

mormonartist

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mormonartist

COVERING THE LATTER-DAY SAINT ARTS WORLD

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EDITOR'S NOTE

It's hard to believe, but Mormon Artist is now one year old. We've profiled almost fifty artists so far and enlisted the help of just over a hundred volunteers (though not everyone helps out with every issue, I should add). Kind of amazing, really, especially when you consider that it's all a labor of love. I'd like to thank everyone—artists, volunteers, and especially you readers—for making all of this possible. Let's make year two even better.

Effective next issue, we're switching to a quarterly frequency (January, April, July, October) instead of publishing a new issue every other month. Why? More time to put each issue together, which will help us make a better magazine. Future issues will be longer, though, so you don't need to feel like you're getting gypped. This will be good. (And luckily MagCloud recently raised their maximum-page limit from 60 pages to 100.)

With the departure of Brittany Pacini as our Film & Theatre editor, we've added two new editors to our board and shuffled things around a bit: Meridith Jackman is the new Music & Dance editor, Meagan Brady is the new Film editor, and Annie Mangelson has moved from Music & Dance to become the new Theatre editor.

Our special contest issue has taken longer to put together than we expected, by the way, but it will be coming out very soon. We hope to have information about our next contest as well.

— Ben Crowder



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NO LONGER THAN 1,500 WORDS

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PAINTINGS, ILLUSTRATIONS, PHOTOGRAPHS
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SONGS, COMPOSITIONS, DANCE VIDEOS
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GENERAL NOTES

WORK IN ANY GENRE IS FINE AS LONG AS IT'S APPROPRIATE FOR AN LDS AUDIENCE.
ANYTHING YOU SUBMIT MUST BE YOUR OWN WORK.
SIMULTANEOUS SUBMISSIONS ARE FINE.
IF YOUR SUBMISSION HAS BEEN PUBLISHED BEFORE, LET US KNOW.

QUESTIONS?
EDITOR@MORMONARTIST.NET

ARE SCHOLARS AND MUSEUMS IGNORING MORMON ARTISTS?

BY MENACHEM WECKER

Try searching for “Mormon” on the website of New York’s Museum of Modern Art, and MOMA will ask if you meant “mormons.” But don’t get your hopes up—refining your search returns just one page, a profile of Dorothea Lange, who photographed Mormon subjects for *Life* in the mid-1950s.

Searching the sites of other major U.S. museums shows MOMA is not an isolated offender. The National Gallery of Art has hosted musicians who previously performed with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the Orchestra at Temple Square. A quilts exhibit at the Smithsonian American Art Museum mentioned the Mormon Trail, and the collection includes Thomas Moran’s painting *Mist in Kanab Canyon, Utah*, while New York’s Metropolitan Museum site yields only one hit: Charles William Carter’s print *Mormon Emigrant Train, Echo Canyon*.

The conspicuous absence of Mormon art in U.S. museums begs the question: Are art institutions maliciously turning a blind eye on LDS artists, or have LDS artists and cultural institutions done a poor job of marketing themselves to the wider public? And whichever is the case, are there good reasons why non-Mormons should take Mormon art seriously?

“I suspect most people don’t even know there is such a thing as Mormon art,” says Dr. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, adjunct professor of religious art and cultural history at Georgetown University’s Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding.

Apostolos-Cappadona, whose publications include *Encyclopedia of Women in Religious Art* and *Dictionary of Christian Art*, says she has rarely encountered Mormon art or artists as specific topics in her research. “I am not sure there is a



strong, or even growing interest in the topic of Mormon art.”

A “conundrum” might account for this lack of exposure, according to Apostolos-Cappadona. Mormon-themed art is often off limits to non-Mormons, who cannot enter consecrated temples. And for whatever reasons, experts tend not to view the art by Mormon artists that is accessible to non-Mormons as part of the larger field of religious art, which is getting far more exposure.

A search through the online library catalog at a major East Coast university returned just one relevant publication, *Mormon Graphic Image, 1834-1914: Cartoons, Caricatures, and Illustrations* by Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, published by the University of Utah Press in the early 1980s. Rather than championing Mormon art, the book turns out to be a catalog of anti-Mormon cartoons, some of which attack the prophet directly. One

example, a 1904 drawing from *Life* by F.T. Richards, shows Joseph Smith wearing a top hat and a long white beard pushing a wheelbarrow full of babies, flanked by a long parade of wives. “Joseph Smith Comes to Washington,” mocks the headline.

In their introduction, the authors explain that they conceived the study, which was funded by BYU, after reading John and Selma Appel’s *The Distorted Image*, published by the Jewish organization, the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith. Bunker and Bitton decided studies of images that stereotyped Jews, blacks, Native Americans, and Catholics have proliferated, but such a study of anti-Mormon images was “long overdue.”

Some suggest that anti-Mormon sentiments might still present problems in academia. According to Christi Foist, who holds a graduate degree in religious studies with an emphasis on religion and art from Arizona State University, it can be “a little

tricky” to find scholarship on Mormonism. Foist found that her program focused largely on “traditional, institutional religions” like Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. “Things that fell outside those boundaries—especially things sometimes defined more as ‘cults’ than religions—typically didn’t get as much scholarship,” she says.

Pablo Solomon, an artist based in Austin, Texas, who draws and sculpts dancers, says galleries and museums are generally anti-religious, and as such, Mormon artists, who tend to be devout, might get targeted. “If you pay close attention, religious art is always portrayed as basically primitive propaganda used to scare and to control the ignorant masses in the days before the average person was educated,” says Solomon. “The work of great masters is seldom analyzed as to the message of faith, but rather as to the artwork’s relevance to the progression of art.”

Apostolos-Cappadona disagrees with the charge that academia discriminates against Mormons. “As far as I know, there is very little interest in Mormonism, let alone anti-Mormon sentiment, at least in the academic circles I frequent,” she says, adding that there was some interest, inquisitive but not necessarily negative, surrounding Mitt Romney’s presidential bid. “Who knows—if he revives himself for 2012, then maybe there will be more interest, positive and negative.”

Dr. James E. Bryan, a specialist in the history of the



decorative arts and design, who has featured slides of the furniture of early Mormon pioneers in Utah in his lectures, also cautioned against overstating the absence of Mormon studies in academia.

“I would caution that the verb ‘ignore’ is perhaps a bit strong, implying that art historians are deliberately avoiding Mormon art, when I would expect that for the most part they are simply unaware of it,” says Bryan, assistant professor of art history at University of Wisconsin-Stout.

Bryan says he and his colleagues often use history, including religious history, to contextualize art in their teaching, but never try to proselytize or criticize any belief. On “rare occasions,” students have told Bryan his teaching contradicts their beliefs, but the reactions have been misunderstandings, he says. “What is being taught is not what the student should or should not believe,” Bryan explains, “but what the people we are studying believed, and whether we agree with them or not, that’s what they thought and here’s how it influenced their art.”

But art historians are not often bringing Mormon religious history into their teaching due to the influence of modernism on twentieth-century art historians, Bryan says, since modernism increasingly defined artistic “progress” in terms of an increasingly abstract style, which precluded realist traditions like Mormon art.

“This ‘greatness’ of given artists was most easily determined by how much other artists were influenced by them,” Bryan says, or, more recently with the rise of modern art, by the degree of popularity an artist achieved. “As far as I know, no Mormons have been highly prominent by either of these standards . . . If Mormons have done interesting things I would not be surprised for some art historians to start looking into it.”

Another difficulty facing scholars who seek to bring religion into art and art history is what Lawrence Klimecki, a Sacramento-based fine artist, illustrator, and designer, who is also a deacon in the Catholic Church, calls “the round peg in the square hole.” Museums and galleries rarely give viewers any information which facilitates connecting to the art on a religious level, according to Klimecki, and they tend to see art as just a commodity. “For the religious artist, however, the work is something more—it

is an expression of their divinely inspired gifts,” Klimecki says.

David Dark, author of *Everyday Apocalypse* and *The Gospel According to America*, agrees, adding that the essential element of religious art-making is “faithful receptivity.”

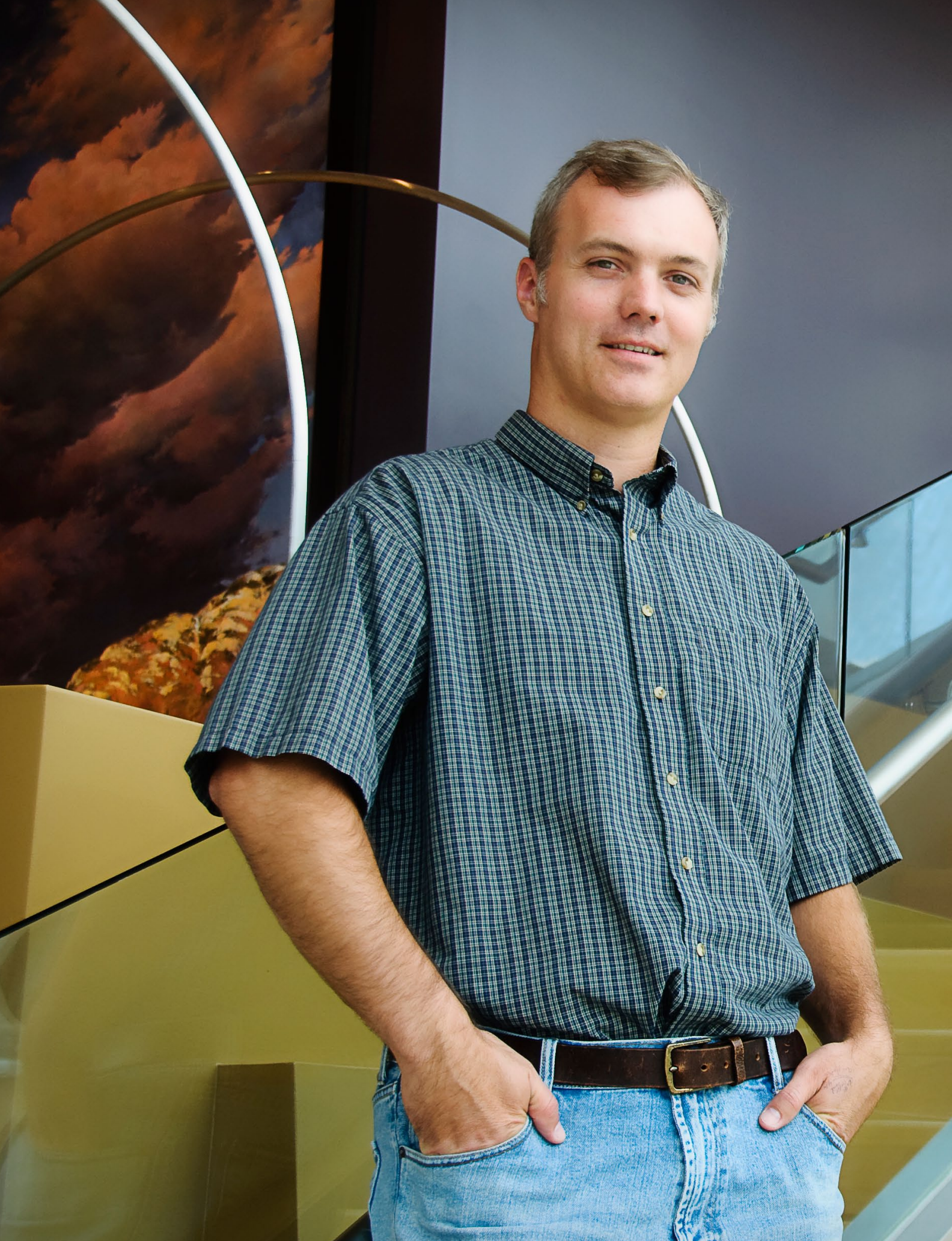
“I think the best artists are almost un-self-consciously transparent about their faith. It comes through naturally and candidly in a way they really can’t help,” says the Nashville-based Dark, who is currently pursuing his doctorate in religious studies at Vanderbilt University. “It isn’t—and couldn’t be—incorporated into the work after the fact.”

When artists try to append religious significance to their works after the fact, it is easy to spot, says Dark. “When the audience discerns that a notion has been inserted unnaturally to make the work pass muster for the doctrine police or something (a Bible verse or a symbol placed obtrusively on an image), I’d say the artist’s career is rightfully and even helpfully jeopardized,” he says.

The good news for Mormon artists is that American art might be getting a higher profile in American museums, as Suzanne Muchnic reported on May 30, 2009, in the *Los Angeles Times*. “Long the stepchild of a Eurocentric art world, American art is finding new favor at home as a growing number of institutions showcase work from Colonial times to World War II,” Muchnic begins, explaining that experts are pointing to three factors which might be responsible for the revival: “a national coming of age, a thirst for new artistic territory and a critical mass of American material that has made its way from private homes to public museums.”

Mormon art could certainly play an important role in the new trend, as Apostolos-Capadona explains. “Given its evangelical nature and its nineteenth-century roots and expansion into the American West, Mormonism provides a window into the ‘American’ interest in utopian societies and the drive to go west,” she says. Otherwise, there is always the possibility of a Romney 2012 campaign. ■

Menachem Wecker is a Washington, D.C.-based painter and writer, who blogs on religion and the arts at <http://iconia.canonist.com>.



Patrick Madden

INTERVIEWED BY AMELIA CHESLEY

WEB: QUOTIDIANA.ORG

I can tell you have a great love of words. Has that always been the case?

I honestly don't recall any particularly linguistic moments from my childhood. I do know that during high school, I was very interested in artistic expression, but this usually took the form of drawing. I was involved in the literary magazine at both schools I attended, but mostly I worked on illustration. During my junior year, for some reason I thought it would be interesting to write a story that narrated a kid's fall from a tree. It wasn't. I have only a vague recollection of what I wrote, probably for my own protection. Even as I turned it in to the editors, I knew it was garbage.

In college, I took one creative writing course, which required students to research family history and elaborate (fictionalize) the stories we found there. My grade was a deserved B-. Even when I got into the master's program at Brigham Young University, my first application to do a creative thesis was rejected by the same professors who hired me to teach creative writing six years later. So I think that I essentially learned to write during my graduate study.

What makes essays different from other genres? What is your favorite thing about the essay form?

First off: the term essay is often misused and abused. When I say "essay," I mean a ruminative, associative, meditative, subversive bit of prose, something that is very hard to pin down, but that certainly doesn't set out with its conclusion in mind, and never tries to convince you of anything.

Essays are open-ended, full of wonder (and wondering), curious, playful, conversational, and companionable. They resist definition, partly because they subvert the notion of genre. An essay differs from other literary genres mainly in its focus on thinking.

In an essay, I get not only a narrative, I get an actual author's mind working through experience, perhaps narrating a bit, perhaps researching, perhaps imagining. Many writers have stated that an essay is an artistic representation of a mind at work. And that's my favorite thing about the essay form.



Tell us a little bit about putting together your book *Quotidiana*. Does publishing an entire book feel different from publishing individual essays?

Yes, but I'm not entirely sure what a "book" might feel like. My own book is simply a collection of individual essays, most of them already published. This is fine, I think, but there must be a different kind of thing going on in a novel, for instance, or a two-hundred-page treatise on salt or cod or the rise and fall of ancient cultures. If somebody asks me what my book is about, I struggle to encapsulate it. Once, after I stumbled through an inadequate explanation, my wife, who had overheard, told me, "You better come up with a better description, because nobody's going to want to buy *that* book." At the same time, I think other essayists can appreciate that the book is simply a slightly related collection of essays. I bet Charles Lamb had a hard time writing a back-cover description for his *Essays of Elia* too.

In any case, for years I have been interested in the way many essays can take seemingly insignificant subjects and work them into a glorious extrapolation of meaning. Virginia Woolf's "The Death of the Moth" is just one example of this. During my doctoral program at Ohio University, I stumbled upon the word *quotidian*, meaning "everyday, routine, mundane, etc." and from it fashioned *quotidiana*, which I conceive of as a collection of such things (similar to "Americana" or "Indiana"). I began to write essays in that vein. One of them begins with changing my daughter's diaper. Another is me washing grapes in the sink. Another came from my mind wandering during another writer's reading.

Once I had enough of them (eleven, ultimately), I started piecing together proposals, which I sent to several publishers that I knew had published essay collections in the past. I did this work myself because the couple of agents I had contact with ran away screaming when I said my book was a collection of essays. "No money!" they said. I got

lucky in that my book was runner-up in a national contest (sponsored by the Association of Writers and Writing Programs) and was accepted by one of the first presses I contacted, the University of Nebraska, which has a great tradition of publishing important works of literary nonfiction.

From that point to actual publication is about two years (the book will be out in March 2010). I've spent that time getting high-resolution scans of a few dozen images, copyediting, failing to write an adequate description, etc. It's not tiring, though, because I'm really quite excited about the book.

You originally studied physics. Do you feel like your science background has made a difference in your creative writing?

It must, right? Most superficially, my writing often contains some scientific or mathematical musings, and not only on the metaphorical level. One of my essays, for instance, wonders about vastness: the realm of things that seem nearly infinite (though I'm not sure "nearly infinite" can really mean anything). I wondered, first, about how many grapes there are in the world. This got me to thinking about God's promise to Abraham: that his descendants would number as the sand, the dust, or the stars. So I tried to calculate how many grains of sand there are on the earth (approximately 1.5×10^{22}), which led me to Archimedes' *Sand Reckoner*, in which he calculated the number of grains in a sand-filled universe. I covered a lot of ground, much of it scientific, but the roots of the essay remained in my own family experiences. That same basic process describes a lot of my essays.

What approach do you take in teaching writing? What is the most important advice you have for your students and other aspiring writers?

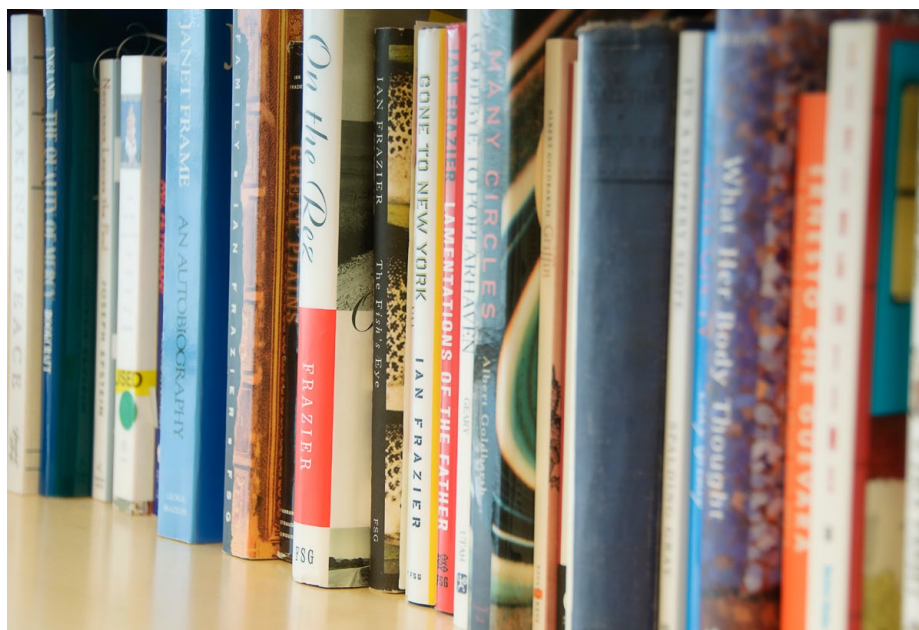
I'm afraid it's not very original, but it's time-tested, so I stick with the way I was taught: I assign a lot of reading from exemplary essayists, then I say "Go, and do likewise." That said, I do require students to own their influences, to consciously

adopt techniques and styles and forms that they find in the writers they enjoy (selected from among the writers I require them to read, which they wouldn't likely read otherwise).

For instance, I typically divide a semester into twelve units, each one with a theme such as "place" or "childhood" or "holiday" or "quodidian." The readings I assign during that week or so all focus on that theme, all offer examples of essays written in that subgenre. Then I ask students to select six of the twelve themes and to write their own essays within those themes, under those influences. Another thing I do that's a bit unlike most teachers is I assign a *lot* of essays from the Great Dead. I firmly believe that writers should be immersed in the tradition of their form.

Likewise, my advice is not very profound. I have observed that what sets successful writers apart from others is sticktoitiveness. There are a lot of people with writing talent out there; there are a lot of people with the desire to write. But the ones who get published are the ones who never give up. That's assuming that getting published is your goal. It doesn't have to be. Writing is valuable even if you only show it to your mom.

So, besides that, here's another bit of recycled advice: read voraciously in the form that most interests you. This will sound like a commercial, but I really don't make a dime from it: if you want to write essays, read the Great Dead writers I



mentioned just now on <http://quotidiana.org/>. It's free and easy to access, and we're even slowly eliminating a lot of the typos.

What writing role models do you have? Have your role models changed as you've gained experience?

My absolute favorite writers are the following, you should read them: Chris Arthur, Brian Doyle, Ian Frazier, Eduardo Galeano, Scott Russell Sanders, W. G. Sebald, William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, and Michel de Montaigne. I have their portraits on my office wall. The last three are long dead, which means you can get their essays for free (I recommend <http://quotidiana.org/> for all your essay needs). You'll notice that they are all men. I'm sorry about that. I like a lot of women writers, but none has ever bowled me over the way these fellows have. To qualify a bit: my favorite women essayists are Desirae Matherly and Sara Levine, but they've published only in journals; no books yet.

What do you most hope to accomplish through your writing?

I'm not so sure. I have very small aspirations in terms of fame and fortune, though I've never turned down an editor's offer of payment (this usually means I can take my wife on a date). I am content to be a "minor essayist," which, as my friend Brian Doyle points out, is pretty much the best an essayist can hope for anyway because there are no major essayists.

On the selfish side of things, I love the process of writing, because it allows me to focus my thoughts on a subject and spin out connections that I wouldn't normally entertain, simply because there's usually too much demanding my attention.

So, essaying is akin to meditating, aparting myself from the harried world.

Even with no external consequences (no publications, no money, no recognition), I'd benefit from writing essays because of the peace they bring me. But since my essays do sometimes get published, I'm very pleased when they strike a chord with a reader and cause him or her to think more deeply about something or to experience a small bit of that peaceful pause from an otherwise stressful existence.

What spiritual rewards do you see from composing experiences and thoughts into essay form?

Ah. I think that writing essays opens one up to the wonders of the world flowing past, usually unnoticed or unappreciated. It also humbles a writer to recognize his place in an infinite world. Essays help me balance heart and mind; simplify my existence; achieve a wisdom from the past; interrogate my ignorances; recognize and rejoice in complexity; resist easy answers and ready-made explanations; exercise a useful, playful contrariness...

Essaying is a way of being that coincides greatly with following Christ's example. When Jesus said that we should become as little children, I think he meant that we should be humble and teachable, that we should maintain a sense of wonder at everyday miracles, even the ones we've seen a thousand times before. Not only that, but no matter how intelligent or mature we think we are, we are children in relation to God. He will always be so far beyond us that we'd better be humble about our paltry understanding. Essayists recognize this better than other people. Or, when people recognize this, they engage their inner essayist.

Not long ago, my students asked me if a person who didn't like essays could be happy or could be a good person. I said yes, but I'm not friends with those people. Then I thought better of it and revised my comment to *no*. This may seem like extremism (and it is, for sure), but I really think that each person's best self is an essayist. We may not engage this part of our being as often as we should; we may have buried away our curiosity in favor of rushing headlong into the frantic system of twenty-first-century life, but at times we all stop our heedless getting and think deep joyous thoughts, don't we? ■



Catch

AN ESSAY BY PATRICK MADDEN

As I threw casually, with that lazy effort of a volleyballer warming up, as the football bounced off my son's hands repeatedly, the thought came to me: *Let it be*. Only it wasn't the words themselves, it was the idea to remain silent, to keep my mouth shut, to enjoy the teleological day: it was what it was. But I didn't. I broke. I gave advice, perhaps even reprimanded. I employed clichés: *Step into it. Follow through. Keep your eye on the ball.*

Underfoot weeds poked up amidst the grass. When the ball sailed past my boy, I bent to pull them up. I looked around—the trapezoidal patch of green, the black bicycle path, criss-crossing gray power lines humming overhead—thinking of the future, the improvements I'd yet to make. Then the ball came spinning back toward me, but away. I lunged half-heartedly, knocked it down to the earth, so I wouldn't have to chase it. In any case, it was a good spiral. I sent him running deep with an upward nod, my left hand waving away. My pass flounders, but makes the distance, caroms off his chest, comes to rest nearby.

Later that night, during dinner, we noticed a guy in a sky-blue-and-white-striped Argentina soccer jersey wandering across our yard. I thought he might be looking for a lost dog. A few minutes later, a harried neighbor called to tell me that the youngest Stewart boy was missing, then a knock came at the door. Trevor Smith was there, beginning to explain what I already knew. Over his shoulder, I saw the streets full of people, some shouting, some poking into side yards, looking, knocking. I put on my shoes, stepped out the door, left my wife and children eating behind me.

There was worried movement everywhere, kids riding their bikes, parents tugging their young ones in wagons, but I broke off to search on my own. I felt a license to walk wherever I wished, to peek behind fences and in backyards, between air conditioning condensers, among the tall weeds hidden behind the Hauns'. I knocked on the doors of neighbors I'd never met, told them what I knew,

watched the concern come across their faces as they told me they hadn't seen anything. I was looking where I did not want to find him, suspecting every seemingly innocent guy in a ballcap, looking over shoulders surreptitiously, my head filled with all the crime drama I'd absorbed over the years. I sometimes say that I write nonfiction because I don't have an imagination, but when a toddler is lost, I have an imagination. I was on edge.

Earlier, I was tired, lackadaisical, fulfilling some fatherly obligation to toss a ball to my son, as my father had done with me, as he still does, given the opportunity, meaning that we are both together during the fall, perhaps at Thanksgiving, when football is in the atmosphere, the Irish are promising to shake down the thunder, the air is crisp with a scent of dying leaves. I moved slowly.

But once, at least, when my son threw a ball with a bit too much zing, high and soaring so it would fly over my head, I almost let it go, but then I realized that I can still jump, can't I? So I jumped, stretched out my arms, arched my head back to see the airfilling light, above me, only sky.

I caught it. And our local Mormon bishop found the toddler. Collin Peterson told me: "He looked like he knew where he was going. Just walked right there." The boy was in his next-door neighbor's basement. He'd entered through their lower-level back door, then stayed quietly inside for nearly an hour while everyone was out looking for him. The good news spread quickly, or I was among the last to know; maybe I was too far away. People stayed in the streets long after the police left and the Stewarts went back to their ordered, normal life, with perhaps a few more hugs than most nights. The sun was setting over the west mountains. My neighbors gathered in groups to talk. David Nash, who lost his wife to cancer earlier in the year, was smiling over near the bank of mailboxes. I couldn't hear what he was saying, but his deep Boston resounded, beating out the wiry overhead crackle and hum, at least for the time being. ■





Rick Walton

INTERVIEWED BY DAVID LAYTON

WEB: RICKWALTON.COM

Describe a typical day in your writing routine.

Okay, there are two words in there that don't make any sense in my life: *typical* and *routine*. There is no typical day. I have no writing routine. Basically my day consists of getting up, hopefully going walking, and then just plowing through whatever I can talk myself into doing. I'm working on a million projects at any one time. They're all fighting for attention, so I try to focus on the ones that are most important—the most urgent. Sometimes I just work on the ones that are most appealing. I have a lot of people who work with me. I've got a couple of assistants and some interns, and my son works with me. So I have to keep them all busy, which is easy. I have plenty of projects.

How did you get into writing riddle books?

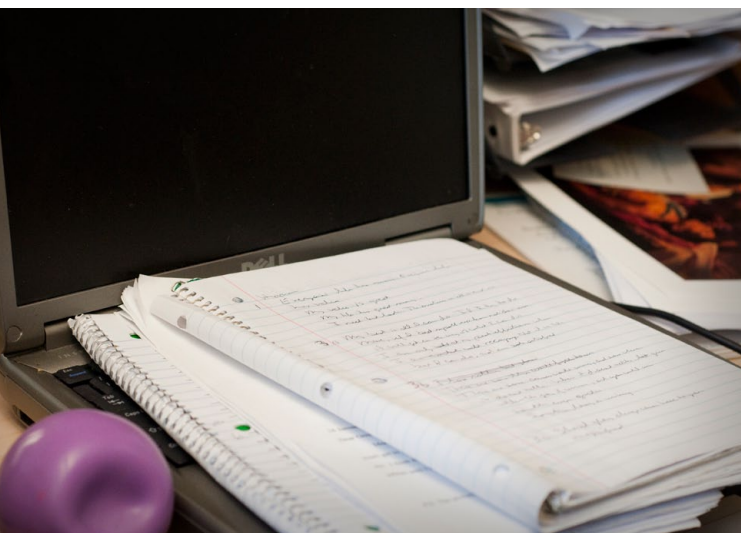
Ah, riddle books. Pure desperation. I had sent around a query letter that described eight projects on it. I sent it to over a hundred publishers. I sent it to a lot of publishers that didn't publish children's books. I was kind of indiscriminate and not very knowledgeable.

Oddly enough, four of the publishers came back and said they'd like to see things, so I sent them out and they trickled away until one of them still had one of the manuscripts. So I called them up and asked them about it. They said, "Well, we're still thinking about it, but while we have you on the line, how would you like to do some joke books?" So I said, "Sure."

They sent me copies of the joke books and I didn't recognize any of the jokes, which was a little odd, since I had read a lot of joke books, and if they'd been collected, I should have been able to recognize some of the jokes. So I called them and asked them if they wanted original jokes. They said yes, they'd prefer that. So I said, "Oh, okay." That was one of the best things that happened to me because it forced me to learn how to reverse-engineer writing. I went and studied joke books. I figured out what the formulas were and wrote jokes. The first eight were on *Reading Rainbow*. Five of them were International Reading Association Children's Choice books, which made me totally discredit the book awards process. You have these goofy little joke books and people win national awards? There's no objectivity involved in the selection process.

Which project have you had the most fun with?

I've got a project right now we're shopping around. The original title is *The Insanely Ridiculously Dangerous Book for Daring Boys and Girls*. It's an accumulation of my best stuff from over



thirty years put into a really bizarre format with a bizarre premise and it's just a really weird book. It's more descriptive of who I am and it's just very bizarre. So far, some publishers have been interested, but with publishers, mostly their response to it is, "Huh?" My agent really likes it. He thinks it's brilliant. That's why I like my agent. But the publishers just...it's before its time.

I'm sure it will come out soon.

I'm sure it will. Somebody will recognize its genius.

What's your favorite published book?

That's a question that everybody asks all the time and the standard answer is "I can't tell you," because it's a lot like asking which of my children is my favorite. I've got five children and at one time or another, each of them is my favorite, but I never tell which one it is for two reasons. First, because it changes all the time, and second, because I don't want my other kids to be sad if they're not my favorite kid. So I don't tell which book is my favorite, because it changes all the time, and I don't want my other books to be sad if they're not my favorite book. Honestly, I do have some that I like particularly. Some that I like to read might be a good way to answer that: I like to read *Bertie Was a Watchdog, Once There Was a Bull... (frog)*, and *A Very Hairy Scary Story*. Short, funny, and punchy are the kind I like the most.

How has your writing evolved over the years?

I think, if anything, I'm more interested in pushing boundaries and exploring and trying to do the impossible. I like the challenge of doing something that's never been done before. I've got several manuscripts that haven't been published that are really bizarre, like the one I told you about. I've got one that's the story of the tortoise and the hare, where if you read the text front to back, the tortoise wins the race. If you read the same text from back to front, the hare wins the race. It's an exercise in ambiguity. Then I've got another one called *Oddly Hippo*, where you actually turn the words upside down. If you turn the words upside down, there are words. So the story can actually be told with the words upside down and it's still a story. And I've got a bunch of other odd things I'm trying. What's the weirdest thing you can do with a book?

At the suggestion of an LDS publisher, I wrote the Quad board book—the entire Triple Combination in thirty-two lines. Eight lines for the Bible (the whole Bible—that's four lines for the Old Testament and four lines for the New Testament), eight lines for the Book of Mormon, eight lines for the D&C, and eight lines for the Pearl of

Great Price. It turned out pretty well. The publisher decided not to publish it after all for financial reasons, but I love those kinds of challenges.

What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

I was just asked this, and what I said was, “Quit, unless you can’t. Then do the work.” They wanted my advice in ten words or less.

The standard advice—and it does work—is read a lot and write a lot. A lot of writers jump the gun and spend a lot of their time on the marketing before they’re actually ready to sell their book. I know I did. I would have been better off if I’d focused on the writing first. Learn your craft. There are a lot of workshops and conferences. Network.

And don’t do it for the wrong reasons. Don’t do it because you think you’re going to get rich, or because you want the fame and the glamor, or because it’s going to solve your problems or justify your life, because it will probably do none of those. It will just be more frustration.

If you do it because you love it, because you like the creative process, because you want to do it for your family, or because you have something to say, then you’re more likely to stick with it long enough to actually get published. If you do it just to get published, you’ll probably realize really quickly that it’s a frustrating job. Anything in the arts is frustrating because it’s hard to actually make a success out of it.

If you don’t love it, find something you love—and that’s just fine. I don’t think there is anything more important about being an artist than about being, say, a plumber or a teacher or an auto-repair person. In fact, some of these things are even more important, I think. Indoor plumbing is good.

How has the gospel influenced your writing?

It’s influenced how I live as a writer. I believe in the power of literature to influence people, especially children. I think it’s important that we provide good literature for young kids, so I do as much as I can to promote children’s writers and writing for children in the Church and in Utah. I’m involved in a lot of projects, a lot of listservs, and a lot of conferences. It’s just important for me to do what I can to help Utah writers. The more successful the LDS writers are, the more people hear about us. They become curious. They explore. If nothing



else, they have a more positive attitude toward the Church.

Not everyone I work with is LDS. To help good, solid, talented, moral people get involved with writing for children and to get them in positions where they can help influence is a form of missionary work. I’ve got a lot of writer friends who are not LDS but who have come out to Utah for writing conferences who become very positive about the Church. They haven’t joined the Church, but they are very friendly and they help LDS writers, and when people say negative things about the Church, they challenge them and set them straight. So I think that’s an important thing too. It’s not actually the content—most of my writing is relatively non-religious, although I am doing some things for the LDS market.

Do you have any fun stories that you can share about your writing experiences?

I’ve always thought it would be cool to be banned, because you’re not really a serious author unless somebody’s tried to ban you somewhere. I’ve got a book, *Pig Pigger Piggest*, where pigs marry witches. I was on a three-and-a-half month trip throughout the United States with my family, doing school visits and touring. We went to Greenville, South Carolina, for a couple of days of school visits there. This is home of Bob Jones University, deep in the Bible Belt, during the time when Harry Potter was being challenged all throughout South Carolina. I went to the school, and it was so religiously conservative that the principal said grace in the library during lunch. You’d never get away with that in Utah. So I thought, “This is my chance to be banned.” *Pig Pigger Piggest* turned out to be their favorite book, and I thought, “I will never get banned.” I was actually quite pleased. ■





Cambria Evans Christensen

INTERVIEWED BY MAHONRI STEWART

WEB: CAMBRIAEVANS.COM



Cuzco, Peru, I came across a horrid soup with eyeballs and bones at an outdoor market. I called to my husband, “Come see this bone soup!” Saying those words out loud made the whole idea fall into place. I was excited but fairly certain someone must have already written a spooky version of Stone Soup, because it seemed so natural. But luckily no one had yet! So, I sat down, wrote the first draft in one day, and sent it to my agent and editor.

It’s evident from both books that you have a very unique style that ranges from the craft-like to the surreal—a mix of the vintage and the contemporary. What can you tell us about how you see your style and in what way it expresses who you are as an artist?

My illustrations reflect the things I’m interested in. I like paper ephemera, patterns, typography, and nearly anything vintage.

Then there is my love of modern minimalism which shows itself in my slightly OCD line work—where everything is contained and the same line weight. I think my style is a continuation of the drawings I’ve made since I was little—but hopefully getting better!

You’ve done design work for some pretty big companies—Martha Stewart, L.L. Bean, Kmart, Reader’s Digest, Wizards of the Coast, Habitat for Humanity. How different is the big-name, corporate atmosphere from your more creative work with your children’s books? Which do you prefer?

I used to work full-time for Martha Stewart as an art director, and have continued to freelance for them as well as other clients. My jobs are a mixture of illustration, product, and graphic design.

Doing children’s books and design for companies are both creative and I like switching between the two because they require using design to solve problems, with very different results.

Tell us about *Bone Soup* and *Martha Moth Makes Socks*, which were published by Houghton Mifflin. What brought those particular stories and images into your mind?

While studying graphic design at Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), I was able to take a wonderful illustration class called “Picture + Word.” Its entire focus was writing and illustrating children’s books. For our final project we had to present a dummy (a manuscript and sketches in book form) to a panel of editors in Boston.

Very soon after that, I had an agent and a book deal for *Martha Moth* with Houghton Mifflin. The story came from an experience with a pesky moth in my Providence apartment. I pulled out my sweaters for fall, and they were all fine except for my favorite one. I thought, “Why did that moth have to go shopping in my closet?” That sparked the idea of a moth that could eat a sweater in a single sitting.

Bone Soup was a longer process. I knew I wanted to write a Halloween story, but I struggled with coming up with ideas. While traveling in

You grew up in Utah but have lived in New York and now in London. How does the cosmopolitan atmosphere compare to what you grew up with?

I'm originally from Virginia and spent most of my summers there, so the East Coast feels like home. The variety of food in metropolitan areas is amazing. There are great specialty stores, restaurants and farmers markets. I've always been a bit of a food snob, but after New York I am even worse. I think big cities feel more like a neighborhood to me because everyone is out walking, playing in the park and you see the same shop owners and people on the subway/tube. I especially love that I can walk within a few blocks to do all of my errands. Our little branch in Brooklyn, Bushwick 1st, may be small, but it is fantastic—the people who show up want to be there, and because of that, there is a lot of camaraderie.

The drawbacks to the city are that it is very expensive, doing basic things like laundry or parking the car can take forever, and everyone is always working so it's hard to get together with people. There are plenty of things I like about Utah. I regard it with fondness, and I certainly miss friends, family, and the thrift stores. However, I don't miss the

dry, hot summers, the lack of food options, and the fact that you have to drive everywhere.

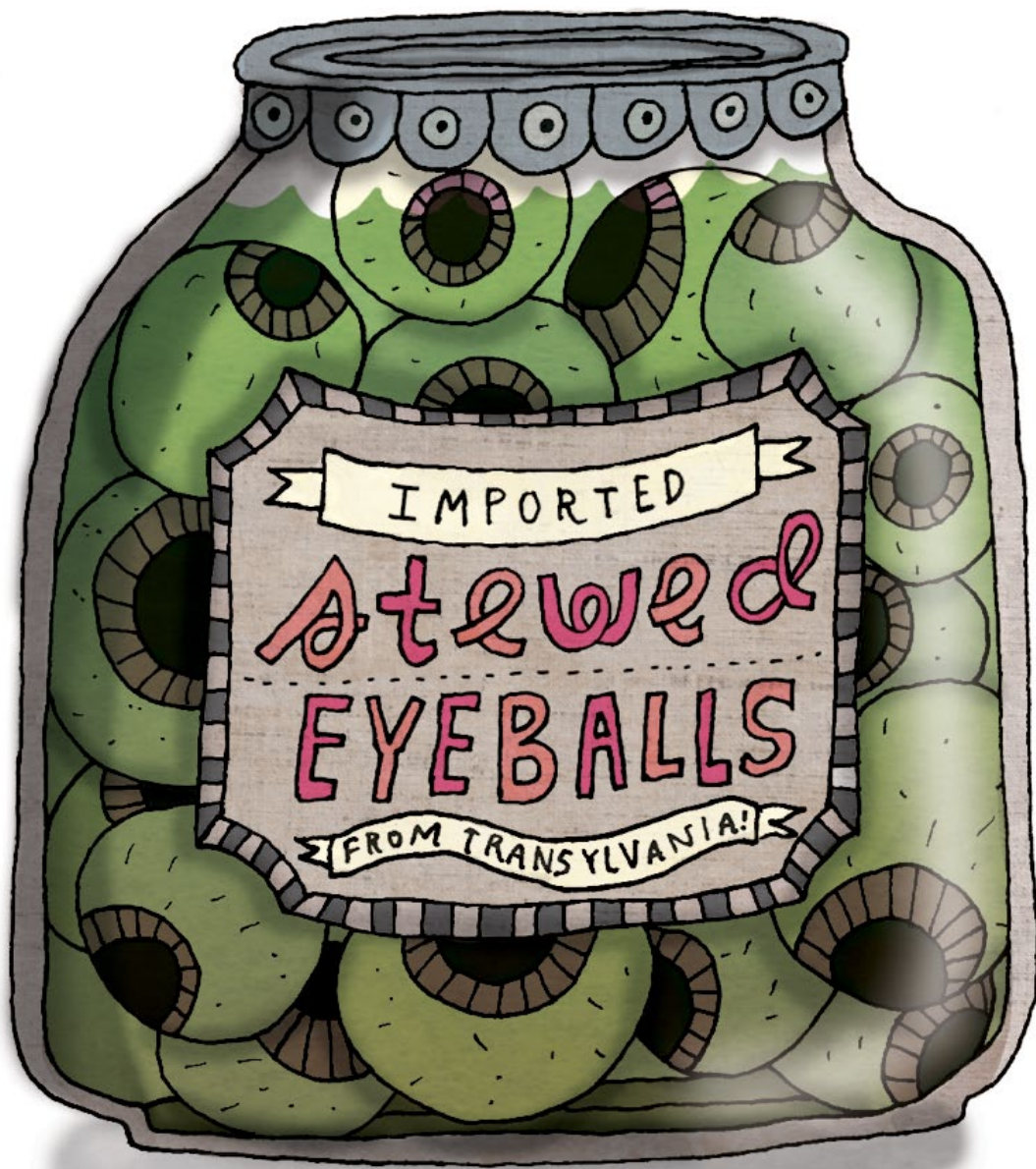
What would you say are the positives and negatives in doing freelance work? How has it compared with your more steady jobs?

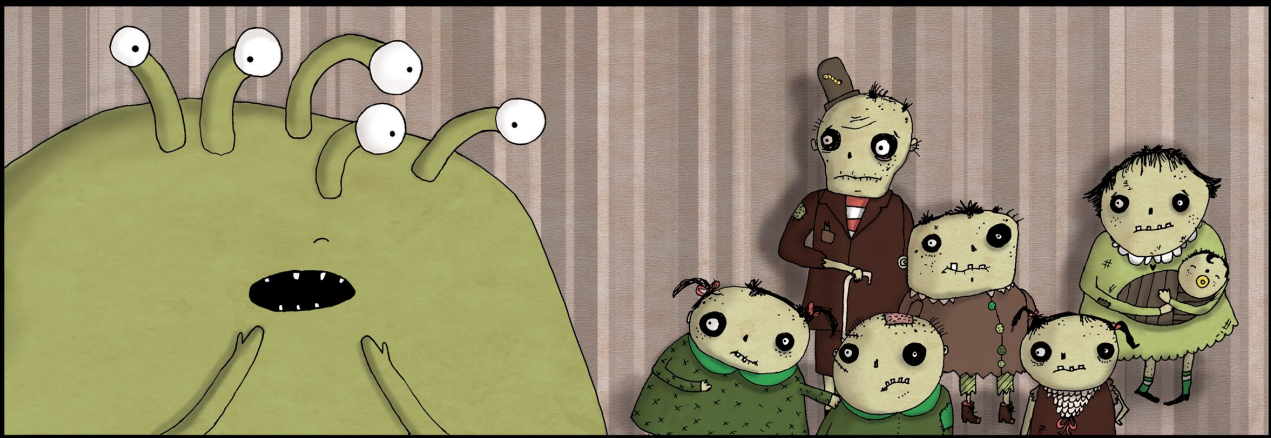
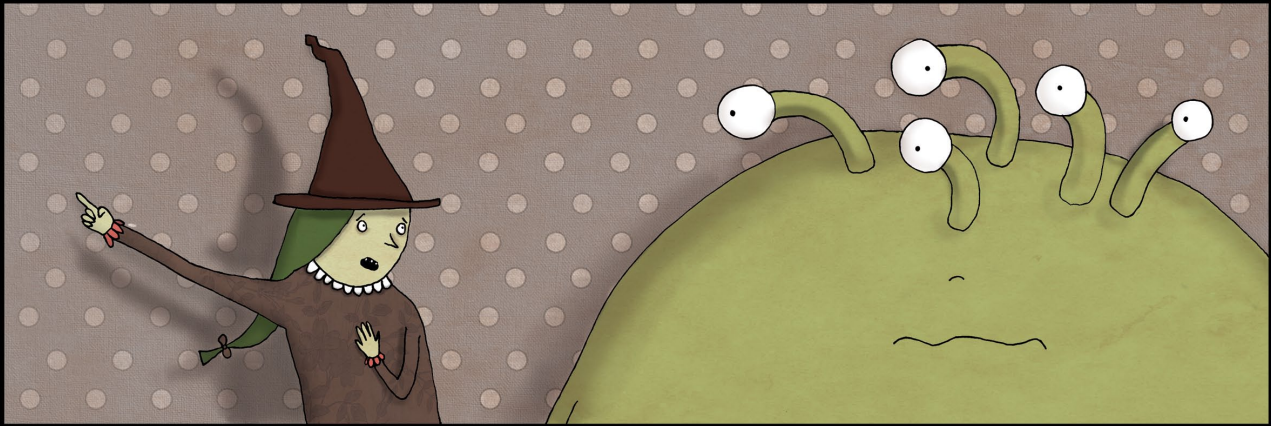
The big positive with freelance is that I have the ability to work anywhere. I was just in Amsterdam, and in between sightseeing I was able to work on deadlines. Plus, I have the freedom to work on all kinds of projects. In one day I could be doing an illustration for a poster, a logo for a non-government organization, a product design for a craft line, and writing a manuscript. The three major drawbacks are that I never know when the next check is going to arrive, I have to pay my own ridiculously expensive health insurance (which doesn't even cover much), and there are no real vacations or holidays, as I am always working.

What creative things do you like to do in your free time? What are your hobbies?

I used to spend hours drawing little characters in sketchbooks, but that feels like work now and I try to avoid overworking my arm. So, to relax,









I read, watch TiVo, cook or bake, and travel. Also, because of my many allergies and gluten-free requirements, I spend quite a bit of time experimenting in the kitchen and coming up with new recipes.

How has the gospel affected your artistic life?

Because I have the gospel in my life, I am happy, and I think that shows through in my work. I write and draw things I find funny and hope others find them funny too. The only time being LDS has affected my work directly was when I turned down a lucrative job designing for advertising firms and products that go against the Word of Wisdom or my morals.

Where do you want to be several years down the road?

I hope to continue doing what I love: working on books (hopefully with a larger print run and audience) and doing design. I also wouldn't mind traveling more.

What advice would you give to those who are trying to break into your field?

For design, work on a portfolio that shows good concepts, a clear understanding of typography, and the ability to solve problems by showing

process. For children's book illustration, work on a portfolio that is consistent, shows an ability to draw the same characters in different poses, and is not a copy of someone else's style. ■





Lola and the Case of the Missing Lollipop
— copyright © 2014



Perla Antoniak

INTERVIEWED BY AMY BAUGHER

WEB: WEB.MAC.COM/P.ANTONIAK

How did you get started with photography?

Ever since I was young, I found myself thumbing through magazines, ripping out photos that caught my eye. I have always been drawn to color, beauty, and people. I especially love faces. The one thing that impresses me the most is the ability to catch an expression so intense, it changes your own.

I always thought photography was for photographers. I assumed I would be the one forever looking at photos, not taking them. I knew nothing about cameras. In fact, I used disposable ones until college.

As part of the requirements for my art degree, I was forced to take an Intro to Photography class where we strictly shot black and white film and developed it ourselves. I was scared stiff. My dad lent me his old '69 Minolta. It looked like a lead dinosaur. Basically, I learned how to load the film, took my first shot, and the rest is history.

Did you have a goal in mind when you first got started?

I remember a photography exhibit at one of the museums at the National Mall. There was a section on photos from twentieth century American history. Forever ingrained in my mind was this photo of a young American soldier. He was a Marine private fighting in the jungles of Da Nang, Vietnam. He looked like he was about fourteen years old, and the expression in his frightened eyes almost told the whole story of the war. I remember thinking, "I wish I could take photos like that."

You work with both traditional means of photography and digital photography. Do you prefer one over the other?

My first class in photography involved working strictly with black and white film, and I'm so thankful that I started out this way. I always was a

little weary of photos that had been digitized and photoshopped and I thought it made someone less of a photographer. In the film class, I learned that everything you can do on a computer, you can do with film. In fact, computer programs are designed based on the original effects that have been used in both the shooting and developing process. It is really amazing and it opened a whole new world to me. I enjoy working in both media. However, until I am able to get my own darkroom someday, I'll be working primarily with digital.

What sort of post-processing do you like to do on your images?

Typically when I snap a shot, the photo is finished. Every now and again I fix the coloring or contrast for publishing or if I feel it would give the onlooker the same sensation I had when I was there in real life.

What are your favorite types of shots—subject, time of day, etc.?

By far, I get the most invigorated and inspired when shooting in a foreign setting. I love exploring new people, patterns, and colors. Typically I shoot outside, and I only shoot at sunup and sunset. I have been to many amazing places during high noon, but rarely bring my camera. Lighting is everything, and when it floods your subject, all interest is lost.

How do you see the gospel influencing both your artwork and you as an artist?

I love this thing we have called life. It is a gift. God is the master artist and his creations are his art. Picasso once said: "Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe, a moment that will never be again. And what do we





teach our children? We teach them that two and two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France. When will we also teach them what they are? We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you. Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move. You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel? You must work, we must all work, to make the world worthy of its children.”

Do you have any advice for someone who wants to do what you do?

Don't be scared. Some people will have natural talent and their ease with the camera will drive you crazy. If you truly desire something and put in the work, miracles beyond your imagination will occur. Stop looking at photos and start taking them. In the words of Nike, “Just do it.”

What do you consider your greatest achievements in your career to date?

One thing that never ceases to amaze me in this world is a beautiful piece of workmanship. For centuries, people have used their hands to create objects of unmatched repute. In a constantly changing world, I feel the need to aid in the perpetuation and preservation of these precious works.

For my final BFA project I spent several months in India doing field research on the arts and handicrafts of Tamil Nadu, India. I spent my days with native artisans who taught me their craft as I documented my time with them through photography. I worked with weavers, doll makers, painters, jewelers, lei makers, and many other artists. For the culmination of my project I created a book entitled *Kalai & Kaithiran* with an exposé of my experience and displayed its pages as a part of my senior exhibit at BYU–Hawaii.

One of the greatest experiences I have had happened when I met a Sikh couple touring Honolulu the same week of my art show. I invited them up to the North Shore to come and see this show. To my surprise, they did come and were thoroughly impressed with the work I had done and the beauty in

which their homeland was portrayed. It was such a joy to watch them as they walked by the pages of the book, reading every word and gazing at every picture. My project came full circle when the wife walked by the page of kolams (intricate designs placed at the home, drawn by filling one hand with rice flour and delicately drawing beautiful patterns on the ground to protect the family from evil), thought back on her childhood in India and said, with tears in her eyes, “My mother used to do this.”



What's next for you?

I am currently looking at graduate programs that would support my desire to perpetuate and promote native arts and crafts. My desire is to become acquainted with artisans worldwide and create a web of international contacts available to anyone who may want to buy, sell, preserve, or simply learn about native arts.

In the future, I would love to work for a museum or magazine as their arts photographer. It would be so amazing to be a part of something I deem so important and so fun at the same time. I want to be the one on the other end when the phone rings and someone says, "We need an exposé on the Masai and their beadwork. Perla, you're our girl! Your flight leaves for Nairobi in the morning..." ■







Debra Fotheringham

INTERVIEWED BY DAVID LAYTON

WEB: DEBRAFOTHERINGHAM.COM

How did you first get started in music?

Well, I've always wanted to be a musician, so I started playing violin at a very young age—when I was seven or something like that. I played for a while, then got sick of it. In junior high I picked up the trumpet and got sick of that as well. Then I picked up percussion, which I loved and still love, and around the same time I started to teach myself guitar. I've always been a writer, and so the thought of being able to do both of the things I love—music and writing—was really cool. So I started writing songs, and it was just awesome.

When you're writing a new song, what is your creative process?

I never write one thing first—like the lyrics first or the music first. I always start with some guitar riff or something, and I usually keep a book of ideas with me where I'll jot things down if I'm thinking about some kind of idea or lyric. And if the guitar riff fits that idea, then I try to meld them together.

Who have been your mentors?

There are so many musical influences— a lot of the songwriters, like Paul Simon and Joni Mitchell. Also, I grew up listening to a lot of jazz music.

My good friend Stephanie Smith has really helped me in my songwriting. She's an amazing songwriter, and I've learned a lot through my



friendship with her. There's also a guy out in Nashville named Rick Clark who I got to know. He's a producer who has done Death Cab for Cutie and stuff like that. He helped me refine my song-writing a lot. He's awesome.

How has your love of reading influenced your music?

A lot, I think. I love reading. In fact, I just finished three huge novels and my husband was freaking out, saying, "You finished that already?" It was good!

I'm not sure. I don't know how it would tie in directly with the music. I love to read, and I guess that has influenced my love of lyrics and my love of language.

How did your self-titled album get started?

That was years in the making. When I first started playing, I was about eighteen, and I just made this little demo in a friend's basement. I had been selling that for about five years, and I just didn't have the money or the means to make a real album. Eventually I just started saving; I guess I'd expected some benefactor to come out of the blue and fund my album, but finally I just realized that if I wanted this to happen, I had to make it happen.

So, I just funded it myself and met a guy named Giles Reeves. He's from Nashville originally, but he moved out here to help his nephew Jonathan Schultz at a studio out in Sandy. I met Giles, when he came to some little songwriters' get-together, and he was really interested and said he'd produce the album. So we got together and cranked it out in a couple of months. It was really, really awesome. Funnest two months of my life!

Which song on the album was the most fulfilling to write?

Probably "Summer Rain." "Summer Rain" represents those times in the summer when it's really hot and dry and sometimes you just want a little summer rain. It's kind of a metaphor for those times when you're just going through a period when nothing's happening and you're feeling frustrated and you want a little something to spice up life. That's kind of how I was feeling, and so I wrote about it.

What inspired the Portuguese in "You Are Truth"?

I wrote that for a friend's wedding where her husband went to Brazil on his mission. It's a bossa nova, so I wanted to throw a little bit of Portuguese in. It called for it.

You began performing at sixteen. How has your music evolved since then?

Hopefully it's not teenage music any more. I'd like to throw away my first songs and never hear them again. I'd like to think my lyrics have matured and I've learned how to craft a song a little bit better. I still have a long way to go, but I'd like to think that I've come a little bit further than when I was sixteen!

You've performed all over Europe and the United States. What was your most memorable performance?

My most memorable performance was probably my CD release concert, just because I was here in Provo, and there were all these people who had been supporting me through the years. They all came out to see me and the release of the CD that I had been waiting for for years. And everything just went right—the band played well and we were together. It was just one of those magical nights. It was awesome.

How does the gospel influence your work as an artist?

How does it not influence my work as an artist? I mean, the gospel is everything about who I am. I try not to make my music completely Mormon music—I don't want to isolate people who might be able to get something out of it—but I'd like to think it's influenced every bit of me. I don't think there's a piece that I can pull out and say, oh, this is how the gospel has influenced me, because the way I live, everything I do from a day-to-day basis, is influenced by the gospel.

Where do you see your career going as a singer/songwriter?

I don't know. I just want to keep playing and writing songs. That's my only goal. ■

Danor Gerald

INTERVIEWED BY MAHONRI STEWART





When and why did you begin acting?

I've always wanted to act since I was a child. My mind was made up during a game of dodge ball after school when I was about nine or ten where I got hit by one of the tennis balls we were using. I curled up into the fetal position and moaned in pain. Everyone surrounded me, extremely concerned. Then I suddenly stopped writhing, pointed up at them and started laughing. They were angry, but they were cracking up at the same time. At that moment, lying on my back in the grass, I decided to become an actor.

I didn't do any child acting. I wanted to get involved, but both my parents worked so I had no way of getting representation or auditions. Then I took a theatre class in ninth grade, but the closest thing to acting I did in high school was being the mascot my senior year. I knew I would pursue acting in college where I believed it would be more challenging. I started as a theatre major at a private university in Arkansas, but after two years I decided that wasn't the right fit, so I went back home to Dallas. I was struggling with my desire to act, but I was led to the Southwest Actor's Conservatory, where I began my professional career in about 1994.

It's been an adventurous journey from that point to now. I was led from Dallas to Disney World in 1998. Even with two agents, I couldn't book any film or TV for a while. After about three and a half years I started to shift my thoughts and internalize my work for the intimacy of film. That didn't work so well in a theme park setting, but I started landing TV and film roles while I was there. My major work on camera began six years after I became a professional, when I was led from Florida to Utah to finish my degree in digital cinema and pursue more work behind the camera. In Utah, I essentially stopped doing theatre and shifted my mindset completely to acting in film, and it's been working for me ever since.

I have been very blessed. Though the road has been rocky and at times full of confusion, it feels like I've been guided along the way.

Although you've done stage work, most of your acting focus has been towards film. What about your personality and interests lends well to that field?

I learned how to act in the theatre, then I learned how to relate that craft to film. It may sound strange coming from an actor, but I'm actually introverted. When I sit down with a script, I understand what a character feels very quickly. I like to work between the lines, and I think that's where all of the real acting happens. It's the reacting that tells the story. I'm a loud thinker. I really enjoy the collaborative nature of film. I enjoy doing my part to add to a greater whole. Film acting is a perfect fit for that attitude. I feel that an actor is a servant to the director, to the story, and ultimately to the audience. You learn that in theatre so much better than film, actually, because you get instant feedback. You hear the laughs, you feel the tears, and you sense the bated breath.

In my process of preparing for a film role, I try to bring the audience on the set with me. I prepare to touch them through the screen. My improv experience really helps. I never read a script verbatim at an audition anymore; by the time I get it at an audition it's too stale. Plays are crafted, screenplays are drafted. I understand that difference. It's more enjoyable and practical as an actor to focus on the reason you're saying something instead of what you are actually saying. That's the only way you can make genuine sense of Shakespeare for an American audience.

So again, my classical training informs my film acting sensitivity in that regard. I try to achieve the feeling of permanent spontaneity on camera that will keep an audience guessing. I won't ad lib unless it's beneficial to the scene and the story. I'm not a scene-stealer; I just try to breathe as much life into the character as is relevant and meaningful.

What power do you think acting in specific and film in general has to shape people's lives?

Acting has a way of moving and shaping people like nothing I know. Generally speaking, film is the most influential artistic tool I've seen in my lifetime. You have millions of people sitting in the dark, being subtly influenced to feel certain ways about certain things at any given moment in today's world. It's amazing what a good movie can do!

What have been your favorite projects?

I did a world premiere adaptation of William Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury* at the Undermain Theatre Company in Dallas. We were nominated for awards and almost got to perform it at the famous Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago. I also enjoyed *To Kill a Mockingbird* at the Dallas Children's Theatre.

I edited a documentary called *Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons* that was a really unforgettable experience. I have a place in my heart for my first feature film, called *Believe*, and I also had a really good time filming *Forever Strong*, the rugby movie by Ryan Little that just recently came out on DVD.

What influence does being a Mormon have upon your work?

Well, I wouldn't be in Utah if I weren't LDS; I'd have never thought of living here. I pray over parts. I don't pray to get parts, but I pray after I get them. When I audition, if I don't get it, then I don't want it. Why should I let it bother me? I have faith in the casting process. That's the only healthy way for an actor to view things. I pray for guidance to make the most of the role and that my choices will be good for the sake of the story. I am selective; I have turned down roles and auditions after reading the sides and seeing the direction of the film. I also try to bring the eternal into my character whenever possible. There are some temporal truths that if performed effectively will reveal a bit of the spiritual, eternal truth in life. I know this is a privilege. I know this is a power. When one has privileges and power, one would be piddling away life's opportunities without prayer. I have been lifted to performances beyond my own ability, and at times I've felt the Lord work through me. Man, that's like an out-of-body experience. I'm a good actor, but I understand that the Lord makes me good. If he gives me every breath, then how can I claim any of it? My words cannot explain how blessed we are, so I'm trying to do it through my art, through the story. That's the influence being Mormon has on me. It gives me a desire to explain to everyone on earth who they really are.



Tell us about your conversion to the Church.

When I decided to leave Arkansas and OBU, I was on a spiritual pilgrimage; I was praying for the Lord to help me find my way home. I had an intense desire to figure out his will and follow it. Then, on Christmas night 1993, I had a heavy, depressed feeling. I felt I should give up on acting. I felt I had frivolous dreams that would not amount to anything. Earlier that evening, I saw an immense shooting star, which gave me a strong impression that something amazing was going to happen that night.

In the midst of the despair, I was hanging around with some friends, and one friend played a song for me, "Chains of Love" by Erasure, with the lyrics: "Don't give up, don't give up...together we'll break these chains of love." It seemed to reach in and speak to me as though it were the voice of

the Lord. I somehow knew he was very real and he didn't want me to give up on my dream of becoming an actor. I knew he would help me do what I wanted to do with that dream. I wanted to use acting to spread love.

A few days later, I was led to attend an acting conservatory in Dallas. One night while I was drawing, a church commercial came on the radio about a little girl and her dad. I wrote down what I felt and heard in my mind while listening: "The road to life is clear and foggy, the truth is sometimes hard to find. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

Several months later I was invited to take the discussions by a classmate's roommate. I had told him I wanted to be baptized, but had never found the right church in which to do it. My grandmother was a Jehovah's Witness and my great-grandmother was a Baptist. I had been to lots of other churches and studied many more faiths, and at that point I was more of a Rastafarian, with dreads down to my shoulders.

I listened to the discussions and I just kept waiting for them to say something that was wrong. At that, I would have told them they were wrong, thanked them for any added truth they had given me, and moved on. But they never did say anything wrong. A still, small voice was whispering, "This is what you've been looking for." Two weeks later I was baptized.

Because of the previous policies of the Church against African-Americans, I've heard of some African-American Mormon artists receiving criticism from other communities for being black and Mormon. Has this been a concern at all for you?

I try not to carry my faith around like a badge of honor for the world to see. I don't think that's a unifying attitude; it's a segregationist way of being. For me, the gospel is about achieving a very personal relationship with the Savior. I haven't had major problems, but I know that things happen behind closed doors that are not always fair, friendly, and honest. I'd be lying if I said I haven't been negatively affected by what has happened behind those doors from time to time. I'm not that naïve, but I'm not that worried about it either. That's partly why I keep my faith between myself and my personal intimate interactions with people.

Living in Utah, I don't really get to be a part of those "other communities." I *am* the black community around here, usually. When my religion comes up among other blacks, they do a double-take, they may ask a couple of questions, and then we just move on. I don't get nervous or worried; there's no need to make a fuss.

I've made some friends in the artistic community outside of Utah who've become closer than normal because of the common bond of Church membership. I'm a southern gentleman most of all. Mississippi and Texas, those are my roots. I've dealt with so much racism from both blacks and whites by being black on the swim team in the south; adding the LDS thing was just another natural way to bust a few more stereotypes.

Tell us about your media arts company, Imminent Catharsis.

I work through it as an actor, doing my films, editing, and theatre arts projects. The logo is a shooting star, with the name coming from that cathartic experience I had that Christmas night. But more significantly, it refers to the state of the world. I feel the "Imminent Catharsis" is the Second Coming. Everything feels like there's this big emotional thing coming. Movies, magazines, music, everything is about this rising feeling leading to an emotional breakthrough.

What projects are on deck? What projects do you have further out?

I've got a lot going on. Acting-wise, I have two films in August—a feature called *The Last Eagle Scout* and a short called *The Blue Sweater*. In September, I am producer/director of photography for my first feature. I'm working with a new writer/director named Paul Sonnier who just retired from the Air Force. I'm also cast in another feature shooting in October.

I am producing my own projects one by one between acting and editing gigs, but I haven't got the capital to focus on them completely at this point. I'm almost done with an inspirational CD called *Acting in Faith: Showbiz Secrets Every Christian Should Know*. I'm developing a workshop about all the acting lessons that you don't learn in school. We have so many needs beyond talent and training as an actor. I'm excited about it because

it took me fifteen years to figure the stuff out. The workshop will enable others to make progress in their career in a lot less time.

I have written a book of poetry that I'd like to make an art film out of as well, and also a film in the can called *Jane's Flour*. It's a true story about a black Mormon pioneer. That will be done with post-production in a couple of months. I have a play in script development called *Manifest* which combines my love of theatre, cinema, and spirituality through mythological stories. I'm prepping a business plan for a modest budget four-film package that I'm starring in.

What do you regard as your most personal and professional triumphs?

Personally, finding the waters of Israel and holding on to my faith and my temple marriage are the ultimate triumphs in life. Professionally, because I feel that honesty and transparency are the benchmarks of a Christian character, I try to uphold those standards. I believe in the goodness of human nature. Maintaining that faith in this industry has been hard at times, but I believe it is a worthy ideal to uphold.

What advice would you give to aspiring Mormon actors and filmmakers?

Get training. Get experience. Define success on your own terms. Don't do what everybody else is doing and expect to be happy. These careers are not cash cows. If you want to do these things, do them because you have to do them. There's a big difference between wanting to act and wanting to be an actor.

Doing the right thing is not enough. Doing the right thing for the right reason is what makes your work real and sincere. The same rule applies to your calling, and your parenting, and your marriage, and all that you do in life.

What do you believe to be the future of the LDS film movement?

I think most of what would be considered LDS film will stay within the LDS market until it has matured significantly—until the films can speak for themselves and don't get lost in the translation to other cultures, they will continue to hit a glass ceiling financially. I used the phrase “jello circuit”

in cinema school because LDS film strongly resembles the old chitlin' circuit for black musicians, as does the low-budget urban film genre we currently see prospering.

The urban films aren't successful for their quality; they are successful because they have a large audience that is loyal and under-served. We could easily replicate this model if we had a greater sense of solidarity within the market.

To grow and stabilize, the LDS film movement has to have a steady production pipeline of films that are better than what we have generally seen so far. The LDS audience wants to have a spiritual (or at the very least emotional) experience from any LDS movie. The movies are competing against Hollywood fare on the very same shelf, and the LDS audience expects their movies to stand up to that same measuring stick.

What do you think is most important lesson that Mormon filmmakers and Mormon artists in general need to learn?

Understand that your faith and your craft should support each other, but they shouldn't control one another. Your art shouldn't define your faith, and your faith shouldn't define your art. You must see clearly, but see everything. We shouldn't judge one another, because filmmaking and artistry is a process of growth for each artist.

Experience is the best teacher. What you know now will pale in comparison to what you will know ten years from now, so none of us should think we know it all.

We can't expect the world to do anything for us; we are the true rebels. When an artist falls away from the Church, they're not being a rebel, they're being a lemming that follows the masses, and there's nothing rebellious about that. We are the peculiar ones, and we represent something that is a rebellion against this entire world. We should not be afraid of that; it is something to embrace. As standards drop further, we will be considered more and more unique.

And honestly, your art is not as significant as your family and our Savior; it will never be able to save a single soul. Our art can only provide an opportunity to feel God's love and thereby give a personal glimpse into who we really are, which is so much more than any film or work of art will ever be. ■



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