mormonartist

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mormonartist

covering the Latter-day Saint arts world

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editor's**note**

You know, I still can't believe it—just seven months ago I was in my kitchen scrambling some eggs for breakfast when *Mormon Artist* was born. The day before, I'd stumbled across MagCloud (a print-on-demand magazine publisher) and thought it was an interesting idea, filing it away in my mind for future reference. As I pushed my eggs around on the skillet, the idea of publishing a magazine resurfaced and grabbed hold of me. I decided to give it a shot. A few possible topics shuffled through my head but none sounded compelling enough.

Then I stopped and asked myself what kind of magazine *I* wanted to read. Almost instantly I thought of the arts, and then the name *Mormon Artist* popped into my head and I knew right away that I had a winner. The floodgates opened right then and it's a wonder I didn't burn those eggs, there were so many ideas pouring down as I scratched them onto an index card in a frenzy.

I knew I had to start right away—patience has never been one of my stronger virtues—so I registered the domain for the website and started planning out a list of people I wanted to interview. Things miraculously came together, even more easily than I expected. (My guess is that this is because I didn't have enough sense to know what I was getting myself into.) But here we are on our third issue, with two more already lined up and no end in sight. It really is a miracle.

Even more of a miracle is the outpouring of interest in helping out. Already we've had over fifty people volunteer, and in this issue, all of the interviews, transcribing, and photography, along with almost all of the editing, have been done by volunteers. (I did the first two issues almost entirely by myself. Let's just say that when publication time came around, I didn't get much sleep.) Having people help out has made a difference. Which isn't to say it's been an entirely smooth ride—sickness and technology failure made brief cameos here and there—but overall it has gone spectacularly well. And now that we have enough people onboard, we can start running more interviews in each issue, and, with luck, switch our publication frequency to monthly instead of bimonthly.

We still need more volunteers. If you'd like to help out, take a look at the staff needs post on our blog and shoot us an email or a message on Facebook or Twitter. While we're more than happy to have people help out wherever they can, we're particularly looking for section editors for Visual & Applied Arts and Music & Dance (we want people with editing experience and a passion for the subject) and for more interviewers.

If you want to help out but don't have time, tell your friends about the magazine. If you're on Facebook, join the group ("Mormon Artist") and invite people you think would be interested. The more people reading the magazine, the better.

Up till now the conversation on the magazine has been primarily one-sided. We're hoping to change that, and to create more of a dialogue we've added support for comments to the website. Feel free to post your thoughts if you'd like. We've also removed the advertisement sidebar and replaced it with a listing of upcoming events and other announcements, which will hopefully be more useful. (If you have something you feel should be added there, send us an email.)

Again, if you know of any international Latter-day Saint artists, let us know. We've got Jonna in this issue and in the next issue we'll be featuring a brother who wrote one of the hymns in the Italian hymnbook, and we want this to be just the beginning. There are many, many members of the Church in the far reaches of the world who make art and yet hardly any of us know about it. Let's change that.

Thanks to everyone involved, especially the artists and the volunteers. There would be no magazine if it weren't for them.

—Benjamin Crowder

Letters to the editor may be sent to editor@mormonartist.net

submissionguidelines

Types of work we're looking for:

- *Personal essays*
- *Poetry*
- *Short stories*
- *Short plays*
- *Paintings*
- *Illustrations*
- *Photographs*

(This list will grow, and the submission guidelines will get more refined over time, but we want to keep it simple for now while we work everything out.)

Work in any genre is fine as long as it's appropriate for an LDS audience. It also goes without saying that anything you submit must be your own original work. (Simultaneous submissions and previously published work are both fine.)

All submissions should be sent via email to editor@mormonartist.net. One submission per email, please.

Literary submissions: in the body of the email, put your name, the title of the piece, the genre, and a short one-paragraph synopsis. Attach your submission as a Word or PDF file.

Visual arts submissions: in the body of the email, put your name, the title of the piece, and the medium. Attach your submission as a JPEG file.

Michael O. Tunnell

Michael O. Tunnell has written many award-winning children's books, including Mailing May, Wishing Moon, *and* Moon Without Magic. *He also teaches children's literature at Brigham Young University. His latest book,* The Candy Bomber: The Story of the Berlin Airlift's Chocolate Pilot, *will be published in 2010. Website:* ***michaelotunnell.com***

How did you decide to become a writer?

I don't know that I could name a particular instant when that happened. I think it's just more a part of who you are. I read a lot as a kid, and I think there was always a latent desire to tell my own stories that surfaced as I got older. I actually decided to "do it" when I started teaching school. I taught mostly fifth and sixth grade, and then did a masters degree in instructional media. I spent a few years in a junior high as a media specialist. I was involved with children's books a lot, and working with kids and literature ignited the memory of how wonderful reading was, and brought that desire to tell my own stories to the surface.

I began writing early in my teaching career, and even wrote my first unsuccessful children's novel. I submitted it thirty or forty times to different publishers. Then I went back to graduate school again and did a doctorate in children's literature. That sort of put a stop to creative writing for a while, till my dissertation was done, but then I came back to it. Early in my career as a professor, while I was at Northern Illinois University, I was trying to get tenure and was busy doing professional writing. I thought, "Well, I don't know if I have time for novels right now," so I began working on picture book manuscripts. My first manuscript was accepted on the third submission. My editor got in touch with me. She didn't accept it; she said, "Cut this by a third and we'll talk about it." The manuscript was ten pages long, which is pretty long for a picture book nowadays, and to cut a third out of ten pages is quite a bit. It was difficult, but I did cut it by a third, and that's when she accepted it. The name of that book is *Chinook*. It's based on tall tales about the Chinook winds that I experienced as a kid in western Canada.

Is writing for children different from writing for adults?

Actually, it essentially isn't any different. There are some things that you have to take into consideration, depending on your target audience. Sometimes when you have an idea and begin to write, you may think you have a target age in mind, but the story takes on a life of itself, and it ends up being for older readers or younger readers, and then you have to decide if you want to go with it, in that direction. When you're doing picture book manuscripts, generally you have a younger audience in mind.

I'm speaking only for myself. I'm pretty sure every writer approaches this differently. There's just a million different ways to do this; it's not formulaic. For me, though, I generally have a basic idea. I'm working on this novel, and I have a feeling it's for ten- to fourteen-year-olds. I have been surprised from time to time, that the reviewing public sees it differently. For instance, with *Children of Topaz,* I aimed at a middle grade audience—fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh grade. I was thinking upper elementary grades, but some of the awards it won were secondary school awards. It won a Carter G. Woodson Honor Book Award, given by the National Council for the Social Studies, in the secondary category. It surprised me. Sometimes people out there see it differently than you do.

Is there a genre that you prefer over others?

I used to think there was. When I used to dream about being a published author in the trade book field, I always thought it would be fantasy—Lloyd Alexander's Prydain Chronicles-type fantasy, in the mold of Tolkien. And yet, when I look at what I have written for young readers, it surprises me that most of it has been historical. I began to discover that history and fantasy were my two favorite genres, both to read and to write. There is, though people wouldn't think it, some similarity in that readers are removed in time and place in both of those. In history, it's our world, but it's not now. For younger readers, a hundred or two hundred years ago is almost as foreign as Middle Earth or Prydain.

School Spirits, which was my first novel, is a ghost story that's set in the 1950s. Some people who reviewed the book said, "Why did he set it in the 1950s?" I set it there because I like the time period. It's the time period of my younger childhood. So even though this is a fantasy of sorts, I did a great deal of research about the 1950s. I was born in 1950, so I was reasonably young through that decade. I couldn't remember a lot. For instance, I had a scene in that book where the kids were eating Oreos with milk. I suddenly thought, "I can't remember eating Oreos when I was a kid. Were they around?" I ended up calling Nabisco, and they had someone who would answer questions, and I found out that Oreos were introduced in 1912. So indeed, they were around in the 1950s, but I couldn't remember. That's just one small


Moon WITHOUT Magic
The Joke's on George
MICHAEL O. TUNNELL
pictures by KATHY OSBORN
MAILING MAY
MICHAEL O. TUNNELL
ILLUSTRATED BY
TED RAND
Wishing Moon
MICHAEL O. TUNNELL

detail. I had to look at what music was popular, what movies played in 1958. *Wishing Moon* and *Moon Without Magic* are of course fantasies, but the amount of historical research was massive, because I really did set it in the ancient, ninth-century Arab world, which I knew very little about. It became as much a historical endeavor as it was a fantasy endeavor.

Sometimes, especially in Christian groups, fantasy can get a bad rap. Why do you think fantasy is important to read and write?

For the most part, LDS members are less likely to get bent out of shape about fantasy literature. We do have people around here who won't let their kids read Harry Potter, but I think they're the exception to the rule. There's a lot more resistance to it in the born-again Christian, Bible Belt area. In any case, fantasy is the seed of creative thought. I could quote you any number of well-known scientists who have said in one way or another, "We wouldn't have landed on the moon if it hadn't been for fantasy literature." Fantasy made kids growing up believe in things that would have seemed like impossibilities to earlier generations. John Tyndall was one of the most famous British physicists around the turn of the twentieth century. He said that fantasy was what allowed us to make connections. Otherwise science would be little more than categorizing knowledge that we observe. This sort of ability to see around corners, to imagine connections, is a quality of fantasy that allowed science as we know it to move forward with new discoveries.

There's a well-known and true story of a woman who brought her young son to Einstein because he had a gift in mathematics. She wanted to ask him what she should do to ensure his greatness in the field of mathematics. Einstein thought but for a second, and he said to her, "Read him the great myths of the past. Stretch his imagination." This ability to imagine, that fantasy had engendered in his life, was one of the most valuable assets for his science and math.

I always appreciated that BYU had a course called Christian Fantasy. It was primarily a study of C.S. Lewis and Tolkien. But the very elements of high fantasy—quest fantasy—really have so many allegories about Christian faith. C.S. Lewis made no bones about it; it's a little harder to pin Tolkien down, but the stuff is there. I just see it as an important part of expanding our horizons, making us believe in possibilities.

How does your approach to nonfiction differ from your approach to fiction?

In nonfiction, the research about the topic is paramount. But you can't let that academic approach—making sure you've got all your ducks in a row—ruin the fluidity of your writing. Milton Meltzer, one of our great authors of nonfiction for young readers, has been quoted over the years saying basically that he uses all the same techniques that fiction writers use, except inventing facts. He might not use them the same way, because you're not creating a character like you do in fiction, but he's breathing life into real human beings to make them as alive as he can for young readers, just as you want to make your fictional character as alive as you can for your readers. But expository text is different, so you're working within those parameters.

Typically, once you do a lot of your research for nonfiction, an order to the writing presents itself. It's usually chronological, because that's the way the historical events unfolded. In fiction, you can jump around a

bit—you can do flashbacks. Not that you can't do those with nonfiction, but nonfiction is a little more systematic. You have to know your stuff, and you have to know your stuff to start with. In fiction, you can just start writing. You can develop your characters, and you can lay it out, and you can do your research along the way.

Do you outline your fiction?

I outline in one way or another, but it's never the same way. I still end up experimenting, but there is always in me a need to know where I'm going with it. I've known other writers who say, "I have this kernel of an idea, I have this character, and I just start, and where it takes me is where I go." I'd be too nervous about that, and yet I sort of admire somebody who can do that. I start with a yellow pad of paper, and I just write—three (or four or five or six) longhand pages—and scribble out, rethinking, until I have the basic run of the story. And of course it never ends up being like that in the end, because it does take on a life of itself as you move through, but at least you have some sense of where you're trying to go when you start.

In *Brothers in Valor,* you write about Latter-day Saint youth in Nazi Germany. How do you approach writing about Mormons to a wider audience?

I didn't write that book for an LDS audience, so that was a real consideration. There are two reasons that was a hard book for me to write. The first thing is that it's so close to the truth of what happened, with Helmuth Hübener and his resistance group. I had read the biographies written by both the surviving boys, and I got to know the real people too well. When I fictionalized it, it was hard to breathe life into the fictional characters. I really worked on that, and I'm not sure I achieved it the way I wanted to. And the second thing is that you have pressures about how you're representing the Church to the larger audience when you're doing this, and that can be very hindering. "Do I use this word?" "Do I do this?" I found it crippling sometimes. Maybe if I had been writing it for Deseret Book or something like that, my mindset would have been different. I enjoyed writing the book, but those things were a challenge for me.

I'd like to do something like this again, though. I've fiddled around and done lots of research on a historical novel set in Nauvoo. It keeps getting set by the wayside, and I can't find someone who wants to do it outside the Mormon market. But I'd like to try that again, because having been through the experience once, I might be a little better at being able to handle those difficulties that come with writing about Mormon culture.

How does being a member of the Church affect your writing?

A few years ago, I was invited to a conference of Mormon writers and artists. We were in a discussion group and somebody asked how much of our work was dedicated to the Lord. "Is it? Do you rely on inspiration to do it the way the Lord would want you to do it?" I remember thinking and even saying, about me in particular, there are some things that are just ingrained into us if we're faithful members of the Church that allow us to proceed in a way that sets certain boundaries for us. It will be different for every individual because we all see things differently. I couldn't quite go with this idea of,

"Lord, I am a vessel in your hand; write through me." It just didn't sit right with me. I saw it more like, "I'm going to give it my best shot," and then be guided as much as possible by whatever is inside me—who I am and what I believe ought to be in there anyway.

People see this so differently within the Church. People outside the Church think we all see Mormonism the same, and of course we have basic beliefs that are the same, but even then we begin to look at how we live those doctrines differently. The Word of Wisdom, for instance: there's a lot of variation, whether you drink cola drinks or not. I think there are as many ways to be a good Mormon as there are good Mormons. And it's the same with writing about Mormonism. When I was working on that Nauvoo novel, the polygamy thing came up. You can't avoid the issue if you're writing about Nauvoo. In the end, it sort of brought the hammer down. And I thought, "How am I going to deal with this?" And all the time, whether you want to or not, you're thinking about how your Church member friends and how BYU, for whom you work, is going to look at how you deal with this, and it almost gets irritating at some point, because you realize you can't free yourself from that. Maybe you shouldn't entirely. But it's still a struggle.

I did a lot of research about polygamy, and I found a lot of things that knocked me off center about that period of time, that we don't know generally in the Church. At that point, I said, "I can't write this book. I can't do this." I'm not going to rewrite history. In a way, members do have a selected history, and I can understand that when you're talking to the world in general and to new converts to the Church. But to think that people aren't people, especially in those tumultuous days of the early Church, is sort of ridiculous. If I'm going to write something, I'm not going to do what we did for kids often in the fifties, where we said, "Look this is the history we want them to know, so let's just rework it." We don't do that anymore. Because of the pressures (both real and imagined) exerted by the LDS environment in which I live, I said, "Instead of facing this, I won't write this book." I got over that after a while, and figured there was a way to deal with it for younger readers without

having to go into the gory details—and without avoiding the issue. I haven't got it done. I never did get back to it because I got caught up in another project, but I think I will eventually.

The real answer is that it's a struggle, basically. You want to be true to yourself and true to the truth when you're writing about history. You don't want to do something that would affect testimonies negatively, and yet there are plenty of things that are absolute truth that will affect testimonies for some people. So in a way, it would be sort of easier just to write about the Church for Deseret Book, where you are focused on a narrower audience and therefore have a different mission.

What do you think is the goal of writing?

My goal is to tell a good story. A lot of other things could get in the way of that if you're not careful. If it's a historical novel, and you've done tons of research, your research can actually get in the way of telling the good story, because there's this great temptation to show everybody everything you learned, and that will bog your story down.

Another thing is wanting to tell a lesson or preach a moral, which has always been a difficulty in religious fiction. In good writing, the messages are subtle. They are treasures to be discovered rather than sermons to be preached. They're more powerful that way because they're self-discovered. That's why I think it's taken Mormon fiction a long time to get to a higher level of quality. There's just that understandable part of us, when you're writing for a religious audience, that wants to moralize. And we're even more concerned that children get the message.

But the goal is really to tell a good story. If you're too worried about theme or about showing what you've learned, or too concerned about something other than telling the story, chances are you will weaken the story. Chances are if you do all your homework, you know what it is you want to say, and you let it unfold naturally through the process of telling the story and developing the characters, you're not only going to get a better piece of writing, you're going to more successfully communicate to your audience what you want them to know about history and what you want them to know about whatever your theme or moral is. ▪

Merrick White

Merrick White is a painter and recent BYU graduate. Website: ***merrickwhite.com***

Tell us a little bit about your background: where you're from and how that has made you what you are today.

I was born in Wisconsin, but I moved when I was four and grew up in Las Vegas my whole life. I think probably the biggest thing that influenced who I am and where I am today is my schooling. I was homeschooled from the time I started school all the way until high school. It created an environment for me and my siblings that allowed us to spend a lot of one-on-one time with my mom, so she was able to get to know us on a level that most moms don't, I think. And that helped her tune in to our abilities and our talents early on. She was the one who pushed me into my art more than anyone. As a result of that, I pursued my artistic talents and went to BYU. I started out as an art major and graduated as an art major. Never once wanted to do anything else.

Did you have any formal training then?

I took a couple of art classes when I was younger, but I never really got into it then. My junior year of high school, my mom said, "Okay, I'm forcing you to take an art class—you have too much ability to just throw this

away. Just take it, and if you hate it, you don't have to do it. But at least take one class." So I did, and within two weeks I turned in my first assignment and my teacher said, "You're too good to be in this Art 1 class, so we're moving you up to the next level." My teacher was very good at getting us involved in contests and shows, and winning awards was this big thing for me. I realized that I did have some talent, and that got me into it.

When I applied for BYU, I started talking to my mom about what I wanted to major in. The obvious thing was art. So, I immediately started taking art classes there—drawing classes, mostly, until last August when I decided to take a shot at painting. I had a great teacher who was really good at explaining everything and starting out with the basics and helping us understand. I just fell in love with it and was inspired by her and her paintings.

Do you have a name for your particular style?

If people ask what I paint, I usually say oil portraiture because I paint a lot of faces. I wouldn't say there's a particular name for the style that I do. Since I just graduated from college, I'm still in that exploratory phase of my life where I like a lot of different things and haven't decided on one particular thing. I think I'll always do faces, but I'm still working on expanding my artistic repertoire.

What's a typical day like for you?

It's pretty straightforward every day, since I have a full-time job. I get up, I go to the gym, I go to work, I come home from work. My husband usually gets home

from work about an hour and a half after I do, so I have that time to make dinner and work on some of my art while it cooks. He leaves earlier than I do for work and gets home later than I do, and we only have these few hours together, so we usually spend most of our time together then. Sometimes I say okay, tonight is a painting night and I just have to work, and he'll sit next to me while I work. It's a real challenge to juggle all these different things: spending time with him and cleaning the house and doing the laundry and then getting my painting in. When I did my last show, after he went to bed I would paint until three in the morning every night because that was the only time I could paint.

Tell us about your work process, taking a painting from start to finish. Does it change a lot from the beginning to the end?

Yes. It changes a lot. I constantly carry around a little sketch book with me and whenever ideas or compositions come to me, I write them down or sketch them out so I can remember them and come back to them. Then I take photos; I rarely use models just because it's hard to afford them at this point, and trying to bribe a family member to sit there for hours on end is difficult as well.

After I take photos, I usually find three or four I like that I can work from. I've started making my own panels, since I don't really like to work on canvas very much—I like working on a Masonite board or some other kind of board. So I prime that and color it and then I spend about an hour just sketching it out and finding that composition on the panel itself.

Then, after everything is measured and all accurate—it's just a really loose sketch with charcoal—I tackle the painting with a big brush. I usually cover the entire surface of the painting and try to get everything with paint on it. I don't do detail; I just try to get shapes right, and that usually takes me a couple days. After that, I go back and I repaint the entire thing with more detail, and that takes me another couple days.

It's a tough process, but I learn something new every time, and the process does evolve a lot. Sometimes I end up changing the entire thing halfway through or covering it all with paint and starting completely over. Sometimes I love it right from the start, and sometimes I hate it and have to rework it over and over and over until I'm happy with it.

What are your favorite and least favorite parts of life as an artist?

I really love starting a new painting. I love thinking of ideas. Just the thought of making my paintings a reality gets me so excited. I also love working on my paintings and seeing the works in progress and what I've accomplished and seeing how my abilities increased with this particular painting. I love seeing my art up on people's walls or in a gallery. That motivates me and it makes me feel like I'm accomplishing something and I'm doing what I want to do.

I think my least favorite part is the mess. I do all my painting right in my living room—it's carpeted and I can't even tell you how many times I've scrubbed paint out of my carpet. I think when it comes time to sell our condo I might be investing in a few well-placed rugs, because of all those darn spots! We're planning on moving in the next couple months and when we do, I'm dedicating an entire room to my art that can get as messy as I want. Then it won't be a problem.

With your paintings, who do you see as your audience?

I feel like there's still a lot of growth to be had in my artistic career, and I think that my audience will grow as my paintings grow. I think right now my audience is pretty much anyone who likes to look at art. I'll gain a more specific audience when I find a direction that I'll go in for a long time. Right now, when I'm doing a little bit of this and a little bit of that, pretty much everyone is my audience.

Tell us about working on your "Sadness I" painting.

When I decided on the idea of this show—to mix abstract ideas with people and their facial expressions—one of the first ideas I thought of was sadness. I thought that painted drips created a beautiful tears metaphor, so this particular imagery was on my mind through all the other paintings. The two sadness paintings were the last ones that I did. With every painting I did, I constantly thought of ideas for this one. I went through several different background colors and finally decided on blue. Blue tends to be a strong color, especially the blues that I paint with, and so I mixed a lot of different colors to create this blue and feel I got exactly the color that I wanted. It's a beautiful blue, and it's one of my favorite colors—kind of grayish-blue, like an overcast sky. I think it creates that solemn tone, and the

white tears dripping down intensify that mood. With the painting with the man, I wanted to create his facial expression not like he was crying, but just that he was solemn and sad.

Do you have any ideas as far as what the theme of your next show will be?

I think I'm going to try to tackle just abstract paintings. My husband really loves abstract paintings and I've tried my hand at it a couple times. I'm going to work with geometric and organic shapes mixed together and how they contrast and clash, but I'm going to integrate them together.

Where do you see yourself in the future and what are your future ambitions and plans?

Well, right now I'm working full-time, but it's not a full-time career that I'll do for the rest of my life. I'm really dedicated to my art and I want to be a mom. I think that in the future I see a lot of late nights, because that's really the best time for me to paint. I don't want to let my life get too busy to give up on my art. I want to be a mom and I want to take care of my kids, but I always want to be sketching and thinking of ideas even if I'm not putting up shows and working on big projects; I always want to be an artist. My husband and I plan to create a business out of this and do commissions and shows and enter my art into a lot of things.

How does the gospel influence you in your art and as an artist?

I think that as an artist, especially an LDS artist, you paint what you feel and what you believe, whether it's consciously evident in your art or if it's just subconsciously what you paint. For my art, the gospel plays a huge role, but I think it's less obvious than art like Simon Dewey or Liz Lemon Swindle, who paint gospel subjects. I don't paint gospel subjects, and at this point I don't plan to in the near future. But I love painting the

human body, which is one of God's greatest creations. I also love painting children. I think that painting these subjects is glorifying God, as long as they're painted in a positive and a modest way.

How do you see your paintings fitting into the larger scheme of things?

I think I can at least show people that it's possible to be both an artist and a mom, and that you don't have to paint only LDS subjects to be an LDS painter. Take people like Minerva Teichert—regardless of what else went on in her life, she dedicated her life to art and she never let her passion die. I saw a couple of her shows when I was at BYU and found out that most of the time she left her easel in the kitchen so that she could be both a mom and an artist at the same time. That's motivating to me.

I feel like I can build the kingdom in a positive way through my art just by being an example of good and wholesome art, and by being an artist in the LDS community and in other communities. As for having a family and still being an artist, I'll have to take that as it comes because I'm not at that stage yet, but I'm never going to let that passion die. I want it to be integrated into my family as a part of my family's culture—that I am an artist. Regardless of what we paint, as long as it's good and wholesome, we can build the kingdom in our own little way.

What's the most satisfying part of painting?

Probably when someone comes up to me or e-mails me and says, "I loved that particular piece! That meant so much to me." Getting the feedback from people. I mean, I hear it from my husband and I hear it from my mom, but they always say it's good. When a total stranger is moved and inspired by my art, I feel completely satisfied—I feel that I'm doing what I want to do and that I'm accomplishing my dream. ▪

John Telford

John Telford is a photographer and BYU professor known for his photographs of landscapes and Mormon sites. E-mail: ***john_telford@byu.edu***

You became interested in photography while on your mission in the Samoan Islands. What initially sparked that interest?

Being in that country and being in that environment. It's very, very beautiful. It was a place where I wanted to take some pictures as a record of the experiences that I was having. And as I took more and more pictures, I got more and more serious about it, until I eventually decided that it was something I wanted to pursue. I then became known as the mission photographer.

It wasn't an official title or anything, but I was so involved in it that eventually I had an assignment, as it were, from the then junior member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Thomas S. Monson. I was asked to take pictures at a ceremony that was given in honor of a visit he made to the islands. I took the pictures and then produced a little book for him that had both the photographs and an interpretation of all the things that had happened.

After your mission, what steps did you take to become a professional photographer?

I came to BYU to play baseball on a scholarship, and also because they had a photography program. At the time BYU did not have a degree in photography, but there were several classes I could take, so I took all the classes I could and then just started looking for jobs in photography. One job led to another and within a year or so of being out of school, I was working as a portrait photographer and then as a commercial photographer at a commercial studio here in Salt Lake. I've been making my living in photography ever since.

What other photographers have influenced your work?

I've been influenced a great deal by prominent West Coast landscape photographers, starting with Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, and Wynn Bullock. They are the ones that have been my primary influence. Eliot Porter was another strong influence in the color work that I have done, as well as other people along his same lines.

What drew you to those particular photographers?

While I was at BYU studying, I was introduced to the work of Ansel Adams and became very enamored of the work that he had done. I began studying his work and his techniques. Eventually I got to study with him a little bit and was introduced to several other photographers in the circle. An unassociated experience along that line is that while I was working in commercial photography in Salt Lake, I made a proposal to my boss that we open a gallery, and in 1972 we established the Edison Street gallery.

As I look back on it now, it was actually one of the very first galleries in the whole country that was devoted solely to exhibiting photography. Through that experience I became acquainted with a number of very prominent photographers throughout the country as we exhibited their work in the gallery and brought that caliber of photography to Salt Lake and Utah.

Where do you find your inspiration for your work?

There are two aspects to my work. One of them is in the landscape, the environmental photography, the photography of the natural world, which I've done for a number of years. I just go out and I photograph. The inspiration is a matter of going out and putting myself in places that are just incredibly interesting and beautiful.

The other side of that is that after I joined the faculty at BYU and started teaching photography on a full-time basis, I became much more interested in doing work that would be in harmony with the mission of BYU as well as the Church. So I started

photographing places that are related to Church history and the historic architecture of the Church. I've done a number of different projects that have been published extensively over the past fifteen years.

What aspects of nature do you strive to capture in your photography?

I'm primarily interested in the ephemeral and fleeting things of the natural world. I've photographed natural landforms, which geologically have hardly changed at all in the lifetime of a human being.

And yet it's not the landform that interests me per se. It's the light that illuminates the landform and the conditions that are very fleeting. So as I photograph, I am interested in seeing the landscape in a light that is very unusual. As opposed to ordinary, middle-of-the-day light, I'm looking for the changing weathers. I'm looking for what is referred to as "the sweet light." You know, light that changes very, very rapidly at the extremes of the day.

Those are the things that interest me a great deal, and it's in those kinds of conditions that I make most of my photographs.

Of all the photographs that you've taken, do you have a favorite?

I don't know that I could isolate it down to a single one. There are many, many photographs that continue to mean a lot to me—it's really hard to narrow it down to just one or two.

There is one, though, that I've talked about a lot. It is a photograph that I made while I was at a workshop where Ansel Adams was the primary teacher. It's a photograph of five redwood trees. I got up early one morning to go out and photograph in Yosemite Valley, and I saw this series of trees that are laid out in a symmetrical pattern of five. There's one tree in the center and it's surrounded by four additional trees. The light when I first saw it was spectacular—a very brilliant quality of light. As I started setting up the camera, I ended up taking so much time doing it that eventually the light changed and it was no longer as interesting as it was when I first saw it. So I came back the next morning to try it again, and still, I spent too much time in calculating and setting up the camera and missed the opportunity. Finally on the third morning, I came early enough to get everything set up and was able to make the photograph. Just that experience was interesting in its own right—the commitment of three days to make a photograph.

The other part that was interesting is that a year or two later, Ansel was in Salt Lake on a book signing, and we invited him to come over to the gallery, which had been established by that point. This photograph was hanging in the foyer of the gallery and I noticed him looking at it. I said, "Have you ever seen those trees before?" He indicated that he had not seen them and then I told him, "That's interesting, because they're only about two hundred yards away from your house in Yosemite." He looked at it again for a minute and finally turned to me and said, "Wow. I wish I had taken that picture." That was a nice compliment.

Where are your favorite places to photograph?

I've really enjoyed going to Israel and the Holy Land and making the photographs for a book, *In the Footsteps of Jesus,* that was published eight years ago and

will be republished this year. I enjoyed very much going to South America and Chile and photographing in Torres del Paine National Park too, which is an incredible place. On the one hand, I'm making photographs for a book about our Savior, and on the other hand I'm making photographs of an environment that is inherently beautiful. Photographing in Alaska was very enjoyable too.

Six to eight years ago I had the opportunity of going to Cuba and photographing there, which is an unusual place for Americans to be able to travel to. But that series of photographs is different from any of the other things that I had done before because they are predominantly about the people and not the landforms. When I'm photographing the environment, it's just me and the environment. When you're photographing people, particularly people who speak a language you don't speak, it becomes a real challenge to approach them and get permission to photograph and then get spontaneous reactions from them. It's a totally different experience. I feel like there was a real stepping out of my comfort zone, and that I was doing something that I hadn't really done a lot of. I learned a lot and made a lot of personal progress in being able to do that kind of photography.

How has the gospel influenced you in your photography?

After joining the faculty at BYU, I had a strong desire to do the kind of photography that would be useful or in harmony with the mission of BYU and the Church; that it would contribute to the fabric of what the Church is all about. So, initially I began photographing the architecture of the Church. Within just a couple of years, though, I had this desire to photograph historic Mormon architecture, but not necessarily the

temples—not that I was ignoring the temples or downplaying their importance, since I feel that they are incredibly significant and quite visible for the membership of the Church. But there is a second tier of architecture in the Church which is hardly known, like the tabernacles and the nineteenth-century meeting houses that are so prevalent up and down the whole state of Utah and into Idaho and other places in the intermountain area. I wanted to photograph those buildings with the desire to show their individuality, their significance, and the commitment the early Saints had in building them. The craftsmanship that went into them is phenomenal.

So I began photographing the architecture of the Church, which for me is similar to landscape photography in that I'm using that same quality of light and I'm looking for the weather and the ephemeral things that are associated with landscape photography. But in this case, there are buildings in that landscape. The photographs of the buildings are done in "the sweet light" or in this amazing weather, so it's not just a documentation of the architecture. There's a strong commitment to the visual beauty and the art of the buildings.

I made that series of photographs over a period of about two or three years. Exhibiting those photographs then led to a proposal to go to Nauvoo to do similar things there, which resulted in three different books done with Susan Easton Black. That also led to my going to Israel and photographing the environment in the Holy Land for *In the Footsteps of Jesus.* It's been one after the other now. After photographing in Israel, I came back. And when the Nauvoo temple was announced, there was a whole new reason to go back to Nauvoo and look at the city all over again with the idea of focusing more on the rebuilding of the temple. Two books then came out associated with the Nauvoo temple. After we'd spent a lot of time in Nauvoo photographing we decided, well, let's do other areas that are associated with the Prophet Joseph Smith. Now, I had not been to New York, Kirtland, or any of those places, so we decided that this would be a good time to do a book associated with the Prophet Joseph Smith as the 200th anniversary of his birth was rapidly coming upon us. So I did all the photographs of the areas associated with the Prophet—everything from Sharon, Vermont, the birthplace, all the way back to Nauvoo and Carthage, where the Prophet was martyred.

All of those photographs were then compiled into the book called *Joseph Smith: Praise to the Man,* which was also done with Susan Easton Black. I just had this desire to share my love of photography and the environment, as well as my love of the Church, and I feel like doing those photographs for that purpose helped to tell the story of the early Church and also the life of Christ.

In a sense bearing your testimony through photography for other people to enjoy.

Exactly. I gave a devotional at BYU a year and a half ago and that was one of the big things that I tried to stress: that as photographers, particularly LDS photographers, we should make sure that we're doing photographs that reflect our testimony, rather than photographs that lower our standards to the standards of the world.

Did you learn anything new about the history of the Church that you hadn't known before?

Oh, yes, especially from working with a person like Susan Easton Black who is so well-versed with the history of the Church. She would lay it out on a shot-list, as it were, to make sure I knew about the important places that I needed to be photographing. I know a lot about photography, but I don't pretend to be a Church historian. And so to have someone like that to fall back on, who would say, "These are the important things that need to be photographed," and then getting involved with the stories associated with those places—it was a real learning experience for me to be able to do that.

In fact, there's also another interesting story associated with that. I had made a photograph of the Salt Lake Temple at Christmastime which had been commissioned by the Church. I think a lot of people have seen that particular photograph. It's on the pass-along card that the Church uses. It has the Salt Lake Temple on it. So when I was in Kirtland photographing one afternoon, we drove over to the Isaac Morley farm. It was late in the afternoon and the light was just perfect to make a photograph. As my wife and I drove up, I jumped out of the car and one of the couple missionaries approached me, obviously to give the tour and the spiel on the Isaac Morley farm, and I said to this sister, "I'm here to make photographs for a book that I'm doing with Susan Easton Black. I need you to just quickly take me to what you think is the most significant place here on the Isaac Morley farm where I can make a photograph. And if we can get that photograph, then I'll be able to slow down and listen to you and hear your spiel and do all of those things." So she took me to a place and I made the photograph. Then we slowly made our way back to the car and she was telling me about many of the things that I obviously was not aware of concerning the Isaac

Morley farm. As we got back to the car she bore her testimony to me and then handed me one of those Salt Lake Temple pass-along cards. She said, "Here. I want you to take this." I looked at her and kind of winked and said, "I already did." She had to stop for a minute before she realized what I'd said.

What spiritually uplifting experiences have you had while taking pictures of these places?

I think I had a lot of those experiences, particularly in the Holy Land. I was there for about six weeks. My wife and two daughters were with me for just one of those weeks and after they went home, I was there by myself for the remainder of the time. During those weeks of photographing, I immersed myself in the scriptures and read the stories about the places where I was photographing so that I would be very familiar with what had taken place and where I was, making it so I would be able to go to those locations with those stories right there in my mind. Well, when my wife and my daughters were still with me, we went to the Garden of Gethsemane. One of the interesting things about the Holy Land of course, is that there are a lot of places that are assumed to be the places where certain events happened. Once we were in the area where Lazarus's tomb is located in Bethany, and my daughters had both been kind of complaining that the schedule was really hectic and that it was hard to feel the Spirit because we were go go go, and just being told about the history. I remember being with one of my daughters in Bethany at this tomb and I said to her, "You've got to stop and think about what took place here. Feel the Spirit and understand the story of what took place and try to feel the Spirit confirming it."

The next day we were in a place above what is traditionally known as the Garden of Gethsemane, but it was a place, nonetheless, that was a possible location of where Christ actually suffered for the sins of all mankind. While I was there I wanted to just feel it by myself, so I slipped away from my wife and two daughters and went and stood among some of the olive trees. I stroked them, I felt them, and I eventually laid my head against the roughness of the bark of those olive trees. Through that experience I was literally feeling the Spirit of that place and what happened there. The Spirit really, really came over me, and tears started to flow down my cheeks. A few moments later we all walked from that spot down a road that is traditionally known as the route that Jesus took from the Mount of Olives toward the Gate Beautiful, where he made his triumphal entry into the city. We were walking down it, arm in arm, just feeling the Spirit. And in that moment none of us said anything, but tears were freely flowing down our cheeks as we realized the significance of this particular place and what we were experiencing and what had happened there some two thousand years ago. Things like that were very spiritual for me, and I realized both the importance of what I was experiencing and the importance of making photographs that would convey those same feelings.

What did you have in mind as you were trying to capture those feelings that you had there?

One of the things about doing this is realizing that Jerusalem and Israel have been conquered and destroyed, and re-conquered and built and re-destroyed over and over and over again in the two thousand years since the time of Christ. Academically you realize that most of the places that we were at are just assumed to be the places where Jesus was. The landforms have changed so significantly that it's hard to say, "This is exactly where the Savior was" or "This is where these things actually took place." But there are a few places that have actually been confirmed as the places where Jesus was. One of these is the Garden Tomb. Many Christians feel that this is where Jesus was in the tomb and that that is the Garden where He was resurrected and witnessed by first of all the women. Being in that environment was incredibly spiritual, and I felt both the Spirit and the pressure to make photographs that would convey that as best as I know how. Those places are all very, very significant.

At the same time, as we move into the nineteenth century and the organization of the Church and locations in Nauvoo and Kirtland, such as the temple in Kirtland, the Johnson home in Hyrum, Ohio, where the 76th section of the Doctrine & Covenants and others were given—those were also very, very significant places. In the book *In the Footsteps of Jesus,* I do make one comment about being in the Garden Tomb and being in the places where Jesus walked, and as I made the statement, the question came to me, "Did I walk today where Jesus walked?" In that book I recount all the times that Israel has been conquered and built and rebuilt and all those experiences—all those things that had taken place, particularly in the Garden Tomb. On the doorway to the Garden Tomb there is a quote from Luke saying, "He is not here, for He is risen," and the thought came to me that we are here trying to feel the Spirit of Jesus, that I'm trying to walk in the places where Jesus walked. So the question really should be changed from

"Did I walk today where Jesus walked?" to, "Am I walking today where Jesus would have me walk?" because that's a far more important question to ask ourselves. It's about doing the things we know we should do rather than just wanting to be in the places where significant Church history events have taken place.

What advice do you have for aspiring photographers?

From a photographic standpoint, I point out that photographers have to make two rather critical decisions every time they take a picture. These decisions are so fundamental that most people don't even think about them—most of the time it's subconscious—but at the same time, they're made every time a picture is taken. These questions are: "Where do I point the camera?" and "When do I click the shutter?" They are fundamental and basic, and yet that's the difference between good photographs and bad photographs. "Where do I point the camera?" means, "What am I taking a picture of? What do I include?" And sometimes, equally important is the question, "What do I not include?"

The second part of that is "When do I click the shutter?" For me, clicking the shutter at one time of day makes all the difference. I can take exactly the same picture in different light or different conditions and it's a boring photograph, yet because of the light it may be very significant. "When do I click the shutter?" also has to do with the expression on someone's face or the peak

action, the peak moment—all those kinds of things. I talk about that but I also talk to my students about the importance of making photographs that reflect one's testimony and one's beliefs. I photograph things that I believe in. I photograph things that I want to promote, as it were. But I will not allow my talent to be used to promote things that I don't believe in. For that reason, I don't photograph products that are contrary to the teachings of the gospel, and the teachings of the Brethren. I think this talent is God-given, and I want to use it to promote the things of the gospel and things that God would want to have promoted.

Certainly, and that probably brings you a lot of peace of mind, also.

It brings peace of mind and sometimes it's a challenge at the same time. One of the things that I tell the students is that you're going to have to make the decision way before the opportunity is there for you to make these kinds of photographs, particularly in professional work. You're working professionally. You're trying to earn a living and getting paid for what you do. It may be a tough decision to turn down a tobacco company or an alcoholic beverage company or other things that have huge budgets to be able to promote their products. But you have to make the decision when it's not on the line that these are products I'm not going to promote. Most photographers eventually have to make that choice, and a lot of them, because there's a lot of money involved, will use their talents to promote things that they don't believe in. I also tell my students to have the strength and the faith to do those things that reflect your testimony.

Where do you see your career heading in the future?

There are probably a few books that I'd still like to do, but that will be getting progressively harder to accomplish. I've never done anything associated with the Book of Mormon, even though I've done things on Church history, and the New Testament and Bible places. I've never had the opportunity of going to Central or South America and photographing Book of Mormon subjects, and I'd love to be able to do that at some point. I've also been spending a lot more time in making photographs for exhibitions as opposed to photographs for publications. Much of my career at BYU has been devoted to making photographs for books or some other form of publication, and having been very successful at having those books published, I've turned my attention for the last couple of years to exhibiting more photographs. I've done this with the hope that I'm able to influence people to collect and acquire photographs to put into their homes or their businesses that reflect these same values which I have for both Church-related things and also environmental things. To me, they are both about beauty and enriching the soul, as opposed to exploring the dark and perverse things of our society. I feel like my photographs enrich the soul and bring peace to the environment, and it would be nice if people would collect them or bring them into their homes so that, hopefully, this same spirit is conveyed. ▪

Jonna Pirinen

Jonna Pirinen is a Finnish singer/songwriter. She recently returned to Finland after spending a year and a half in the United States writing an English album. Website: ***jonna.fi***

You've been performing since you were a little girl. How old were you when you decided to pursue a career as a singer/songwriter?

I always kind of knew that that was my ultimate goal and dream, but you can't just start—you need some kind of sign to lead you so that you're not blindly following your dream without any signs telling you which way to go.

I never really took any music theory or singing lessons from institutions; it was more like private lessons here and there. Because of my lack of formal training I couldn't start studying to become a professional musician, so I figured it would happen some other way. And then, when I was studying social services, there was this TV show called *Pop Stars* in Finland. My friends said, "Hey, you sing—you should go and audition." I thought, "Sure, I have nothing to lose," and I went. That was the first really good sign that I should go this way. Then, after winning, I knew that this was what I needed to do and I knew that I had it in me—that it wasn't my imagination.

What is it that attracts you to being a singer and a performer?

It comes naturally. I can't think of anything else external that attracts me to it; it's all I ever wanted and knew how to do. I mean, I know how to do other things, but it comes so naturally—as a little girl it was all I wanted to do. I watched music videos and I liked singing in front of the mirror and dancing. I started taking dance classes as a little girl, which is when I really started down the path toward being a performer.

You said you got your start because you appeared on* Pop Stars *and won. Tell us more about that.

They were looking for a girl band. They were auditioning girls who could sing and dance, and they chose me and three other girls for the band. The band didn't work out, so I had to leave. I realized that it was the best thing to do, because I didn't like the music they asked me to sing, and I wanted to do something more than just sing someone else's songs. After that show, I was free to make any contracts with anyone else if I wanted to, and Sony Music (as they were called then) was interested in signing me as a solo artist. And I ended up going with them.

Where do you get your inspiration for the songs that you write?

Well, I write about my life, so most of the stories—or most of the songs—are about me. Actually, in a way, I write songs *to* myself more than *about* myself. I've done a lot of songs about self-esteem issues. A lot of girls have self-esteem issues, and I'm no different. I'm comfortable being up on stage, but that doesn't mean I don't have any self-esteem issues of my own. But that's actually not all that uncommon with artists.

When you write your songs dealing with the emotions that you have, does it help you figure things out?

Yes, it's therapeutic to let it out in my songs so that it's not just all somewhere inside me—I let it out and share it with other people. But the thing is, I don't like to write depressing songs, so there's always some kind of solution in the song. Then, when I'm performing, I try to believe what I wrote. I try to help myself by singing my songs and thinking positively.

Part of your song "Explain" is written in English. Tell us about writing that song.

Well, that was the first song we released on my album that was English. My record company asked if I'd like to have someone featured on the album—a duet or something—and I decided I wanted to work with someone outside of Finland, since I had already sung with many Finnish artists. They suggested maybe someone from Sweden, and I thought of a second-place finisher from *Swedish Idol* named Darin Zanyar. Since he was kind of big at that moment, I figured it would be good for my album to have him there.

Because I needed some kind of reason for why I was writing songs in English all of a sudden in between all the Finnish songs, I wrote the song about the language barrier that can prevent two people from understanding each other.

What music has influenced you and the types of songs that you write?

Everything that you can find online is my old material—the Finnish material—and it's very different. Within a year and a half I've started listening to a little more independent. I'm going to make some changes to my music style thanks to the influence of artists like James Morrison (a new artist from the UK, not the well-known Jim Morrison). He sings pop music, but with a soulful twist. So, that's what I'm looking for with my new album: to add a soulful twist, because I love listening to that kind of music—to artists like Alicia Keyes.

So now you're moving toward doing something that you feel more connected to?

Yes, and something that's going to be different from what everyone else is doing, because it's so hard to describe it as "pop" in the traditional sense of the word. People think of pop as music that requires no brain functioning to listen to. My music has always had more meaning to it, as far as the lyrics are concerned, and now the melodies will be more interesting too. It's not going to be as mainstream and catchy as it has been in the past.

You've spent the last year and a half in the United States. How has that experience affected you as a singer/songwriter?

It's affected me a lot because I've had different experiences; living in a foreign country helps you learn and experience a lot. But having been here has made me also appreciate my own country a lot more. Not that it's been awful here, but I've realized how amazing my own country is.

What was it like to write an album entirely in English as opposed to one in Finnish?

In some ways it's easier because I listen to English music myself, so my influences are from English music. That was the problem for me, writing in Finnish—I never had any influences because there was really no one else doing Finnish pop music.

What was your inspiration for the new album that you've been working on?

Life, once again, but I'm also dedicating this album to my mom. She passed away in March. But even though it was a sad event, I have a lot of hope, and I know that I want to dedicate it to her and keep on living my life. This album is about our life journey, and my journey here, and growing and finding out how to be happy. I think a lot of people in this world live in an unconscious state. They're on automatic and they go from one day to another without thinking, "Oh, wait, maybe I can control my feelings, maybe I can control my mind and be happier." So, I'm trying to share things that I've learned with other people—things that I love, and what I've learned through this experience, especially being in the United States.

How did you find out about the LDS Church?

I was studying social services, and we had to do a practice placement in either an elderly home or a kindergarten or a day care center. So I did mine in a kindergarten. Since I was studying in English (it was a British degree program), we had to find a placement for that

month and a half or so that would have English as the language they used there. In Finland it's not easy to find a place like that, because they're mainly Finnish, but I found one. It was actually on the other side of the street from an LDS chapel. The missionaries came there every Friday to volunteer, to sing with the kids and have a little music moment with them. So then I talked to the missionaries, and I wanted to know what they were all about. I was kind of just wondering why they kept on changing—why there were always new missionaries. Half a year later I went to work there as a substitute teacher, and I asked, "Where do you guys come from?" I was just curious. I thought that they were going to want to date me. It was kind of funny—I was like, "Oh, yeah, you can have my number." Then they wanted to teach me, so I just said to myself, "Okay, I'll let them teach. Let me figure this out." That's how I was first acquainted with the Church, and then a year later I was baptized. It took me a while to figure it out, but when I did, I knew I was going to stick with it.

What was your conversion experience like?

It was difficult because for the longest time I kept telling myself, "No, I don't know if this is true, so I can't do all these things they're asking me to do—the law of chastity and the Word of Wisdom and everything. It sounds like too much." But then when I had been investigating for half a year or even a little more, I noticed that I had already come to the conclusion that I don't need any of those things in my life. I was ready to try it out. That's pretty much when things started to happen—that's when I started to feel the Spirit really testifying to me that this was true, that this rang true to me. The longer I went, I understood it more and more, and I thought, "There's nothing more true than this."

It was a big shock for people when I joined the Church because I was very different before that. No one expected it to happen. People still ask, "So, do you still go to the church?" And I say, "Yes, why not?" I mean, I joined the Church—why would I stop going? I changed my whole life around. I'm going to go.

Where were you at in your singing career when you joined the Church?

I started investigating just after I left the band. A year later my album had come out, in June 2003, and I got baptized a few months later in October. My career was actually at its peak then—when I joined the Church, I had the most successful summer by far—but it definitely took a little twist downhill after that. People weren't quite prepared for a preacher kind of girl, which wasn't what I was, but that's what they thought I would become if I joined some weird religion that people don't know about.

Do you feel like it affected your fan base at all?

Yes, it did. Not necessarily directly from the fact that I joined the Church, but indirectly because I made choices, as far as the pictures that I would use for my album cover and what type of music videos I would make, and everything just went from one end to the other. It was too big of a change for most people. Maybe it was the better content.

I've tried to speculate afterwards, or try to understand what happened, if there's anything I could do better. And I've realized that it was just such a drastic change from one extreme end to the other that people turned it down in their heads. They weren't ready for that kind of a change.

I think people will appreciate it more over time. Back then, I think it was too sudden and too quick, and they still didn't know as much about the Church. Since then, we've actually had a lot of good experiences in the Finnish mission; we had our temple open up and had our open house, and it was a great success. A lot of people came and were really interested in it, so I think the turnaround is not going to be as big of a deal.

It's already been about five years since I joined the Church. I think I blend in pretty well. I'm not trying to be different. All I'm trying to do is just do what makes me feel happier. I'm not trying to convert people. All I want to do is have my principles. I'm hoping that this time around it'll be better. All of this, of course, has made me stronger. At times, I would think to myself, "Great. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for turning my career downhill." But of course that's just the human thing to do, and when trials come of course you blame the person who is blessing you. Now, though, I'm grateful that my career didn't go skyrocketing on after I joined the Church. I had this epiphany: "Hey, I can actually do this in English, and I can reach more people." I've regained my strength, and besides, it's good to take a little break. Now it'll have been almost three years since my last album was released, and I think Finland especially needed that time to let things cool off. They can see that, hey, she's still the same person—that it's not so scary.

What effect did your conversion to the Church have on your focus as a singer and a songwriter and the types of songs that you write?

Since I write about my life and about how I feel, it changed quite a bit. But not so much that I would just be singing religious songs, because I don't sing religious songs. As an artist in the Church, someday I'd like to write a spiritual album, but for now I think I'll just try to be the breath of fresh air in this very contaminated pop industry. I feel like it's something I should do, so my songs are positive and hopefully have something more to give to people than the typical pop artist's songs would. And everyone can relate to it—you don't have to be Mormon to believe or agree with what I'm saying. If I'm singing about the Holy Ghost, I'm not using the word "Holy Ghost," but I'm talking in terms that everyone can relate to.

What are your plans for the future as a performer?

I'm looking forward to meeting with my band in January and practicing all these new songs that I've written. We're going to perform a few times before March, and then I'm going to meet with all the different producers I've talked to and see which one I end up working with. And hopefully, if they have free time in the spring, they can start recording and producing the album. It's all very exciting.

Actually, what's really exciting, but at the same time a little scary, is that I've decided to do this as an independent artist. My last record deal ended two years ago when I told the record company I wanted to do an English album because I think I have potential to reach more than just the Finnish market. They didn't want to take the risk of changing what was already working, and so I was forced to leave. But I can do everything they're doing except for distribution, and I can easily make a distribution deal with a record company. I'm in control of my own product when I'm the one who produced it. I'm basically ready to sell my apartment, a condo in Finland, and get a smaller one so that I can make some money in between and pay for the whole album myself.

I'm going to start fishing for opportunities to promote my album in every possible country I can. When the album is ready, I'll start promoting it online first—on MySpace, for example—and we'll see how it spreads. ▪

CHRISTIAN VUISSA

Christian Vuissa is a filmmaker whose films include last year's The Errand of Angels, *about sister missionareis in Austria, and the upcoming* Father in Israel. *Website:* ***mirrorfilms.com***

Could you tell us about your background?

I am from Bregenz, a small city in Austria that has about 30,000 citizens. Bregenz is the capital of the most western state of Austria which borders Switzerland, Germany, and Liechtenstein. The city is known for its Open Air Opera Festival, an annual summer festival held on a large stage in the middle of a lake (featured in the latest James Bond movie). A big difference between Bregenz and Utah is the proximity of different cultures. In Bregenz, for example, if I drove for a few hours in different directions I would end up in several different countries with different cultures, food and languages. I could be in Switzerland and Germany within ten minutes and France and Italy within four hours. When I was a kid you had to cross the border with a passport. Now, it is all part of the European Union. Growing up,

entertainment in Bregenz was in a sense very diverse as well. There was a mix of films from neighboring countries along with kid's movies from Czechoslovakia and many films from the United States.

I was baptized into the Catholic faith soon after I was born, but my mother converted to the LDS Church when I was about seven. My father never joined the Church, so I basically grew up in both faiths, attending Catholic classes in school and going to a small LDS branch on Sundays. I became serious about religion in my early twenties and had a very strong conversion experience that led me to joining the Church when I was 22, leaving on a mission when I was 24, and coming to Utah when I was 27.

How has your background influenced your work?

When working on *The Errand of Angels* I was immediately drawn to the conflict between Sister Taylor and Sister Keller. We often label people as good or bad without really seeing their heart or understanding anything about them. I like stories that offer a different perspective, an angle that helps us comprehend the world from a different point of view. As a filmmaker I try to offer that perspective on the "other side" or the often ignored or misunderstood person. My mother always taught me to reach out to outsiders in any given group or environment. I think this type of upbringing has influenced my work.

How did you get started with film?

I had a few film experiences in high school and was drawn to writing a script when I was sixteen, but it never really materialized. I took a screenwriting course a few years later and worked for a video production company for a couple of years. But it wasn't until I got into the film program at BYU that I seriously considered filmmaking as a career.

Why Mormon cinema?

One of the greatest things about BYU is its International Cinema program. It was mainly established and run for Humanities students to offer insights into the world of other cultures. I think there is a huge void of such films about Mormon culture and heritage. A unique quality about film is that you can tell stories that make it possible for the viewer to enter a world they are not familiar with. After only two hours of watching a film onscreen, it is possible for us to not only understand but also have compassion for another culture, its rituals and traditions. Additionally, these same films have a similar effect on those already familiar with that culture. They see their own experience reflected on the screen and can draw inspiration, motivation, and meaning from it.

In the global world we live in today, where much of the entertainment and pop culture comes out of Hollywood, small countries like Austria struggle to remain and uphold a certain national identity. This is why films are mostly funded by governments, because there is a desire to preserve a national identity. There is even a special label for films that accomplish that—"culturally precious." I think the same is needed for the Mormon culture. Even though there are members all over the world, our faith unites us much like a nationality. At the same time, we are also heavily influenced by the culture that surrounds us geographically. I remember a Swiss journalist who visited the BYU campus during the 2002 Olympics saying that he didn't find it any different here than anywhere else in the United States, and he did not mean it as a compliment. What struck me was that we ourselves might lose sight of what makes us unique and different. There is always a desire to fit in, but at the same time we need to reflect on what is "culturally precious" within our own culture and try to preserve our unique identity. I think film is a powerful medium that does that.

What motivates you to produce work that has a very particular and small target audience?

You have to have an audience you love and care about to create something of value. That can be one particular person or a group of people. I do not think the LDS audience is a particularly small audience. It is a bigger audience than if I were to make films in Austria, for example, which has a population of 8 million people. The only problem is that film is expensive and that is

why the government pays for it pretty much everywhere outside of the United States. Not many films would be made without that support. In our LDS environment we still rely on the financial success of a film. That is why we have seen a decrease in LDS-themed films in recent years. We still need to establish a structure within our community that allows filmmakers to grow and contribute while at the same time being able to make a living. Right now there is no such support structure in place. I hope that with the LDS Film Festival and my production model at Mirror Films we can inspire some people to change that.

Films have tremendous potential to tell our stories to ourselves and to the world. But I also see potential in the limitations. For example, I produced both *The Errand of Angels* and *Father in Israel* for less than $200,000 each in order to have a decent expectation of return for our investors. That means I have 1 penny for every 3 dollars Hollywood spends on average on a feature film. If I spend $1, Hollywood spends $300. You can't compete with that.

But that is exactly where I also see potential. If we look at our limitations and think about how we can creatively use these limitations to our advantage, we can create something entirely new. But I think it has to be done with the audience in mind. If we try to imitate Hollywood, we can only lose, because they will always have more resources available. But if we find those things that money can't buy, things Hollywood can't duplicate, we can offer our audience an experience they have not previously known.

How do you see your work building the kingdom?

I currently see my films working on "perfecting the Saints" in terms of the three-fold mission of the Church. But with each project I will probably expand to make films that "proclaim the Gospel." The role of feature film narratives in building the kingdom is hugely underestimated at this point. If it weren't, a lot more money would be made available to do so.

In what direction do you see Mormon cinema going?

Mormon cinema has lost its steam in recent years and we will have to see what happens. I think there were a number of extremes in the beginning, from the goofy comedy to the heavy drama. But in the end there will probably be a balance somewhere in the middle. I also think that there was a strong urge to tell Hollywood-type epic stories, which basically wasted millions of dollars that could have been used to build a more modest but consistent independent film movement. I believe that "by small means the Lord can bring about great things." I hope we can find a way to apply that principle to filmmaking. The opportunity we have right now is to establish a film form that is unique to our culture.

What is your favorite role in the filmmaking process? Why?

I like all the different roles, but in pre-production I enjoy finding the right actors for the film and scouting locations. Framing the picture, directing the actors, and blocking a scene are all very enjoyable during production, and editing the film in post-production is rewarding because everything is finally coming together. Throughout, I enjoy the collaborative aspect of filmmaking, having the opportunity to work with other creative people.

Tell us the story behind *The Errand of Angels*.

Heidi Johnson, the producer and initiator of the film wanted her mission experience told in a film. Through my mission president, Terry Johnson, her father-in-law, she made contact with me and began asking questions about making a film about sister missionaries. She was determined to make this film a reality, and I was impressed with her perseverance. The story is based on Heidi's mission but we took many liberties in telling Sister Taylor's story. Many of my own mission experiences flowed into the story but the film really is a tribute to sister missionaries and missionaries in general.

What is your favorite scene in that film?

I have two favorites, the first being the scene in the old Jewish cemetery. I like how Sister Taylor's prayer is being answered without her really knowing it. God works with us and leads us in ways we often do not understand. The cemetery scene signifies that only when looking back do we realize that God has guided us along the way. I also like the scene when Sister Taylor looks through Sister Young's scriptures and finds pictures of Sister Keller and Sister Young. This process of discovery continues later on in the train back to Vienna. By seeing pictures of a "different" Sister Keller, Sister Taylor is able to take responsibility for her own relationship with Sister Keller without blaming all of her struggles on her companion.

What were some of the miracles you saw while filming it?

We had miracles happening constantly. From how

we found the actress to play Sister Keller, to how we were able to film this 600-year-old house that served as the sisters' apartment in Salzburg. Also, we were not kicked out of train stations, trains, streetcars, buses, or any public places until after we got our coverage. And we were able to finish production on time. I think small miracles happened all along the way.

Tell us about founding the LDS Film Festival.

I started the LDS Film Festival when I was still a film student at BYU in 2001. I was impressed with the talent of many of my peers in the film program along with other filmmakers I met here in Utah, and I thought it would be beneficial to the community to establish a festival that offered a venue for filmmakers to showcase their work. The whole LDS cinema genre was barely established at this point, but there was a certain confidence in the air that did not exist before. When I started the festival there were hardly any feature-length films being produced by LDS directors or producers. But I had a strong feeling that this would change over time and that at some point the LDS Film Festival would premiere dozens of feature films made by LDS filmmakers. Two years later, we began to screen feature films at the festival. Since 2006 we have had about a dozen feature-length films in the program every year. We have truly seen tremendous growth.

What are some of the success stories that have occurred as a result of the festival?

Over the years we have become a key player and motivator in the LDS film community, signaling progress when many thought the LDS film movement was dying. In general, as a festival we are able to present what will happen in the LDS film world over the course of the year. Attendees at the festival are well-informed

about most upcoming developments and film releases by LDS filmmakers. Additionally, we have helped create buzz for films before they were released in theaters, therefore creating awareness early on. Examples of this include the films *Saints and Soldiers* and *The Best Two Years.* Last year alone we premiered five or six films at the festival that ended up being released in theaters in 2008. We also have seen winners and honorees of the short film competition move on to do bigger and better things. For example, Jared Hess had a number of short films in the festival before directing *Napoleon Dynamite.* He was also in the group that won the first 24-Hour Filmmaking Marathon. The marathon was started in 2002 and is a fun competition where groups of five people create a film in 24 hours. A year later, in 2004 (the festival switched the festival dates from November to January, basically skipping 2003), Mark Hedengren, who had never previously made a film, participated in the marathon and won first place. His film ended up playing at festivals nationwide, which won him awards and grants. The 24-Hour Filmmaking Marathon draws about 40 to 50 groups each year and motivates amateurs and professionals, high-school kids and college students, to make movies.

Based on the success of the marathon, we started the 7-Page Script Competition in 2007, where writers submit their scripts to the festival and the festival selects three young filmmakers to read through all the scripts. One is then selected and made into a short film. The festival gives the filmmaker a budget of $500 and assists in the production of the film. Similar to the marathon, we have seen tremendous success with this initiative, having now produced nine short films that have won awards at festivals both nationally and internationally.

The LDS Film Festival has grown steadily over the years. The first festival had an attendance of about 750. Last year we had over 6,500 people show up. What began as a short film festival is now a full-blown festival that offers a variety of different formats, genres, and styles. This year alone we have about 40 feature films and special screenings. In the last three years we have also established ourselves as a festival that is packed with filmmakers who come to network, socialize, and simply enjoy the films.

Where do you see the LDS Film Festival going in the future?

We will continue with what we are already doing while hoping to increase the attendance and quality of the program every year. We want to become one of the major events in Utah County, eventually attracting tens of thousands of people. To reach this goal, the LDS film community needs to continue to flourish, and so far we still see a lot happening. Additionally, we will increase our involvement with the filmmaking aspect of the festival, like the 24-Hour Filmmaking Marathon and 7-Page Script Competition, with the goal to eventually produce feature-length films that are marketed to both the LDS and general audiences. And we would also like to get more involved in training and education, helping young filmmakers to grow and succeed. We want to be the place where new talent is discovered early on, a place that offers young filmmakers a head start. Finally, we want to become the biggest festival in the region that not only attracts a huge audience but also numerous distributors and industry professionals looking for product and talent.

What do you hope will be accomplished with all of your efforts?

I hope the festival helps our little film community to be united and succeed. We can all learn from and influence each other. I believe that it is important that we come together to appreciate each other and the little things everyone contributes. Every filmmaker is stronger if the whole community thrives, and vice versa. The success of one is beneficial to the progress of another. We need to understand that appreciating our diversity fosters our unity. Each year the LDS Film Festival tries to bring the community together to do just that. The wonderful thing about the LDS Film Festival is that people can really mingle and network. Established filmmakers come to the festival and willingly share their experience and knowledge. Audiences also have the rare opportunity to meet filmmakers and learn from them. I am astonished at how much goodwill exists within this community and I see it every year at the festival. One weekend at the festival can be more informative and inspiring than a whole semester at film school. People always leave the festival motivated and hopeful.

In regards to my own filmmaking efforts, I really hope that I can grow into a filmmaker who makes films that not only entertain but also edify. I really think that films have the potential to "instruct in such a way as to improve, enlighten, or uplift morally, spiritually, or intellectually" by telling stories that resonate deeply within us and inspire us to reach our full potential. I consider myself a beginner at my craft. But hopefully I will have the opportunity to grow as a filmmaker with each film that I am involved with. ▪

CHRIS CLARK

Chris Clark is a theatre professor at Utah Valley University who has directed a number of productions, including several with BYU's Young Company Shakespeare Troupe. Website: ***http://uvu.edu/theatre/people/clark.html***

Tell us about about the degrees you've received and what your education has done for you.

My undergraduate degree is a BA in English from BYU. I came to BYU on a theatre scholarship, but sometime during my mission I decided there was no way I could support a family in theatre. So when I came home I switched to English. But I don't regret it, because that's how I met my wife! We were in an English Society play together. It was one of those Biblical pageant plays. I was the devil and she was a chicken on Noah's ark. It was very romantic.

After graduation I worked in retail management for about four years. I made good money but I felt like I wasn't using my talents at all, so I quit. And my wife, thankfully, encouraged me. It was a serious leap of faith for her. We packed up and moved to England. I got my MFA in directing Shakespeare from the University of Exeter.

After I finished at Exeter, we returned back to Utah and a good friend, Clifford Mayes, encouraged me to finish with a PhD. So I was accepted into a PhD program at BYU in educational leadership. And I'm still toiling away there on my dissertation! But I'm close to finishing…I think.

Can you tell us what you gleaned from your time in England and at the Globe, and why you keep going back to England?

I learned a lot from living there. First of all, and oddly the most important thing I learned, was the value of the Church organization in my life. We lived in this tiny little town on the English Channel called Dawlish. There were about 500 people aged 90 and above there, and then us with our two little boys. We were the only members in town. And we had only lived there two days when people from the ward—which was 40 minutes away—starting dropping by, asking if they could help, driving us places. It was the most Christian thing I think I've ever experienced. So Lisa and I both have incredibly warm memories of the ward there.

The program at Exeter is focused on finding ways to make Shakespeare both innovative and accessible. We were trained in original Elizabethan performance, as opposed to contemporary Shakespeare performance, which has actually changed quite a bit. Part of our experience there included an internship at the Globe. We were able to perform there—scenes from various Shakespeare plays, monologues, etc.—all for the tour groups going through the theatre. It was amazing to be able to perform on that stage. We learned the value of the audience in Shakespeare—as actors we should never ignore them or take them for granted. In Shakespeare's day they might throw something at us or beat us up in an alley after the play. Today they just go to sleep or roll their eyes and read the program. Either way, as an actor, you lose. You have to captivate them. We also trained with the Royal Shakespeare Company. I think people would be surprised at the kind of serious training and research that Shakespearean practitioners go through.

As for England, I'm not sure why I'm so drawn to it. It might be ancestral voices! I just love storytelling, and everything over there—particularly in London—has a

story attached to it. Everything has value and age. I love that. I'm proud of American progression, but it bothers me that we destroy and bulldoze so much of our history. We barely acquire history, and then it's gone! Another strip mall. Europeans have a much stronger sense of history and storytelling than we do.

Tell us about your work with *Marrying Man*, *The Tempest*, and *Nosferatu*.

Marrying Man is the only play I've ever written, and I didn't really even write it. I compiled it. It tells the story of William Shakespeare's early marriage to Anne Hathaway when he was 18 and she was 26. I used lines from all 37 plays to comprise the text. I didn't write a word of it; Shakespeare wrote it all. I just scoured the plays, found the scraps, and assembled them into a new, autobiographical story. It was surprisingly easy to do, and it was an incredibly fun project to put on stage.

The idea behind my production of *The Tempest* was that it was a Jacobean Masque. The style of performance under King James was different than the style under Queen Elizabeth. Our actors were all masked, the stage was quite small, and the backdrops were all forced perspective with very little set and props. The cast was entirely male—even the one female role. There was a lot of magic and visual spectacle, which is a very Jacobean idea. The unique element of this production was that I had four "readers" sitting at the four points of the stage, and they read all of the characters lines from a script, like reader's theatre. Each actor had 6 or 7 different voices they had to use for various characters. The actors on the stage didn't speak at all. For me, this was an experiment. It came together very well—I was very proud of it, and it had some national recognition.

My original idea for *Nosferatu* was to project the film on a giant screen and have the actors mime the actions in front of it. It would have been interesting but incredibly difficult to pull off. Then, last summer, I saw some mixed-media work by the English theatre director Katie Mitchell. Mixed-media is where you incorporate elements of film into live performance. She was doing this amazing work with lighting and cameras onstage, and I thought, why not try this kind of thing with *Nosferatu*? Re-imagine the film, live, in front of the audience. What we eventually did with *Nosferatu* is use elements of the 1922 film—exterior scenes and action sequences—and seamlessly integrate them into live actors on a live set being shot in real time with real cameras. And this was all projected on a screen. If we did our job right, the audience wouldn't know where the 1922 version started and ours ended.

What we didn't anticipate was how much of an ensemble piece this would become. The true art of the piece was in the ensemble; in how actors would transform into various characters onstage, and then turn around and move a lighting tree or shift an electrical wire. It was exciting.

What methods or procedures or inspirations do you put yourself through to bring new life to old texts?

With Shakespeare I have two rules: it has to be easy to understand, and the audience has to feel involved. If it's innovative and creative on top of that, then that's a plus! Shakespeare just gets a bad rap. I hate it. People think he's boring, or incomprehensible, or long-winded and pointless. And that's a reflection of some of the performances they might have seen, or the dull

introduction they may have had in their high school English class. (This is changing, by the way. Teachers are learning that if they introduce Shakespeare through performance rather than reading, they get much better comprehension. I've seen some incredible work being done in classrooms!)

My approach is to look at the story, decide which elements I love about it, and then let that be the springboard. I'm never afraid to cut text. I don't want the audience to get lost. Then I develop a directorial concept that propels the story—for example, if I change the time period there should be a reason for it in the text and it has to work with the story we're telling. And then I try to cast playful, intelligent actors who aren't afraid to look ridiculous or work hard with the piece. And they can't be afraid to look at the audience—to touch them and involve them. It makes such a difference in performance when you kill the fourth wall and draw everybody in. I think it's exciting.

Shakespeare stole all of his stories. He didn't create any of them; they were previous plays, or poems, or historical stories. But he knew which stories to steal, because he knew which ones were worth telling. I love Shakespeare because I love the plots, and I love the language he uses to convey them. And I love the variety of his canon. Each play has its own personality. To me it's incredibly fun to dig at each play and find a new way of telling the story.

What new projects are you most drawn to? Why?

I'm drawn to any project that allows me to be creative and to put my stamp on it. I love working with designers and producers, but at the end of the day I need to feel like the piece is my vision. That's my job as a director. I love doing pre-production work—deciding how I want to tell the story and make it new. And then bringing that to fruition is the most exciting thing I can think of. I can't do paint-by-numbers theatre, where everything is already spelled out for you in the text. And I'm anxious about doing what Peter Brook calls "dead theatre," which is where you do the same plays in the

same ways over and over again, and nothing new is ever achieved. That happens a lot, unfortunately. I want to see a play in a fresh way, and then bring that to the stage.

Your plays have a lot of beautiful visual imagery and appeal to them. What part does the visual element play in a production?

It's everything. I've learned that, I think, from film directors. If you can't say it visually, without words, then you aren't truly expressing it yet.

I remember doing an exercise with *The Tempest.* The actors in this show, except for the four readers, did not speak at all. They expressed everything through movement while the readers read the text and spoke their lines. One day I asked them to perform the entire show without the readers. Just the movement. And this is a Shakespeare play—the plots can be tricky without the words! But we just turned on music and let everyone go through the motions. And I could tell when we were being clear visually, and when we were not. It was amazing. I learned so much about the value of seeing and understanding imagery and pictures on stage.

With the Young Shakespeare Company at BYU, you toured one-hour versions of Shakespeare to elementary schools. What did you learn and enjoy in working with children's theatre so directly?

Well, we grow up with these terrible misconceptions about Shakespeare. We think he's boring, or difficult to understand. And a lot of that has to do with the way we were exposed to the works. Children need to see Shakespeare performed, and they need to see it early. It never ceases to amaze me that we can do fifty-minute cuttings of these plays, and school children will sit there, on the floor, and watch the entire thing. They don't get restless or rude. They sit there fascinated with it. And they understand it! Probably because nobody has told them yet that they can't understand it. We've done some tricky shows—*Pericles, King Lear,* and

Hamlet among them—and the kids have no problem staying with what's happening on stage. Children are such a giving audience. They are so appreciative. But they are also honest. They don't pull punches. You know immediately if something is working or not.

Theatre in general can be so exciting and even therapeutic for children. It's more than just pretending—it's expressing yourself in a safe environment. It's a way of dealing with obstacles and emotions in a creative way. You learn so much about yourself by being someone else for a few minutes. That's why children naturally do it. It helps them understand their role, their age, and their environment. I wish more adults would act. Somehow people think it's silly and pointless or intimidating and scary. It's neither. It's a lot of fun, and incredibly insightful.

How has being a Mormon artist affected your plays? What significance have spirituality and religion had on your work?

I don't think I've ever set out to add religion to a particular project. I think it's all intuitive. When I was directing *Richard II* for my MFA in England, I was working with a cast of all non-Mormons. And they kept remarking on the elements of Christianity I was bringing to the play—not in a disparaging way (they were very supportive), but I had no idea I was doing it.

I think part of the notion of having a testimony is that you are expressing it all the time, not just at the pulpit. It comes out in your interactions, your conversations, your choices, and your work. Being an LDS artist means that I am going to inevitably be bringing my testimony to the stage, and I'm great with that.

Theatre's a hard career to make a living at. What advice would you give to struggling artists who are trying to make ends meet?

There's no career path. You will never get a booth at the college career fair with someone recruiting plucky young theatre practitioners. That's the deal. You have to be aware of that. And there's no template for making it work. But it's all about work. It's about your ethic. It's your willingness to make something happen, instead of hoping it will.

But LDS artists can take comfort in knowing that Heavenly Father is guiding their career. He knows where we all fit, and what we do best. If we are willing to do the work and take the chances, He will make it happen in some way.

I also think you can support a family. I have five kids and we're doing okay. But you have to marry someone that is going to be supportive of your choice to be in theatre. I'm so lucky to be married to my wife, Lisa. She's excited for me and is constantly encouraging me to try new things with my work and to put my neck out for opportunities. She loves that I do what I love. ▪


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