy. Music is one strong gift from God. And music can be good or bad—if you choose good music, it uplifts your soul and can help you. It can heal you and comfort you. ❧

Claude Bernard

INTERVIEW BY **MEAGAN BRADY** | PHOTOS COURTESY **DOMINIQUE LEBLON**
WEB: **ARTISTESMORMONS.ORG**

Claude Bernard lives in Brussels, Belgium. He is a professor of communications at Vesalius College and the European Communication School in Brussels as well as the Charles Peguy Institute in Louvain-la-Neuve. He also teaches courses in screenplay writing and the history of cinema. Five years ago Claude established an LDS Film Festival in Brussels which has recently been expanded to the Mormon Arts and Culture Festival.

Tell us a little bit about yourself. Your academic background is in intercultural communications and you also teach screenplay writing and the history of cinema. What led you down that career path? Did your faith affect your decisions at all?

I became interested in the Church and was eventually baptized while attending university in Brussels. The first year in Belgium turned out to be a major adjustment for me insofar as I had been living practically all my life in Italy until my senior year in high school. My mother decided that we should move to Belgium as we had family living here on my father's side.

That turned out to be a new chapter in my life in more ways than one. I think it became my firsthand experience in culture shock and intercultural adjustment. Italy and Belgium—with their rather complicated and some might argue "artificial" histories—are similar in some ways but decidedly different when it comes to social relations and human contacts. I was leaving behind friends I had known for years and found myself in an environment

I was unable to fully relate to at first.

I knew that in terms of my academic studies I wanted to do something that would allow me to draw on my interest in humanities in general, but I did not seem to be able to get a full grip on the local academic system. Eventually I settled for undergraduate studies in English literature and languages and I completed my undergraduate degree at the University of Maryland, which at the time had a small campus in Brussels. It was around that time period that I first met the missionaries and was baptized not too long after.

Around that time I also developed an interest in what for me was a new and fascinating discipline: intercultural communication. I was always partial to the arts in general—since I was brought up in Italy, it isn't too difficult to understand why—and after a while I was able to combine my interest in literature, cinema, and communications by writing a thesis that allowed me to make the most of my interlocking interests. The thesis explored the cultural differences that appear when comparing and contrasting, say, a French film based on a famous or classic novel and its American remake. That allowed me then to qualify to teach screenplay writing and the history of cinema and to specialize in movie marketing.

Faith and my conversion certainly played a very important part in my academic life; for one thing, it gave me far more focus and in retrospect I would even go as far as saying that the initial malaise I felt when first arriving in the country proved to be the perfect opportunity—at least on an unconscious level—to be on the lookout for something else, something more. Little did I know it would turn out to be the restored gospel!

You've mentioned you are developing an increased interest in interfaith dialogue. Can you describe what this entails and why you think it is important?

I am particularly pleased to see the Church take a more proactive stance in the field of interfaith dialogue lately. I understand that historically the Church has gone through periods of "retrenchment" followed by spurts of outreach. I can certainly feel that creating a space for dialogue among denominations is a direction the Church is going in at this particular moment and I wholeheartedly welcome that.

I sometimes hear of members expressing the idea that the Church should not make too many waves and remain as discreet as possible, perhaps in the forlorn hope that the world at large will simply let us be. It might sound tempting, but ultimately that is not the destiny of this church.

At the same time there are so many dedicated and inspirational people from other faiths who have something to offer, such as a fresh perspective and precious insights. I was touched for instance by the way our Church authorities praised the attitude of the Amish in the face of terrible tragedy, and the fact that we as members are equally encouraged to learn from the strengths exhibited by our fellow travelers is something I personally find immensely appealing.

Ultimately we all need to recognize that there is strength in numbers and that all people who are genuinely willing to do good are worthy of respect and praise. Goodwill allows us to look beyond narrow confines and gives us an opportunity to draw strength from one another. I hope to somehow be able to play some kind of a role in fostering good relations with other communities.

You've created a LDS Film Festival in Brussels that is now in its fifth year. What gave you the idea to establish the festival? Can you describe some of the highlights of the past few years?

The idea came about when I found out that film director Christian Vuissa had created a yearly LDS Film Festival in Orem, Utah.

Because of my personal interest in cinema, I was of course already aware of the significant contribution that Mormons have made to the history of cinema throughout the decades, from *Casablanca* to *Schindler's List*. Still, to know that there were artists and directors out there willing to create and produce stories that had a decidedly LDS slant was very exciting to me. Here was the perfect opportunity to make use of what can possibly be construed as the most effective medium ever devised, and certainly *the* medium of the last century, to tell our stories as well as our side of the story.

We started by simply setting up a DVD player and projecting films against a wall in the basement of the Institute of Religion in Brussels. At the time we had a wonderful missionary couple serving in the city—the Tolleys—and with their help we decided to give it a go.

I was of course hoping for the best but had no idea what the response was going to be. To jumpstart the process and hopefully generate some much needed word of mouth, since there was no budget to speak of, I decided to rent a small art house theater and screen *States of Grace*. The response on the whole was very positive and in some cases bordered on the enthusiastic.

I appreciate of course that the film may not have been to everyone's taste, but in a European context it made far more sense for me to first showcase that particular movie. If the ultimate goal of the event was to show films that would attract people beyond LDS movie aficionados and sympathizers, it was important not to exclusively select films that might have rightly or wrongly been labeled as apologetic.

For one thing, I liked the fact that the director was not afraid to tackle real and at times admittedly disturbing issues. Ultimately, I responded to the film in a very personal and profound way and I can honestly say that it is the one movie that helped me fully grasp and appreciate the full power of the Atonement and how far-reaching that power truly is.

Fortunately, I do not belong to any particular current of thought regarding the ultimate purpose of LDS films,

nor do I profess to know where the future of LDS cinema lies and what this still fledgling movement is supposed to signify in the grand scheme of things.

I simply enjoy the fact that LDS directors, writers, actors, and producers are taking chances and trying to honor their craft while at the same time framing stories from a uniquely LDS perspective.

I can enjoy and appreciate a gritty, realistic piece like *States of Grace* while admiring and feeling spiritually satiated when watching more classic films like *The Work and the Glory* or *Emma Smith* or comedies like *The Best Two Years*. If anything, the future of LDS films lies in diversity.

I think that having a somewhat eclectic taste in various artistic fields has allowed me to consider all kinds of options when working on the film programming of the festival, even though I purposely make it a point to try to select movies that will bring about what I hope will be a heartfelt and deeply personal spiritual response. A movie has the potential of strengthening one's faith and offering insight into the lives of a people who have sacrificed so much for their beliefs.

One of the highlights was to have a director like Christian Vuissa come and present back-to-back *Errand of Angels* and *Father in Israel*, which has been renamed *One Good Man* for the DVD release. He also took time to animate a film workshop.

We were fortunate enough to convince Mark Arnett, who was passing through on his way to England to receive a prize, to stop by and show his wonderfully witty and immensely touching *Baby Boomerang*.

I would also count the fact that we have gradually been able to move from a basement to making use of some legitimate movie theaters in Brussels as a big step forward.

I remember showing *Return With Honor* in a "proper" theater as the closing film of the second edition and being impressed by the quality of the image on the screen, considering that we were relying on standard DVDs for the projection.

How do you think Mormon filmmaking fits into the industry as a whole? You've said you don't know where its future lies, but what direction do you see it taking to get there?

As for the future of Mormon filmmaking, I am extremely and perhaps uncharacteristically positive despite how increasingly difficult it is to raise capital for films and the fact that the novelty effect has decreased. As Randy Astle pointed out in his recent comprehensive study on Mormon Cinema ("Mormons and Films," *BYU Studies*), in reality the movement goes all the way back to the silent era.

Still, there is a sense that LDS filmmaking has started to truly come of age during the present decade and that it is slowly but surely beginning to forge an identity of its own. Music played a vital role in allowing Mormons to become more known in the U.S., and now literature written by Mormons in a variety of fields is also paving the way. It is certainly doing extremely well given that we regularly find LDS authors on the *New York Times* Best Seller list.

A movie has the potential of strengthening one's faith and offering insight into the lives of a people who have sacrificed so much for their beliefs.

As for movies, it is always interesting to notice how far-reaching the impact of a movie can be. In the last month alone, I have seen a number of dubbed French DVD versions of LDS movies sold in major stores in Belgium. I am probably the only one in the whole store who is even aware of the fact, but it is immensely satisfying to know that our productions can part of the "mainstream" and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that—quite the contrary, in fact.

Because of the very nature of our history, doctrines, and beliefs, there will always be priceless opportunities to focus on specific aspects of our history and experience and bring out the spiritual component.

You've recently renamed the festival the Mormon Arts and Culture Festival in order to expand its scope to include other areas in the arts. What other areas are now included?

At first we only focused on movies as most local members were not even aware that quite a revolution in the audiovisual field was occurring. The reality is that LDS film—in spite of its decidedly niche appeal—is clearly here to stay, but as we all have come to realize, we are smack in the middle of a readjustment phase, particularly in terms of business models and the selection of narratives.

I also have to consider that when I started five years ago, I could draw on the arguably best LDS movies that had been released between 2000 and 2005. Now, at this stage, I am almost running concurrently with the LDS Film Festival in Utah, and I may soon be in a position to screen a couple of movies next year that will be shown in Belgium before they are released in the States. I am thinking in particular of some up-and-coming European or Central or South American directors.

Still, from an outsider's perspective, Mormons should not be considered worthy of interest exclusively on account of their movies. The festival also fits nicely into my communications/public affairs calling in the Church—to let people know who we really are from a cultural/artistic standpoint, it is important to include concerts, exhibitions, lectures, and forums as well. So the Arts and Culture Festival (of which the Film Festival is still a prominent part) seemed like the logical next step.

How is the festival perceived by the public, both Mormons and others?

Over the years we have seen some faithful members come as often as they could, determined not to miss the opportunity of seeing the latest movie on offer. I think the experience has been positive.

For one thing, once the festival is over in Brussels, I am willing and ready to travel to other major francophone cities in Belgium and showcase them in chapels or cultural halls. Last year I was able to arrange a visit by Vuissa to the Paris Institute of Religion, so that was an exciting step forward and we hope to reiterate the experience every year and make a concerted effort to attract nonmembers as well.

For nonmembers I believe it can be an eye-opener. I remember being contacted a couple of years ago by a student who was writing a dissertation on Mormons and since it was around the time of the festival, I naturally invited him to come. He told me that the movies helped him gain a better understanding of who the Mormons were and how members live their religion in a practical, day-to-day way.

You mentioned earlier that you teach screenwriting. Do you have any general advice for others trying to make it in the film industry?

The old adage "practice makes perfect" still applies. While some may be lucky enough to strike gold with their first attempt and might end up selling their script to the highest Hollywood bidder, it is important to keep honing one's talents. Learn from the masters and the superior craftsmen.

As a professor, I always try to encourage students to acquire knowledge and an appreciation of the major master storytellers of the past. Unlike

painting, cinema is a relatively new art form—barely more than a hundred years old, in fact—and there is much that can be studied and mastered.

While it is tempting to just focus on the latest blockbusters or homegrown productions, it is also important to open up one's mind and learn to appreciate "foreign" filmmakers. It might take a while, but it pays off nicely in terms of becoming partial to other narrative approaches.

Where are the Rossellinis, the Bergmans, and the Kazans of today or tomorrow? Potentially they are everywhere. True, technology has made it easier to simply go out and shoot with a digital camera, but all the clever paraphernalia cannot replace good and meaningful storytelling. That is why Italian neo-realistic movies are still riveting, notwithstanding the rather crude techniques and technical equipment used.

How do you think your heritage plays into your work? Do you think being a Mormon artist in Belgium differs from other places in the world? How about being an artist in general?

One of the big differences between being a member in Belgium, and in many other European countries, for that matter, is simply related to numbers. Once I completed my undergraduate studies, I went and lived in California for almost three years and I could immediately sense the difference as a result of the sheer numbers of LDS people who typically congregate on a Sunday.

Not that the smaller size is a weakness per se—after all, it can be argued that members here may have a more pronounced pioneer spirit, so to speak—but since there are simply not as many members in Belgium, it does limit the number of members who are actively and professionally invested in the arts in general.

There are some interesting developments, though. In the last few years we have seen local members get their work published—whether they are specifically Mormon-centric or not—and musicians are slowly rising through the ranks. My hope is to be able to gradually tap into that reservoir in the future, especially now that the festival is meant to encompass so many art forms.

Living in Brussels is also interesting insofar as the ward I attend is truly multicultural in nature. As a matter of fact, we recently merged two wards and now conduct services, give classes, and teach in both French and English. Institute is offered in other languages as well. The congregation is composed of a veritable constellation of nationalities and cultures. Obviously, being in the capital of Europe helps explain the amount of diversity; it infuses a lot of the things we do and it helps tremendously in fostering patience, tolerance, and understanding, which are godly qualities after all.

I think the artist has a very specific and unique role to play in society. At his best, an artist can bring voice to and become a conduit for a whole range of emotions that cannot be expressed otherwise. I like the fact that the Church from its very beginning always found time to combine spirituality with proper education while not neglecting the importance of art in all its expressions.

What has been your favorite project so far?

I like to think that my favorite project is yet to come. My hope is that as we build the festival and give it a veritable identity, we will be able to travel throughout the major European cities and share some of the great spiritual experiences some people have had.

I am particularly happy about the fact that we were able to contribute a number of subtitled films for a major symposium on Mormonism that will take place in Canada the first week of November and is organized by nonmembers. The program is truly excellent and I certainly want to learn from it myself.

I would also love to open up the festival and invite local non-LDS people to participate and contribute shorts, for instance. Obviously, we will set out a number of parameters and expectations regarding content, but as I said before, different sensibilities and approaches can only enrich a receptive audience.

Care to share any of your current or upcoming projects?

One interesting element is that I decided to add theatre to next year's program mix. We have some local professional LDS theatre actors and we have been working on a play—or I should say a dramatization—based on the letters exchanged between Joseph and Emma Smith. I got in touch with a BYU professor who was kind enough to send me all the existing copies of the letters and I went ahead and translated them into French before passing them on to Jean-François Demeyère, a Belgian director who will stage it. The idea at this point is to actually involve a number of members as well. I am anxious to see what the end product will look like and am hopeful that it will be the first of many theatrical projects to come.

At some point I was urged to write a play relating the encounter between renowned author Victor Hugo and Louis Bertrand, the French translator of the Book of Mormon, when they met on Jersey. It's one of the projects I keep on the top of my wishlist. With theatre, there is a certain "return to one's roots" feeling about it, for me at least.

The first time I ever entered an LDS church, I noticed a rather large but definitely inviting stage. My first reaction was that I wanted to stage something and I actually did. It was *A Christmas Carol,* and I would probably cringe if I were to watch the old VHS tape that recorded the performance, but it was a start. Eventually I staged *Oliver!*, *Tom Sawyer,* and *Fiddler on the Roof,* which were so well received that we were asked to perform them again.

At this point, I do not consider myself an "artist" per se. I see myself playing more the role of a facilitator. In fact, it has become kind of my personal mission. ❧

Ragnar Go'hjerta

INTERVIEW BY **MEAGAN BRADY** | PHOTOS COURTESY **MAGNUS HENRIKSEN**
WEB: **ALTDUHAR.NO**

Ragnar Go'hjerta's talent has never wavered, and at the age of sixty-four, he still has a burning desire to make movies. He has won the Film Critics' Award in Norway, has been nominated for a Golden Bear in Berlin, and has won the Silver Bear. His work is very original compared to other Norwegian films and is strongly modernistic. The story of Ragnar is a story of an outsider, of disappointment, of personal conversion, of absolute faith in the development potential of film as a tool for understanding. Ragnar was born in Oslo, Norway, and studied at the Royal College of Art in London, England. He and his wife, Cherina, have eight grown-up children.

Tell us a little bit about your background.

Isn't this a moment for moving on? I'm an only child born of humble and hard-working parents, who loved me long before I was born. My grandmother and my mother were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. My father was agnostic—the best of both worlds. Coming into a country tired of war as a "child of peace," I got an utterly free upbringing. Fortunately, my foremothers' religion is a golden inheritance, giving me the gift of repentance and a merciful Lord.

Did you always plan to be a filmmaker?

Always. I saw my life in a single falling tear as I received the gift of the Holy Ghost at age twelve under the hands of a missionary in Oslo. Miraculously, twelve years later he also became my bishop in the London Hyde Park Ward.

How did you get into the field of filmmaking?

My Jewish school teacher, Pål Bang-Hansen, who became one of Norway's beloved film critics with his funny voice, glasses askew and frizzy red hair, invited me to work on his first film. Marginalized, as I questioned the socialist political processes, I was "adopted" by prominent poets.

Did your faith affect your decisions at all?

Absolutely, especially later on after I married my actress wife, Cherina. In the hope of including our children and grandchildren in our covenant of forever, we lived in the valley between opposite ideological mountains, and obviously I looked for answers. When the Book of Mormon awakens you to the truth of goodness spoken of by living prophets, you choose by faith.

You've done everything—scriptwriting, preproduction, camera operating, directing, producing, editing, and distributing. Which is your favorite area to work in?

Editing, bringing all the elements together, remains a sublime mystery. At the age of sixty-four, I still love it all, but now there are new cameras and workflows. If I were fourteen, I would know what to do and be getting ready with my images for the coming war of cultures.

Do you have any interesting stories about working in these various areas?

During the early filming of *Love Is War*, the cameraman turned out to have a problem with alcohol, so I found it necessary to take over the camera, never having shot with an Arriflex camera before.

Speaking of your film *Love Is War*, you were the writer, director, producer, cinematographer, and editor. Can you tell us about that experience?

At twenty-three I was too bold for my own good. *Love Is War* is a morality tale for those who who would like listen to my lamentations. People go on about how good it was, so I feel reluctant to show it again after 40 years, but we're doing it anyway.

You won the Silver Bear for an outstanding single achievement, one of the highest prizes at the Berlin International Film Festival, for *Love Is War*.

How does it feel to be recognized for your work by such a prestigious body of your peers?

Early recognition could be considered a terribly cruel mistake.

Where do you get your inspiration?

By lucid dreaming as I pray for help to read the untold stories.

Does your Norwegian heritage have any effect on the films you make?

Certainly. The fight between the sons of light and sons of darkness is an important part of the Nordic dialogue. A Norseman struggles for his right to have an individual perspective. So did Vigeland, Ibsen and Munch, as does the Oslo Nobel Peace Prize.

You've described your work as "unfinished and fragmentary."

Can you expound?

Our imperfections are outstanding, so we are dependent on angelic help. When you engage in trying to live your potential, you find yourself, after many tribulations, fine-tuning reasons to hope for the backup of unexpected goodness. Understanding that you already have—that will be fragmentary, never totally comprehended or assimilated in this life.

You've said that one of your filming styles, a form of "visual poetry" you used forty years ago, is now being seen in films like *Inception*. Can you describe this style, how you employed it, and how it is being used by these films?

Then, I was already using a timeless palette of foresight and afterthought. Such a movie must be experienced, allowed to flow through you as a non-narrative, going from past to future to dream—from wishing to regret—all within the same sequence.

Tony Scott, who was a fellow student, used much the same technique in *Déjà Vu*.

How do you think your artistic style furthers the art of filmmaking?

Healing the spirit and the brain is the true art. Presently, pure film—meaning an undefiled foreign language for helping depressed audiences—is running through me.

Do you have any advice for others trying to make it in the film industry?

I used to say, "Don't, your passion will be misunderstood." Not any more. You will still suffer, when called upon by the spiritual gifts available to us to

confront the void in this silly, silly business. Dare to feel, hear and see the reality. You don't need to be so religious or preachy to praise him who knows us all better than we do ourselves. Be playful as Heavenly Father's children. Remember to enjoy your creative life by honoring your earthly parents too.

Is being a Mormon artist in Norway different from being a Mormon artist anywhere else in the world?

"Norwegian Mormon artist" seems to be a Socratic ironic conundrum. Learning to discern between truth and error is the occupation of a true Mormon.

To be a collector of truth, an enthusiastic realist digesting further light and knowledge, isn't that what it means to be a Mormon—artist or not. All we hope to continue producing in this great family is more good films guided by the Spirit of the Lord.

How does your faith play into your work?

It is the be-all and end-all of my existence, this full-spectrum and amazing truth that he in fact still lives, who once was dead. That has implications for us all.

How does your work help build the kingdom of God on earth?

I consider myself greatly privileged and pay my tithing.

Any last thoughts?

Sincere reflections tell me this: my short, incomplete answers about *Love Is War*, made forty years ago, could be communicated without words. Is a gesture enough? Some of us need to be helped out, to be saved from destructive habits—from our life. I accepted that that someone was me and became active in 1971. It is rare to see a Latter-day Saint high priest with a full beard these days, but after seriously examining myself in the mirror, I see that I don't have to shave, but will still remain a Mormon.

I live up to the real meaning behind the label of a true Latter-day Saint: I produce more good.

Learning to know the eternal holiness whom we are taught to address as our Father in Heaven and Christ his Son. Our timeless advocate asks us to keep the law, and offers kind help for us to see the importance of just that, and to truly set us free.

Learning to discern between truth and error in this creative way has humbly been my life's main occupation. ❧

Alla Volkova

INTERVIEW BY **MICHAEL PICKETT** | PHOTOS COURTESY **ALLA VOLKOVA**

Alla Volkova was born in Tomsk, Russia. She moved to the United States in December 2002 to attend school at BYU and was baptized five years later. She is currently studying at AFI. Among her projects there, Alla directed "Lilith and the Woebringer," a cycle film about a demon boy named Deamien who is reluctant to possess a little girl for his term project because of his desire to be good (see photos). Alla is currently working on her thesis film, entitled "Dreamland."

How did you first get interested in filmmaking?

I was always interested in storytelling, and that's what filmmaking is. Before I could properly talk, I started repeating my parents' jokes and little anecdotes. I had a burning desire to entertain people and tell them something interesting and fun. I first got interested in filmmaking specifically when I was seven. I used to watch television shows and movies and the visual differences between the two formats puzzled me. Television shows were shot on digital cameras and the quality of the image itself was too sharp and looked extremely fake. Movies, however, looked like real life because of the grain and texture in the film itself. I was very intrigued by this nuance. I wanted to find out how it was possible to create something like that.

Growing up in Russia, it seemed unattainable to attend a film school because they are located only in big cities like Moscow and Saint Petersburg, and the programs are extremely competitive and expensive. My family had neither the means nor the connections necessary to help me with that, so I was going to pursue a career as an interpreter studying English and Japanese. That's why, when I found out about BYU and its film program, I got extremely excited. I actually had a chance to get in there.

What filmmakers have been most influential for you?

I grew up mainly on comedies and period dramas. Among the Russian filmmakers I admire are Eldar Ryazanov and Nikita Mikhalkov. However, my main influence came from Leonid Zaharov. Among the foreign filmmakers who had the biggest impact on me are Steven Spielberg and Baz Luhrmann. I was also strongly influenced by the work of Charlie Kaufman, although he is mainly a screenwriter, not a director.

What differences can you see between Russian and American filmmaking? Which do you prefer and why?

That's a tricky question; there are pros and cons to both. I appreciate Russian filmmaking—and European filmmaking in general—because it takes its time and allows you to think. It has very specific subtle mood that can be very captivating and tends to focus on emotion. I also like it more because I understand the subtle nuances in dialogue and the cultural references. Russian comedies are definitely funnier to me than American comedies. However, I've noticed a decline in the quality of Russian films recently. I think they are trying to pump out Americanized comedies and blockbusters, which are not their main strengths. They should focus on soulful interpretation of the stories and structure their films better in terms of narrative.

As for American filmmaking, I like it very much, of course. It has a much quicker pace and can be exciting and fun. I really respect films that are not driven by plot but focus on character. I don't like that the American film industry is concentrated so much on franchising these days. Everyone seems to be dying for new and fresh ideas. Studios are often misjudging good projects and making a lot of weak films. That's why independent filmmakers rock.

How did attending BYU influence your art? What about the American Film Institute?

BYU definitely helped me to define myself as an artist. The Media Arts department faculty was very nurturing and helpful. I never realized that the study of the gospel could be applied to the study of film. It taught me my purpose as an artist and gave me a lot of inspiration in terms of telling the stories that can carry a high standard and inspire others. I found a stronger connection to God because of my work. I think all of us have a divine spark that allows us to feel like creators and produce something meaningful and wholesome. It's very important to me to be able to share what I know about the gospel through my work. I might never be doing Mormon-targeted films ever in my life, but there are certain truths that unite all of us as human beings and lift us up. I definitely want to convey them through my films.

AFI was extremely influential for me because it taught me what kind of professional artist I want to be. It gave me a strong grasp and understanding of narrative storytelling and polished my skills as a filmmaker in general. Also, I think AFI finally solidified my understanding of self. There I was able to finalize in a way the themes and stories that I want to explore in my films. So I would say that BYU gave me soul and AFI gave me tools and means to achieve my vision.

How do you associate with your peers as a Russian Mormon filmmaker? Do you have more differences or commonalities with them?

Well, as I've mentioned above, we are all human beings. One-third of the fellows at AFI (that's how we refer to students there) are international students and come from completely different backgrounds. We are all very much different but I don't think our cultures separate us because we feel the same way about many things. Not only can we relate to each other on a purely human level, but we also can share our experiences here at AFI and our love for film. We know what good and bad filmmaking is. We are distraught if our films don't do well at the screenings or if we have difficulties with family matters. We are happy when we get a good evaluation in class, we laugh at the same jokes. Of course, I have a different lifestyle than most of my peers, but we still relate to each other on many levels. So I would say we have more in common.

What aspects of film are you most concerned with?

Two years ago I would say it was image. I was obsessed with the quality of the photography when it came to films.

Today I would say it's the story and the actors' performance. If the story you are telling isn't meaningful and captivating, you have nothing. If the performance of the actors doesn't

carry your story or ring true, you are ruined no matter how good the story is. All other elements of filmmaking bow down to these two.

What opinion do you have about new technologies in filmmaking such as 3D? Do you think that these technologies benefit the filmmaker?

I think technology is good because it makes filmmaking accessible to people. It also makes the life of a filmmaker easier. Take for instance digital editing. Before, they had to cut negatives and rearrange the strips of the film by hand, taping them together with glue. That's just insane! Can you imagine doing a quick montage with a system like that? I would go nuts. Today, Final Cut and Avid make the lives of editors so much easier. The same goes for advancements in any software or tool created specifically for filmmakers. However, I am old-fashioned and I would choose to shoot on film over digital any day of the week. Film is so much easier to work with and it has this certain quality about it that makes the image come alive. Digital just doesn't have that quality.

I also don't like all the fuss about 3D. Honestly, when I come to the theater, I see 3D images only for the first two minutes, then my eyes adjust and it looks just like if I was watching a movie on a regular screen. If your story isn't good, 3D won't be able to sell it or help it. Props to people who have money and want to work with it, but I prefer regular screenings.

Why are you drawn to directing as opposed to other filmmaking roles such as editing and cinematography?

I started out as a cinematographer and tried myself as an editor as well. I think directing came as a natural consequence of these two disciplines combined together because it deals so much more with story and performance. I think it was just natural progression in my growth as a filmmaker. I started on the outskirts of what is important to me in film and came to its core.

What have you learned about the filmmaking process from the films you've already made?

The first and most important thing about filmmaking is that everything is in the details. The more specific the world you are creating, the better your film will be. Some people think that they can get away with pointing the camera and shooting whatever, but I think it makes their work generic. Attention to detail requires a great deal of organization. You have to know how to manage your time well and be extremely motivated.

Second, filmmaking is very much a social career and you need to get along

with everyone. Preferably surround yourself with people who do things better than you, who are more skilled than you, who inspire you and who you can look up to. It will allow you to grow professionally as you learn from them.

Finally, filmmaking is hard work. In order to do well at it you have to learn how to balance your personal life, relationships, and health. Never let your work consume you.

What influence has the gospel had on your art?

It has always been huge. The gospel defines who I am and what kinds of stories are meaningful and inspiring to me. In the past it definitely helped me make choices between projects I wanted to work on. I don't really know how to answer this question because the gospel is not something I can remove from my life. It's essential to my creative process because it's simply a part of me. I don't know how else to put it.

In terms of examples, then the gospel definitely helps me feel promptings about certain projects and stories. It's a very personal thing for each artist. When I lack inspiration, I go to the Lord and ask for help. He has never rejected me so far. I also think that the gospel helps me keep going no matter how hard things get. It is where I get my creative energies from even if my ideas have nothing to do with religion.

You were baptized after a few years at BYU, so you have been able to see the gospel from the outside and from the inside. How does that perspective influence your faith and your art?

I always thought I had that perspective while living in Provo, but after I moved to Los Angeles I realized that I lost a huge chunk of it because I was in Utah for too long. Now I feel I'm gaining it back. Seeing the gospel from inside and outside, I guess I learned that people are the same everywhere no matter what country or religion. Our task and responsibility as members of the Church and as individuals is to be able to connect to other people

and connect to each other. That's why storytelling is so important. It helps us reach out to something we have never seen before, learn it, comprehend it, accept it, and love it. Often in church we unconsciously separate ourselves from others because of our religion. We can build fences all we want, but I don't think this is what God wants us to do. We need to embrace, not exclude. That understanding brought a new meaning to my faith and art. I hope it will show more in my work in the future.

What do you hope to accomplish with your art? What impact do you hope to have on filmmaking and on the Church?

I really hope my art will prompt some change in people. When I go to an exhibition, read a book, or watch a film, I judge its value by how much it made me think or how much it prompted me to do something. I really hope that I will create media that will inspire people, give them motivation, or make them re-evaluate their life in some way. I'm not aspiring to always make happy-go-lucky, make-you-feel-good films. But change is definitely important.

I also think there is a lot of media today that is meaningless. There are films that make you cry for the sake of crying, or laugh for the sake of laughing. There are also a lot of negative, disturbing messages portrayed on screen. That's why I think it's very important for LDS filmmakers to bring their values into their work. I hope to do that.

I hope that my work and the work of my peers will change the stigma on LDS films. Frankly, there are too many cheesy, poorly made movies sold in LDS stores, and it's frustrating—it gives LDS filmmakers a bad name. But a number of well-made films were produced in recent years and I hope their quality and quantity will continue to grow.

How do you see yourself helping to build the kingdom with your art?

Right now I don't see myself making films that are based on LDS religion or history, but I really want to create media that will provide meaningful lessons and insights for the LDS audience. I want to generate change and help people remember who they are and what their divine nature is. I think that's very important in the building of the kingdom. If I ever feel prompted or will be asked to make a film that will help spread the gospel or support the LDS faith, I will definitely do it. In that work I will try to speak to a wider audience and allow them to understand and embrace our faith. ❧

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