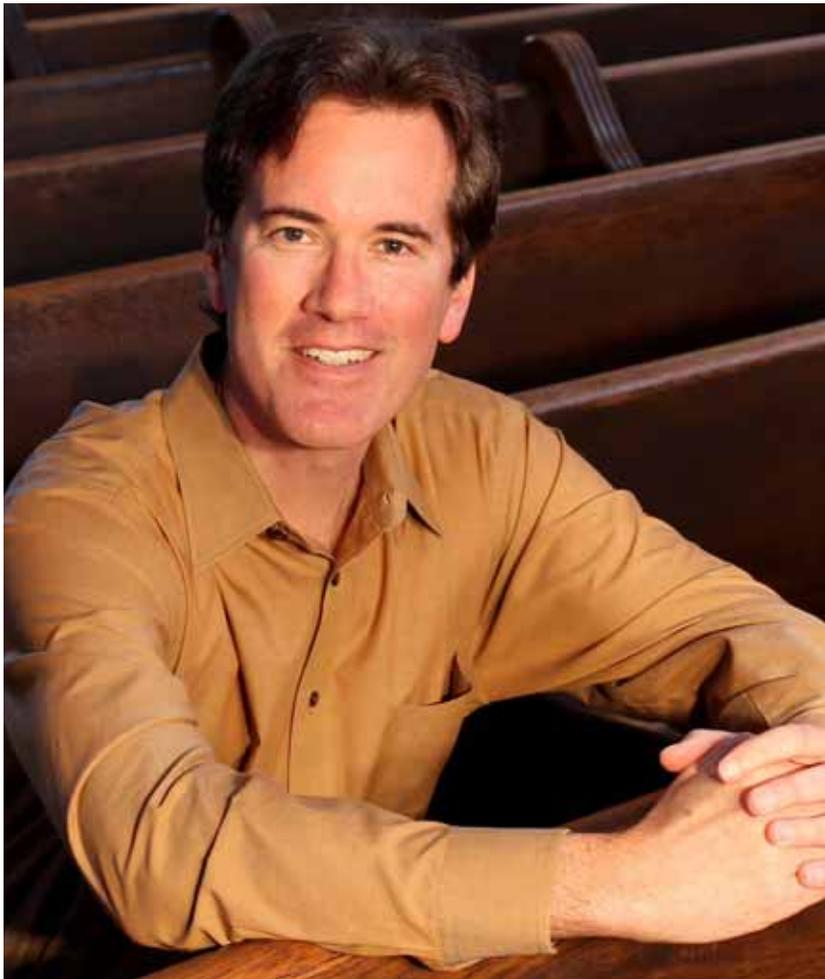




Volume 39, Number 9 Thursday, March 9, 2023

P i a n o M a n *by Andrew Tallackson*



Michael Chertock will perform Prokofiev's "Piano Concerto No. 1" at LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra's March 12 performance.

prepared," he said. "No one would dare do that. And when you are really prepared, good things usually still happen, even when you're nervous."

On Sunday, March 12, Chertock will join LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra as the guest soloist on Prokofiev's "Piano Concerto No. 1." It is a piece he knows well, part of his repertoire for years. Those who ex-

Carnegie Hall is the Mount Rushmore of concert venues. The epitome of prestige. Over time, the likes of George Gershwin, Jascha Heifetz, Arthur Rubenstein, Marilyn Horne, Yo-Yo Ma, Audra McDonald and James Taylor have graced its stages.

Add pianist Michael Chertock to that impressive roster, but the story behind it, why he rarely gets the jitters there, is so unexpected, you laugh right along with him as he tells the story.

It was back in the early 1990s, relatively early in his career. He was a tad nervous about a new piece on the program. He wanted to do it justice. Turns out, the composer's ex-husband was in the audience. He "booed vociferously," Chertock recalls, after it ended. At the same time, distant relatives of Chertock's seated in the audience were so offended by the rude display, they left, missing the rest of the concert.

"I was so mad...I stopped being nervous," Chertock says, adding he funneled that anger into something more constructive: his performance.

"Ironically, I ended up playing quite well that night," he said, laughing. "Every time I go back there (Carnegie Hall), I think about that. I get mad. And it doesn't make me nervous."

That doesn't mean he trivializes the experience.

"You never show up at Carnegie Hall un-

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Sunday, March 12th

Delivered weekly, free of charge to Birch Tree Farms, Duneland Beach, Grand Beach, Hidden Shores, Long Beach, Michiana Shores, Michiana MI and Shoreland Hills. The Beacher is also delivered to public places in Michigan City, New Buffalo, LaPorte and Sheridan Beach.

Piano Man Continued from Page 1

perience this pianist, those who get to speak to him after the concert, will discover a humble musician with tremendous good will and a refreshing sense of humor. Someone who savors the passion, the beauty of classical music, but also appreciates the power of a great film score by John Williams.

LCSO Executive Director Tim King told *The Beacher* he met Chertock more than 10 years ago when they were guest artists with Chattanooga Symphony & Opera.

"I was immediately impressed with his talent and his ability to perform all genres of music," King said of Chertock. "In addition, he has a warm and inviting personality. I feel very fortunate to have worked with him on occasion since that time. I can't wait for our audiences to meet and hear him with the LCSO!"

Since 2004, Chertock has been with the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music, where today he chairs the piano department. Pre-COVID, he found himself on the road, touring, anywhere from two to three months a year. Now, the severity of the pandemic lessening, he's increasing his performance schedule where he tours about two months out of the year.

Browsing through his accomplishments, you discover a pianist whose talent has taken him to great heights. Solo performances with symphonies or orchestras in Philadelphia, Toronto, Dallas, Atlanta, Baltimore, Naples, Detroit, Chattanooga, Utah, Oregon, Indianapolis, Louisville and Dayton. The roster of conductors he's performed with include Keith Lockhart, Jack Everly, Robert Bernhardt, John Morris Russell, Thomas Wilkins, Carmon DeLeone and the late Erich

Kunzel. Awards range from the top prize in the 1989 Joanna Hodges International Piano Competition (Brahms Division) to the grand prize in the 1993 St. Charles International Piano Competition. Recordings include John Alden Carpenter's "Concertino for Piano and Orchestra" with the BBC Concert Orchestra and a 1994 release encompassing movie music. Watch clips of him online, and you witness a performer in impressive control of his talent, knowing precisely where and when within a piece to drive it home.

He and his wife, Maaike, live in Mason, Ohio, about 22 miles north of Cincinnati. They have three children: Joshua, Maria and Marius, with Maria,



Michael describes conductor Keith Lockhart as "incredibly prepared at all times."



Michael Chertock acknowledges applause while on stage.



Michael Chertock with his eldest child, Maria, who is now a singer-songwriter in Berkeley, Calif.

he says, now a well-regarded performer in her own right.

What drew Chertock to the piano, and at what age?

“I was very old,” he says, tongue firmly planted in cheek. “I was 9 when I had my first lesson.”

Laughing, he continued.

“There had been a piano in the house where my family stayed for a summer when I was 5. I messed around with it a bit, but did not begin any formal training until I was 9, and I became really serious about it at 14,” he said.

Age 9 was when his mother purchased a piano and announced everyone in the family would start taking lessons. They were living on a Navy base in Pennsylvania at the time. Being a child of the 1970s, the movie scores of John Williams (“Jaws,” “Star Wars”) were at the forefront of pop culture. People like Rubenstein and Vladimir Horowitz had made names for themselves as classical pianists.

“And,” Chertock adds, “people like Elton John and Billy Joel were at the height of their musical careers. To me, it seemed like, if you weren’t going to be a guitarist, then the piano was the instrument to do.”

Chertock laughs, recalling the days of his youth when he’d sit at the piano, practicing.

“If you’re practicing, no one fusses around with you about homework or chores,” he says, adding he adopted the same parenting approach with his own children.

“If they’re hard at work on something creative, usually, they get left to themselves,” he said. “But if they’re watching TV or something like that, well, then it’s open season.”

Chertock made his debut at 17, playing the Rach-

Continued on Page 4

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Piano Man Continued from Page 3

maninoff “Piano Concerto No. 3.” It was with the Arlington (Texas) Symphony, and with conductor Andrew Litton at the podium. Litton forged a remarkable career for himself in the arts.

“He’s also a remarkable pianist,” Chertock said, “and he was incredible to work with. He took a very large orchestra, a mix of professionals and amateurs, and steered them like a Maserati. That was fantastic.”



Michael describes conductor Andrew Litton as someone who took “a mix of professionals and amateurs, and steered them like a Maserati.”

Litton would be just a taste of the many esteemed conductors with whom Chertock would share the stage. That includes Lockhart, known for his long-standing relationship with the Boston Pops Orchestra.

“That guy,” he said of Lockhart,” is so incredibly prepared at all times. He’s very gifted musically. He’s like a surgeon. He’s so meticulous.

And, audiences eat him up. I’ve seen him introduced to people, and they swoon when meeting him in person. He has this strange magnetism that is really wonderful.”

And his conducting style?

“Each night,” Chertock said, “he tries to make it stronger than it was before. He’s a really magnificent conductor.”

As a performer of classical and popular music, Chertock does not thumb his nose at pop culture. In fact, an ideal balance between the two, he argues, does not pigeonhole a performer into playing only certain kinds of music in public.

Again, he turns to film composer John Williams, who at 91 is still active, his latest score for “Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny” arriving in theaters in late June, right before the Independence Day weekend.

“I think I became a musician because of him,” Chertock said of Williams, “and not just because of his scores, sometimes just from a few measures.”



Michael says film composer John Williams inspired him to become a musician.

If You Go

LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra continues its 50th anniversary season with a performance at 3 p.m. Sunday, March 12, at The Holdcraft Performing Arts Center, 1200 Spring St.

Directed by Music Conductor Dr. Carolyn Watson, LCSO will present Borodin’s “On the Steppes of Central Asia” (performed in LCSO’s first season), Kats-Chernin’s “Dance of the Paper Umbrellas” (an LCSO premiere) and Mussorgsky’s “Pictures at an Exhibition.”

A special visual display of images from the orchestra over the last 50 years will be presented during the concert. Tickets, which cost \$22, or \$20 for seniors, can be purchased at www.lcso.net, by calling (219) 362-9020 or at Roxy Music, 1012 Lincolnway, LaPorte. Students with ID are admitted free.

Asked to elaborate, he paused for a moment, then said, “Think of the end of ‘The Empire Strikes Back.’ Luke has his arm around Princess Leia, and there is this amazing transition (in the score) into the end credits. Williams is creating his own music, but when you think about it, he borrowed a bit from Russian composers. Especially from Prokofiev. You hear a lot of John Williams in early Prokofiev.”

Which gets to Chertock’s performance with LCSO. Prokofiev’s “Piano Concerto No. 1” is no stranger to him. But don’t think for one minute because he knows it so well, he won’t put everything he has into it.

“Whether it’s a half-hour recital or a 14-minute concerto, you have to do your best,” he said. “What is so unique about this piece is, it reminds me when you have a favorite comedian who is a big star, and you see what their audition was like for ‘Saturday Night Live.’ You see this person cramming everything they can do into 10 minutes.

“This to me,” Chertock continues, “is what Prokofiev was like with this piece. Prokofiev was so young, and so talented and sure of himself, he’s so desperate to become a megaforce in music that he bounces from one crazy idea to another. He has no patience to wait in line behind everyone else.”

Chertock pauses, reflectively, then continues.

“I am 55 now,” he said, “and many times, I try to remember what it was like to be 17, 18 or 19, where you think, ‘I’m going to shock everyone now. I’m going to show everyone what I can do.’”

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com

Duneland Weavers Guild

Duneland Weavers Guild meets at 10 a.m. Saturday, March 11, at Three Moons Fiberworks, 402 Broadway, Chesterton.

West Side Study Group will present the program. The general public is invited. Visit www.dunelandweaversguild.org for more details.



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Michael B. Jordan (right) and Jonathan Majors star in "Creed III."

"Creed III" is the Perfect Close to the Series

by Andrew Tallackson

Few franchises boast the consistency of the "Creed" trilogy. Consistency in intelligence, performance and heart. And with this final round, Adonis Creed finally gets out of Rocky Balboa's shadow and stands firmly on his own two feet.

Looking back, the series could have been just wish-fulfillment fan service. But they really thought this through, creating complex characters while holding true to the spirit of the original series.

Rocky Balboa is nowhere present in "Creed III" (Sylvester Stallone, in interviews, said he was ready to close this chapter in his life). Thing is, the story is so tight, there is no room nor need for him.

Michael B. Jordan does double duty here, starring *and* directing, and while the feel of the picture is a smidge darker, the story is so lean, it moves with a purpose. Creed (Jordan) is retired, running the local gym. His wife, Bianca (Tessa Thompson), is producing more than performing. Their daughter, Amara (Mila Davis-Kent), is a precocious young girl, but the movie thoughtfully explores how, influenced by her boxing father, she resorts to violence at school when confronting a bully.

And the heel? Jonathan Majors ("Devotion," "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania"). I tell ya, this guy is on a roll. Each performance is like witnessing an actor on the rise. He plays "Dame," a childhood friend incarcerated for the past 18 years and looking to reconnect. As played by Majors, Dame is broken. You see it in his body language, like he's cowering from the world. There are flashes, too, of anger, like he's poised to attack.

The presence of "Dame" reinforces the connecting



"Creed III"

Running time: 116 minutes. Rated PG-13 for intense sports action, violence and some strong language.

theme of these movies: reconciling the past. In the first film, it was about his father. The second, his father's legacy. Now, childhood regret.

The series, however, does not paint the "villains" as evil cartoons. They are flawed, fueled by resentment. And, they grow with each film. Viktor Drago (Florian Munteanu), for example, the heavy from Round 2, now has strong ties with Creed.

This franchise also is one of the few to contain a marriage, a bond between husband and wife, that is unbreakable. Jordan and Thompson have worked together for so long now, they have that unspoken language that exists between spouses, where you feel the bond without anything being said. When they do hit rough patches, they talk it out, work through the emotions.

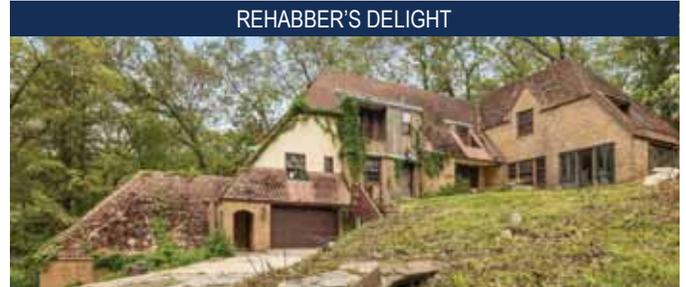
The last act of "Creed III" cranks into full "Rocky" mode, complete with the requisite training montage and the climactic fight. But, again, what this series does well is what happens *after* the match. Two men, seated side by side, confronting the past.

Jordan, Thompson — everyone involved in the series — can rest comfortably knowing they gave it their all. A satisfying close to a most welcome surprise of movies.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com



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“Arsenic and Old Lace” at LaPorte Little Theatre Club

Joseph Kesselring’s classic dark comedy “Arsenic and Old Lace” concludes this weekend at LaPorte Little Theatre Club, 218 A St.

In the play, drama critic Mortimer Brewster appears to lead a normal, happy life. Recently engaged, he plans to visit his charming, spinster aunts, Abby and Martha Brewster. Shortly after his arrival, he discovers his innocent aunts have a deadly secret buried in the basement: about a dozen older gentlemen. To his dismay, Abby and Martha deem their poisonous habits as charitable acts, convinced they are putting these men out of their misery.

Directed by Jim Snyder and Matt Robinson, the cast is:

- Mortimer Brewster: Trent Kaercher.
- Elaine Harper: Kasi Kaercher.
- Abby Brewster: Julie Phillips.
- Martha Brewster: Andrea Bertsch.
- Teddy Brewster: Scott Lenig.
- Jonathan Brewster: Domenic Sirugo.
- Dr. Einstein: Max Principe.
- Rev. Dr. Harper: Russell Pogue.
- Officer Brophy: Pat Hemphill.
- Officer Klein: Andrew Berger.
- Officer O’Hara: Nate Miller.
- Mr. Gibbs: Jim Lampl.
- Lt. Rooney: Bob Verstreater.



A scene from “Arsenic and Old Lace.”

- Mr. Witherspoon: Russell Pogue.
- Performances are at 7:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, March 10-11, and 2 p.m. Sunday, March 12. Tickets are \$17 for adults, \$16 for seniors and \$13 for students. Doors open 30 minutes prior to curtain. Make reservations at www.laportelittletheatreclub.com

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Michigan City Area Schools is seeking nominations for the 2023 MCAS Wall of Fame.

The award, first presented in 1976, honors former employees who made outstanding contributions to MCAS children. Employees from every area are eligible: administrators, custodians, food service personnel, instructional assistants, maintenance personnel, paraprofessionals, teachers, transportation staff and secretarial staff.

To qualify, the candidate must have been employed for a minimum of 15 years. Special circumstances may be considered for those not meeting the 15-year requirement due to hardship or death.

Candidates must have been retired or separated from the school system for at least five years. Because retirees are occasionally called back to service, the date of separation is considered the official retirement date, not including subsequent employment by MCAS. Employees from schools independent before school reorganization, as well as those from schools no longer in existence, are eligible. Death does not make a person ineligible.

All applications remain on file for three years. At the end of that time, candidates must be renominated. Forms and a complete list of past recipients are available at <http://EducateMC.net/WOF>. The deadline is Friday, March 31. Contact Betsy Kohn at (219) 873-2000, Ext. 8365, or email bkohn@educateMC.net

Sweetheart Day Event

Independent Cat Society will hold its Sweetheart Day Event from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, March 11, at Moose Lodge 1357, 108 Indiana Ave., Valparaiso.

Visit www.catsociety.org or email shelter@catsociety.org for more details.



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Harbor Country Film Group



Hema Rajagopalan is the subject of director Rana Segal's documentary.

Local director Rana Segal will screen her documentary "Hema: The Dance of Life" during Harbor Country Film Group from noon to about 1:30 p.m. EST Saturday, March 11, at New Buffalo Township Library, 33 N. Thompson St.

The film tells the story of Hema Rajagopalan, an acclaimed Bharata Natyam dancer and founder of Natya Dance Theatre. It follows her journey from a child prodigy in India to settling in America, where her devotion to Bharata Natyam dance helps preserve her culture's traditions for all artistic genres.

Segal will introduce the film and lead a discussion. An award-winning director, producer and cinematographer, her work has aired on PBS, The Learning Channel and Discovery Health Channel. She received an Emmy nomination for "Painting the Town," about a Chicago muralist, and another for "Shifting Sands: On the Path to Sustainability," about efforts to preserve the Indiana Dunes.

The program is free. Free popcorn will be available.

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Michigan City Public Library

Michigan City Public Library's circulation/front lobby area is open to the public. Public seating is available, and the computer lab is open. Hours are: 9 a.m.-8 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday-Saturday and closed Sundays.

The library is changing overhead lighting to LED fixtures. They will feature automatic ambient lighting, centralized controls for turning on and off and conservation in unoccupied public areas. The library will remain open during all phases of the project, but reserves the right to close if necessary. Areas under the work zone will be closed. The goal is to minimize closure time to its collections and services. The meeting rooms will close while work is done.

The following programs are scheduled:

- **Duneland Stamp Club at 4 p.m. Thursday, March 9.** The club meets the second Thursday of each month. New members are invited.
- **Magic with Kalita! at 2 p.m. Saturday, March 11, after the St. Patrick's Day parade.** The annual tradition is open to families.
- **DIY Plushies (ages 10-17) from 4-6 p.m. Monday, March 13.** Registration is required because supplies are limited. Call Youth Services at (219) 873-3045 for more information.
- **Great Decisions at 6:30 p.m. Monday, March 13.** The foreign-policy discussion program returns for its 25th season. The topic this session is "China and the U.S." Reading material is available at the circulation desk. Call 873-3049 for more details.
- **Free Genealogy Workshop from 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday, March 14.** Presented by the Ulster Historical Foundation of Belfast, staff members Fintan Mullan and Gillian Hunt will highlight Irish and Scots-Irish genealogy for beginners and active family historians. A light lunch will be provided. Registration is required by calling (219) 873-3049.
- **Tinkercad 3-D Modeling at 4 p.m. Wednesday, March 15, in the Makerspace.** Registration is required for the program that involves Tin-

kercad, a free online collection of software tools. This session, for children 9-17, serves as an introduction to 3-D design, art and printing. No experience is necessary. All registered participants receive a 3-D print of his/her creations. Register at the Youth Services desk or call (219) 873-3045 for more info. Space is limited. MCPL 3-D printing rules apply, and the printing fee is waived for this program.

- **Needle Arts Club to Warm Up America Joining Night at 5:30 p.m. Thursdays in March.** Membership is open to anyone interested in needle arts such as crochet, needlepoint, cross-stitch, crewel, tatting and other hand stitching. All skill levels and ages are welcome. Also, the group has organized a local chapter of the Warm Up America Foundation. Volunteers are knitting and crocheting handmade squares (7x9 inch) that will be joined together to make full-size afghans.
- **Sesame Street Scavenger Hunt in March.** Search for Bert, Ernie, Super Grover, Cookie Monster and Oscar the Grouch in Youth Services.
- **Weekly Crafts for Kids & Teens weekly in March.** Each week offers a different project. Take-home craft kits are available, or create some in the Makerspace. Supplies are limited.
- **Story Time at 10 a.m. Wednesdays.** Children birth to age 5 and adults will enjoy stories, songs and crafts. Check out previous story time videos through the library's YouTube channel, Facebook page and website.

The library seeks volunteers to help at least one day a week during tax season (through April) through the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program. The IRS provides some training, and volunteers must pass the VITA test through the intermediate level. Testing and training are online. Call (219) 873-3049 for details.

Volunteer genealogists can answer questions from 1-4 p.m. Tuesdays (Pat Harris) and 11 a.m.-2 p.m. the last Saturday of the month (Colleen Miltenberger).

Michigan City Public Library is located at 100 E. Fourth St. Visit www.mclib.org for more details.



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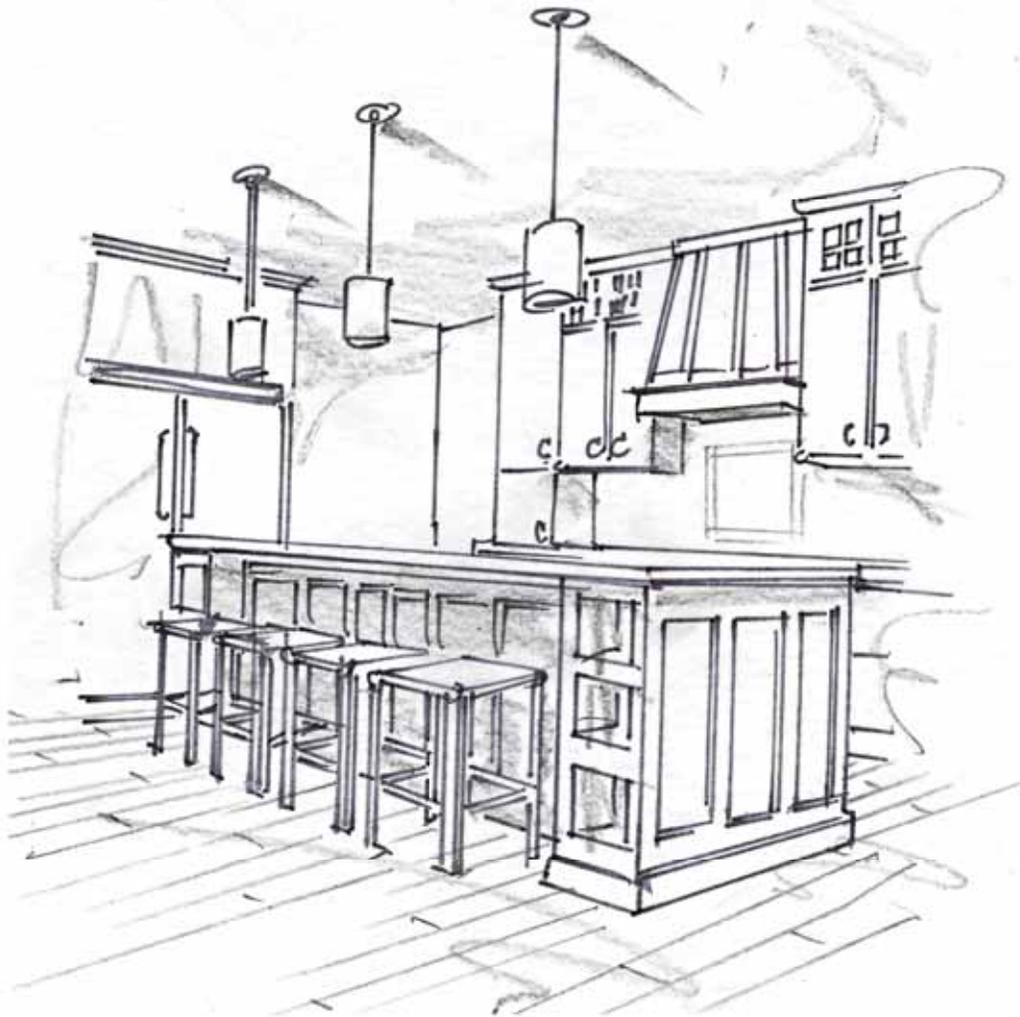
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“Women Talking” is an Extraordinary Achievement

by Andrew Tallackson



You won't find a better ensemble than the one in "Women Talking."

How can a movie land Oscar nominations for Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay...and *still* feel unappreciated?

Somehow, between the “Everything Everywhere” fervor, slights against black actresses (Viola Davis, Danielle Deadwyler) and allegations of campaign tampering (“To Leslie”), Sarah Polley’s “Women Talking” got lost in the shuffle. The actress (2004’s “Dawn of the Dead”) turned screenwriter-director (“Away From Her”) has created a film that’s like watching a ticking time bomb. An emotionally propulsive story, inspired by fact, that shows women taking a stand against male-initiated violence.

Did the film’s subject turn off Academy voters to where they didn’t bother seeing it? Did that prevent its distributor, Orion, from securing more theaters for it? Because had I seen it in time for my 10-best list, it would have landed near the top.

The true story behind the film, taken from Miriam Toew’s 2018 book, detailed how, between 2005 and 2009, women in an isolated Mennonite community in Bolivia were drugged and raped in their sleep by men in their community.

Polley’s story is set in 2010, where a vote among women in the community lands right down the middle: stay and fight...or leave. Staying and doing nothing is not an option. Eight women meet to decide what to do next.



“Women Talking”

*Running time: 104 minutes. View on Demand, Vickers Theatre.
Rated PG-13 for mature thematic content, including sexual assault, bloody images and some strong language.*

Confining characters to a single location and having them hash out their future — it sounds like a stage play. And in some ways, “Women Talking” resembles one. Save for the fact that Polley has made her film so cinematic, it never feels stagy. Her camera is always moving, always circling the women, weaving through them, and through flashbacks, to heighten the sense of urgency. Cinematographer Luc Montpelier saturates the colors to where the images nearly resemble a black-and-white film. A world drained of hope. When it’s revealed the men, who have briefly left the colony, will return by morning, the film takes on a desperate urgency where time is of the essence. The score by Oscar-winner Hildur Guðnadóttir (“Joker”) is extremely effective, the percussive string instruments the movie’s equivalent of a ticking clock.

Then, you have the *wow* of a cast. Rooney Mara, Clarie Foy, Jessie Buckley, Judith Ivey, Ben Whishaw, Sheila McCarthy, Frances McDormand.

The best of the best. The centerpiece of the movie involves weighty discussions on faith, specifically whether committing violence against their aggressors is a sin from which they cannot recover. These scenes crackle with a feverish intensity. Foy (“The Queen”) has scenes where corrosive anger pours out of her, and you sit there thinking, how did this woman *not* score an Oscar nomination? Ditto Buckley (“The Lost Daughter”), who is equally enraged, yet clearly concealing an unpleasant truth.

The surprise is Mara (“The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo”). Not how effective she is, but how effectively she defies expectation. Filmmakers rarely let the actress smile, but her smile here is heart-breaking. Her character, pregnant from rape, has every right to be furious...and she is. But the actress radiates a strength, a kindness, that achieves something remarkable. This is a woman not broken by hate.

In the end, we witness the final decision of these women. We witness strength and courage through



Claire Foy (right), seen here with Judith Ivey, was robbed of a Best Supporting Actress nomination.

solidarity. I was deeply, *deeply* moved.

Let me take back what I wrote earlier. “Women Talking” would not have landed near the top of my 10-best list. It *was* the best film of 2022.

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com

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And the Oscar Goes to...

by Andrew Tallackson

There is a curious irony to this year's Oscars.

On one level, no one cares. There is no wow factor, no one film everyone is rallying behind. Even with streaming making Oscar contenders more accessible than ever, people simply were not intrigued by awards bait.

I predict the show's ratings to hit rock bottom. Even with last year's "Oscar slap," the academy has instituted so many precautions, the ceremony could be rigidly tight.

The irony is that there are neck-in-neck races to the finish. Only a handful of sure things exist. My picks this year tap into the predictability of Oscar voters...however, I would love to be proven wrong. Like, embarrassingly wrong so all the right people win. My predictions, by the way, are in bold print.

The 95th Academy Awards airs at 7 p.m. Sunday, March 12, on ABC. Winners in our "Beat the Editor" contest will be revealed in the March 23 edition. A special thank you to Swingbelly's for sponsoring our contest. The support is greatly appreciated.

So, without further ado, here we go:

Best Picture

The nominees are: "All Quiet on the Western Front," "Avatar: The Way of Water," "The Banshees of Inisherin," "Elvis," "Everything Everywhere All at Once," "The Fabelmans," "TÁR," "Top Gun: Maverick," "Triangle of Sadness," "Women Talking."

Always the wild card. Past history dictates a single movie can dominate, then tumble to the upset no one saw coming. "Crash." "Moonlight." "Parasite."

Heading into Oscar season, the assumption was that Steven Spielberg's "The Fabelmans" was the favorite. The director delved into his past, offering insight into his journey as a filmmaker. Then, the movie hit theaters, then streaming 30 days later. The indifference was deafening. One of Spielberg's biggest flops after the unexpected failure of his "West Side Story" remake. The movie is good, but not great Spielberg. A tad dry. Plus, the scene in which the movie's hero glorifies a raging anti-Semite at school just to fit in created a bit of acid reflux amount viewers.

So, with "Everything Everywhere All at Once" dominating awards season, expect it to take the top prize. It confirms Academy voters are getting younger, willing to take risks...and I would not oppose the win. To say it is not for all tastes is a grand understatement, but something about its hope for dysfunctional families spoke to me.



"Everything Everywhere All at Once" has a lock on, at the very least, Best Picture.

Best Director

The nominees are: Martin McDonagh, "The Banshees of Inisherin," Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, "Everything Everywhere All at Once," Steven Spielberg, "The Fabelmans," Todd Field, "TÁR," Ruben Östlund, "Triangle of Sadness."

Spielberg could be the upset, but again, the love isn't there for "The Fabelmans." **Kwan** and **Scheinert**, however, are mopping the floor with the awards circuit. This is a case where the directors are as much the stars as the cast. Their wacked-out vision is part of the selling point.

Best Actor

The nominees are: Austin Butler, "Elvis," Colin Farrell, "The Banshees of Inisherin," Brendan Fraser, "The Whale," Paul Mescal, "Aftersun," Bill Nighy, "Living."

her acting chops. Thing is, Oscar voters love them some Cate Blanchett. Already twice the winner ("The Aviator," "Blue Jasmine"), but that might not stop her from seizing a third trophy. Indeed, the actress was mesmerizing. The ferocious intensity never ceased. I happen to be in the minority on the film that enjoyed it up to a point, then it embraced tiresome stereotypes of female conductors. Again, how do you decide? I'm just gonna go with my heart and say **Yeoh** after her recent SAG win.

Best Supporting Actor

The nominees are: Brendan Gleeson, "The Banshees of Inisherin," Brian Tyree Henry, "Causeway," Judd Hirsch, "The Fabelmans," Barry Keoghan, "The Banshees of Inisherin," Ke Huy Quan, "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

The contest ended the minute **Quan** kicked into high gear. The performance is like watching an actor on fast forward. He exists on another level entirely: fearless, achingly moving. The child star of "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom" had returned with a vengeance.

Best Supporting Actress

The nominees are: Angela Bassett, "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever," Hong Chau, "The Whale," Kerry Condon, "The Banshees of Inisherin," Jamie Lee Curtis, "Everything Everywhere All at Once," Stephanie Hsu, "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

Heated Race No. 3. Bassett was the sure bet, then Curtis took home the SAG award in the same category. The BAFTAs went high-brow with Condon. I could see Bassett and Curtis canceling each other out and Condon winning. But shouting a lot, which is what Condon did in the film, does not make a great performance. Bassett, who should have won back in 1993 for "What's Love Got to Do With It?," faces Marvel backlash, that she appears in a comic-book movie. But when her character cries out at losing a son and now maybe a daughter, you *felt* it. It jolted you in your seat. Pain, loss, fear for the future — all of it in her voice. Any parent who has experienced loss — regardless if "Wakanda" is a comic-book movie — was affected by that moment. And, it served as the movie's surrogate audience reaction to star Chadwick Boseman's death. *That* is what you call acting. **Bassett** deserves the prize.

□

Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com

Heated Race No. 1. A back-and-forth seesaw between Butler and Fraser. **Fraser** just won the SAG award, confirming people want the happily-ever-after fairy tale. Everyone loves a comeback, but people are more thrilled by the idea of Fraser's return than the reality of it. That the movie, itself, is a yucky, patronizing mess. Butler, on the other hand, has the wow factor. This was a sit-up-and-take-notice star turn. When he is on screen, you can't stop watching. Prove me wrong, dear Oscar voters, and pick Butler.

Best Actress

The nominees are: Cate Blanchett, "TÁR," Ana de Armas, "Blonde," Andrea Riseborough, "To Leslie," Michelle Williams, "The Fabelmans," Michelle Yeoh, "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

Heated Race No. 2. The sentimental favorite is Yeoh, and she is my pick. She's certainly paid her dues, and "Everything" is proof of her star power,

“Jesus Revolution” Takes Thoughtful Look at Faith and the Hippie Movement

by Andrew Tallackson



Kelsey Grammer stars as Chuck Smith, whose church welcomed members of the hippie movement, in “Jesus Revolution.”

The Erwin brothers (“I Can Only Imagine,” “I Still Believe”) are a rarity, creating faith-based films designed to be inclusive. No easy feat. How do you preach to the choir...without alienating mainstream audiences?

“Jesus Revolution,” their latest, may be their best to date. Like all their films, it doesn’t drive home the faith elements with blunt, jackhammer intensity. And while it dilutes a key character, it approaches its subject thoughtfully and in an intriguing historical context.

The Erwin brothers — director Jon and producer Andrew — were inspired by the early 1970s *Time* article that documented “The Jesus Movement.” It began in the late 1960s, primarily in California. Pockets of hippies believed the best protest against the mainstream was not staging anti-war protests, but in embracing religion.

The movie introduces real-life pastor Chuck Smith (Kelsey Grammer), whose California church was dying, but experienced rebirth through his encounter with a hippie bearing the bonkers name of Lonnie Frisbee (Jonathan Roumie). Frisbee was one of those guys you could tell did tons of drugs by the trippy manner of his speech and body language.

We also meet future pastor Greg Laurie (Joel Courtney), who is reluctantly attending a military school. He’s a bit listless, swayed by hippies at a nearby school. Religion is not a top priority, but

★ ★ ★ 1/2

“Jesus Revolution”

Running time: 120 minutes. Rated PG-13 for strong drug content involving teens and some thematic elements

somehow, he finds a way to Chuck’s church.

By having a veteran actor like Grammer play Chuck, the character’s transformation from judgmental to inclusive goes down a lot more smoothly. It’s not like someone flips a switch and now, the movie has a likable pastor. Grammer creates a man willing to take off the blinders and listen to others, even if he doesn’t agree with them.

That leads to the first of many moving scenes where Chuck, his congregation literally divided in half — disapproving regulars on the left, hippies on the right — delivers a quietly passionate plea for tolerance and acceptance. Grammer’s voice is that of calm, gentle embrace. The scene is a sounding bell, *to all faiths*, that houses of worship should be a safe haven for believers *and* outcasts.

Frisbee was a spark that elevated the issue of faith to public discourse. In real life, he was also conflicted about his own homosexuality, later dying of AIDS in 1993. None of that comes up in “Jesus Movement.” I suspect that casting Roumie in the role placed the Erwin brothers in a bind. Could faith-based audiences distance themselves, and rec-

oncile the fact, that Roumie — globally embraced for playing Jesus in the streaming series “The Chosen” — is now playing a gay man? By avoiding the issue entirely, the Erwin brothers chose to play it safe. That’s a shame, because Roumie is *very* good in the film. With his voice and body language, he creates a fully realized individual who lives and breathes the hippie movement. Taking a more complex look at Lonnie might have elevated ruminations on faith and the counterculture movement to a more thoughtful level.

The movie certainly has the gumption to explore the eventual disconnect between Chuck and Lonnie, specifically the parting of ways between the two. Here, “Jesus Revolution” dares to contemplate what happens when ego steps into the picture.

Indeed, the film’s second half is heavier than we expect. The Erwin brothers show uncommon maturity, allowing their real-life characters to be flawed, to fall, then rise again.

Ten years ago, audiences, even Christians, stayed clear of faith-based films. They lacked the resources, the creative talent, to be taken seriously. The Erwin brothers are rectifying that. “Jesus Revolution” proves these guys are the real deal. It’s a dynamite piece of storytelling.



Contact Andrew Tallackson at atallackson@gmail.com



Jonathan Roumie (left) stars as Lonnie Frisbee.

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Favorite movies: “Die Hard,” “The Shawshank Redemption,” westerns and action movies.

Favorite books/authors:

Clive Cussler, James Patterson, mysteries and history.

Favorite music: Kenny Chesney, Zac Brown Band, Jimmy Buffett, REO Speedwagon, old rock and country.

Favorite TV shows: “Monk,” The History Channel, The Food Network.

Favorite food: rack of lamb.

Favorite sports team: Chicago Cubs.

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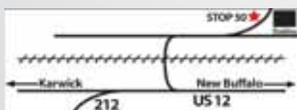
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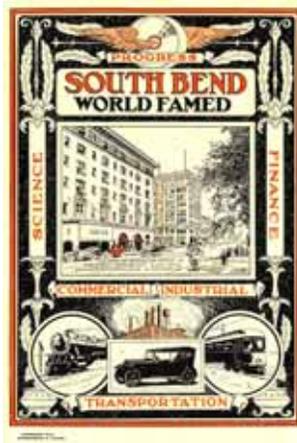
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Poster Design Contest

The Studebaker National Museum and The History Museum have launched “South Bend: The Next 100 Years,” a poster-design contest to celebrate the city’s future.

The \$28,500 in cash awards includes: \$10,000, first prize; \$5,000, second prize; \$3,500, third prize; and \$1,000 to the 10 finalists. Open to all ages, there is no entry fee. June 25 is the deadline, with designs submitted to tinyurl.com/2p99vbvc

The idea for the contest hailed from a poster first



The 1922 survey booklet that inspired the contest.

presented as the cover of a survey booklet in 1922. Titled South Bend, World Famed, it was prepared to celebrate the city’s centenary, showing the progress made in 100 years when the city’s founder, Alexis Coquillard, settled the area and opened his fur-trading post. The booklet mapped out what the city had become during its first century, including descriptions and histories of local businesses, business leaders, educational institutions,

electd officials and governmental agencies.

The contest is sponsored in part by community leader Doug Hunt. Jurying is from June 26-July 14. On July 24, an exhibit of the 10 selected finalists opens at the museum campus, the winners revealed Aug. 21.

The History Museum is located at 808 W. Washington St., South Bend. Call it at (574) 235-9664 or the nearby Studebaker National Museum at (574) 235-9714 for more details.



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Indiana Dunes National Park

- **The annual Maple Sugar Time festival, complete with self-guided tours and maple-sugaring activities, from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, March 11-12, at Chellberg Farm.** Rangers and volunteers are stationed along the farm trail to explain how Native Americans first boiled maple sap into sugar, and how early settlers used large iron kettles to make syrup. The sugar shack showcases how sap is boiled down the way the Chellberg family did it in the 1930s. Children can learn how to tap a tree at the Maple Fun Zone, and meet farm animals while sampling a maple syrup snow cone. Maple-themed products will be sold, including maple glazed pork belly sandwiches from the Wood, Stock and Grill food truck. Scoops A' more will sell maple-flavored gelato atop waffles. Stop by the front of the farmhouse, where Indiana-produced maple syrup and related products will be sold. Also, learn how to make maple syrup at home, and how modern maple sugar farmers make syrup today. Chellberg Farm is located on Mineral Springs Road between U.S. 20 and 12 in Porter.
- **Drop-In Volunteer Program (Trash Trekkers) from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. daily in March at Indiana Dunes Visitor Center.** Trash Trekkers is a no-hassle volunteer option that helps keep trails and

beaches clean. Temporary passes are available. Visit tinyurl.com/2p83798v for more details.

- **Chellberg Farm Open House from 2-4 p.m. Saturdays-Sundays in March.** Rangers and volunteers will share the area's history as visitors tour the farmhouse and garden and visit the animals. Passes are required. The parking lot is off Mineral Springs Road between U.S. 12 and 20 in Porter.



The National Park Service seeks short-term housing in nearby communities for the seasonal workforce of park rangers, guides, maintenance workers and research aides.

IDNP is willing to lease housing for up to one year. Furnished multiple-bedroom units are preferred, but all proposals will be considered. Contact Todd Fletcher at (219) 395-1751 or todd_fletcher@nps.gov

The Visitor Center is at 1215 N. Indiana 49, Porter. The Paul H. Douglas Center is at 100 N. Lake St. in Gary's Miller Beach neighborhood. Call (219) 395-1882 or visit www.nps.gov/indu for details.

Indiana Dunes State Park

- **The 23rd Annual Running with the Irish 5K Race from 8:30-11 a.m. Saturday, March 11, to benefit St. Patrick Catholic School, Chesterton.** The course uses paved roads through IDSP. Visit tinyurl.com/2s3cnt72 to register.
- **Who Goes Where? at 10 a.m. Sunday, March 12.** Meet in the Nature Center Auditorium to learn how physical/behavioral adaptations help animals survive diverse Indiana Dunes habitats. *Indiana Dunes State Park is at 1600 N. County Road 25 East (the north end of Indiana 49), Chesterton. Call (219) 926-1390 to register for programs.*

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- American Legion, 107 N. Flynn Road, Westville, 1-6 p.m. Thursday, March 9.
- First Church of God, 2020 E. Lincolnway, LaPorte, noon-6 p.m. Monday, March 13.
- St. John Kanty, 7012 N. County Road 600 East, Rolling Prairie, 1-6 p.m. Tuesday, March 14.



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“1776” at Marquette High School

Marquette Catholic High School Theatre Department will present the musical “1776” on March 10-12 and 17-19 at the school’s Rudy Hart Theatre, 306 W. 10th St.

Times are 6:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday and 1:30 p.m. Sunday. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$8 for students and seniors. Visit www.marquette-hs.org or call (219) 873-1325 for more details.

The cast includes:

- John Adams — Mary Cate Neary.
- Benjamin Franklin — Maya Ruiz.
- Thomas Jefferson — Jacob Zientarski.
- Abigail Adams — Alex Shoppa.
- Martha Jefferson — Telle Skish.
- John Hancock — Jenna Rearick.
- John Dickinson — Kat Sheerin.
- Edward Rutledge — Ella Crane.
- Roger Sherman — Maria Aredes.
- Robert Livingston/Morris — Madeleine McCarther.
- Dr. Josiah Bartlett — Siobhan Larkin.
- Stephen Hopkins — Andrew Crane.
- Rev. Jonathan Witherspoon — Anthony G. Holt.
- James Wilson — Addison Boyd.
- Caesar Rodney — Sedona Vendramin.
- Col. Thomas McKean — Janel Sheerin.
- George Read — Emmie Reigel.
- Samuel Chase — Dan Bartnicki.
- William Paca — Ivan Mota.
- Joseph Hewes — Leah Bartnicki.
- Dr. Lyman Hall — Telle Skish.
- Charles Thomson — Leighton Kurtich.
- Andrew McNair — Johnathan Madura.
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Spring Artisan Fair

LaPorte County Historical Society seeks vendors for its annual Spring Artisan Fair, which is from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Sunday, April 16, at LaPorte County Historical Society Museum, 2405 Indiana Ave.

The event is the same day as LaPorte County Draft Horse Association’s Plow Day near the Door Prairie Barn. All types of artisan are invited. Spots are limited, so contact Danielle Adams at director@laportecountyhistory.org for more information.

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JROTC Supports MCAS

Michigan City High School's Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps continued to support Michigan City Area Schools by providing color guards for MCHS and Krueger Middle School basketball teams.

Cadets also served as guides for school tours during the Wolfpack Roundup.



Cadets work on a makeshift raft at the 2022 Cadet Leadership Camp.

The MCHS Military Drill Team continued its daily 5:45 a.m. practices, preparing for the last competition at Concordia High School in Fort Wayne.

The cadets will work the regional and semi-state basketball tournaments March 11 and 18, march in the Michigan City St. Patrick's Day parade on March 11, and support the boys and girls track teams for all home meets.

MCHS also is coordinating the JROTC Leadership Camp in June at St. John's Military Academy in Wisconsin. In addition to MCHS cadets, units from Portage, Indianapolis Ben Davis and Romeoville, Ill., will attend. It costs approximately \$400 per cadet to run the camp, with each school bringing 20 cadets. All costs are funded by the Marine Corps.

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In the Area

March 9 — Duneland Stamp Club, 4 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3045.

March 9 — Author Talk with Ron Knickrehm, 6-7 p.m., LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave. Info: www.laportelibrary.org

March 10-12 — “Arsenic and Old Lace,” LaPorte Little Theatre Club, 218 A St. Times: 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 2 p.m. Sun. Tickets: adult/\$17, seniors (55+)/\$16, students/\$13 with student ID. Reservations: www.laportelittletheatreclub.com

March 10-12, 17-19 — “Oliver!,” Footlight Theatre, 1705 Franklin St. Times: 7:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat./2 p.m. Sun. Tickets: \$17, \$12/12 or younger. Reservations: www.footlightplayers.org/reservations, (219) 874-4035.

March 10-12, 17-19 — “1776,” Marquette Catholic High School Rudy Hart Theatre, 306 W. 10th St. Times: 6:30 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 1:30 p.m. Sun. Tickets: \$10/adults, \$8/students & seniors. Info: www.marquette-hs.org, (219) 873-1325.

March 11 — Harbor Country Film Group, noon EST, New Buffalo Township Library, 33 N. Thompson St. Free.

March 11 — Michigan City St. Patrick’s Day Parade, 1-2 p.m., Uptown Arts District (Ninth Street to Fourth streets).

March 11 — Magic with Kalita!, 2 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3045.

March 11 — Valparaiso Oldtime Dance Society Contra Dance, 7-9:30 p.m., Barker Hall at Trinity Episcopal Church, 600 Franklin Square. Caller: Paul Watkins with Chicago band Resurrection Marys.

March 12 — LaPorte County Symphony Orchestra, 3 p.m., The Holdcraft Performing Arts Center, 1200 Spring St. Tickets: \$22, \$20/seniors, students with ID/free. Reservations: www.lcso.net, (219) 362-9020, Roxy Music, 1012 Lincolnway, LaPorte.

March 13 — Virtual Author Talk with David Epstein (adults 19+), noon-1 p.m., through LaPorte County Public Library. Registration: <https://libraryc.org/laportelibrary/24407>

March 13 — DIY Plushies (ages 10-17), 4-6 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3045.

March 13 — Great Decisions, 6:30 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3045.

March 14 — Page Turners Book Club, noon-1 p.m., LaPorte County Public Library, 904 Indiana Ave. Info: www.laportelibrary.org

March 15 — Tinkercad 3-D Modeling, 4 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3045.

Through March 31 — Artwork by Madeleine Schooley/the late Barbara Fedder, The Legacy Center Gallery at Queen of All Saints Catholic Church, 1719 E. Barker Ave. Gallery hours: 6 a.m.-8 p.m. Mon.-Thur., 6 a.m.-6 p.m. Fri.-Sat., 6 a.m.-3 p.m. Sun. Info: (219) 872-9196.

First and Third Mondays — Singing Sands Toastmasters Club, 6:30-8 p.m., Senior Health/Wellness Center (old hospital ER, Barker/Bufalo).

Mondays in Michigan City — Bingo, Moose Family Lodge 980, 2107 Welnetz Road. Doors open/8:30 a.m., early birds/9:30 a.m., regular Bingo/10 a.m.

Tuesdays — Bingo, St. Stanislaus Kostka Catholic Church, 109 Ann St. Doors open: 3:30 p.m. Bingo: 6 p.m. Starting Feb. 7: \$45 entrance fee (includes all cards). Info: (219) 336-3099.

Thursdays — Needle Arts Club to Warm Up America Joining Night, 5:30 p.m., Michigan City Public Library, 100 E. Fourth St. Info: (219) 873-3045.

In the Region

March 9 — The Acorn Mardi Gras Celebration featuring Dirty Dozen Brass Band, 7 p.m. EST, The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Tickets: \$35 + \$5.50 convenience fee, \$60 + \$5.50 convenience fee (reserved). Reservations: www.acornlive.org

March 9-11 — Used/new arts & crafts supplies special rummage, Box Factory for the Arts, 1101 Broad St., St. Joseph, Mich. Times (Eastern): noon-6 p.m. March 9, noon-4 p.m. March 10-11. Info: <https://boxfactoryforthearts.org>

March 11 — Duneland Weavers Guild, 10 a.m., Three Moons Fiberworks, 402 Broadway, Chesterton. Info: www.dunelandweaversguild.org

March 11 — The 23rd Annual Running with the Irish 5K Race, 8:30-11 a.m. Registration: tinyurl.com/2s3cnt72

March 11 — Independent Cat Society Sweetheart Day Event, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Moose Lodge 1357, 108 Indiana Ave., Valparaiso. Info: www.catsociety.org, shelter@catsociety.org

March 11 — Harbor Country Film Group with Eve Moran, “Hema: The Dance of Her Life,” noon EST, New Buffalo Township Library, 33 N. Thompson St. Info: (269) 469-2933.

March 11 — Berrien County Conservation District native plant presentation, 1-3 p.m. EST, Love Creek Nature Center, 9292 Huckleberry Road, Berrien Center, Mich. Free. Registration: (269) 471-

9111, Ext. 3, nancy.carpenter@macd.org

March 11 — Billy Elton, 8 p.m. EST, The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Tickets: \$40 + \$6 convenience fee, \$65 + \$5.50 convenience fee (reserved). Reservations: www.acornlive.org

March 11-12 — The annual Maple Sugar Time festival, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Chellberg Farm, Mineral Springs Road between U.S. 20/12, Porter. Info: (219) 395-1882, www.nps.gov/indu

March 12 — Who Goes Where?, 10 a.m., Indiana Dunes State Park, 1600 N. County Road 25 East, Chesterton. Info: (219) 926-1390.

March 12 — Coastline Children's Film Festival: "I was Born, But," 4 p.m. EDT, The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Tickets: \$25 (reserved). Reservations: www.acornlive.org

March 15 — Open Mic Night featuring The Sand Rabbits, 7 p.m. EDT, The Acorn, 107 Generations Drive, Three Oaks, Mich. Performer inquiries: openmic@acornlive.org

Through March 24 — Group exhibit, "Sense and Sensibility: Poetry in Painting," South Shore Arts, 1040 Ridge Road, Munster.

Through April 12 — Anneke Dekker solo show, Pines Village Retirement Communities, 3303 Pines Village Circle, Valparaiso.

Through April 16 — Exhibit, artist-poet-artificial intelligence researcher Sasha Stiles, Krasl Art Center, 707 Lake Blvd., St. Joseph, Mich. Info: www.krasl.org

Through May 29 — "Built to Last: Studebaker Buildings Past & Present," The Studebaker National Museum, 201 Chapin St., South Bend. Hours (Eastern): 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Mon.-Sat., noon-5 p.m. Sun. Admission: \$11 - adults, \$9.50 - seniors 60+, \$7 - youth ages 6-18. Info: (574) 235-9714, www.studebakermuseum.org

Mondays — Pickleball, 5:30 p.m. EST, New Troy (Mich.) Community Center, 13372 California Road. Free, donations welcome. Info: (269) 426-3909, friendsofnewtroy@yahoo.com

Saturdays-Sundays in March — Chellberg Farm Open House, 2-4 p.m. Meet at parking lot off Mineral Springs Road between U.S. 12/20, Porter. Info: (219) 395-1882, www.nps.gov/indu

Vickers Theatre — *Now Showing*: The Oscar-nominated Short Films 2023: Live Action. Time: 4 p.m. March 11. *Also*: The Oscar-nominated Short Films 2023: Animation. Time: 4 p.m. March 9. *Also*: The Oscar-nominated Short Films 2023: Documentary. Time: 3:30 p.m. March 10. *Also*: "Women Talking." Rated R. Times: 7 p.m. March 9-11, 4 & 7 p.m. March 12. All times Eastern. Theater address: 6 N. Elm St., Three Oaks, Mich. Info: www.vickerstheatre.com, (269) 756-3522.

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Burner by Mark Greaney (hardcover, \$29 retail in bookstores and online; also available as an eBook and an audiobook. 512 pages.)

Do you like James Bond? Jack Reacher? Jack Ryan? These beloved action characters have passed the test of literary time to now include Court Gentry, aka The Gray Man, aka Violator, aka Six.

Gentry came to life about 12 books ago and has been a hit ever since. The first movie adaptation arrived last year on Netflix. I haven't seen it, but Ryan Gosling as Gentry — that is *not* who I pictured. Of course, that is for the reader/watcher to decide.

No matter, I'm here to discuss the latest Gray Man book, **Burner**. As they say, the story is "ripped from today's headlines!" I've always wanted to say that...

You'll want to put a seat belt on your chair when you start reading this one. The action is so intense right out of the gate. And that's part of what makes these books so hot and hard to put down.

"Court Gentry was American, a former CIA officer, and then a former CIA asset — a contract agent. Now he worked freelance intelligence jobs, only taking contracts he thought to be principled."

Some time ago, the CIA put out a kill order on Gentry, never rescinding it. Of course, he was set up, but that's a story for another time. The most important thing to remember about a Gray Man book is, the action starts at Page 1...

Tonight, he's in the Caribbean blowing up a yacht. That's right, all you wanted to know about setting explosives underwater. Actually this is his third yacht to dispose of; the first was in the Maldives, followed by a second in Dubai. A contract job, of course, to inconvenience Russian oligarchs *"who had been party to unspeakable crimes against humanity."* Namely, the war in Ukraine set in motion by the Russian invasion there. Sound familiar?

Mission complete, Gentry arrives at his ketch, moored in the British Virgin Islands, when a CIA officer shows up with a burner phone to speak with Suzanne Brewer, special assistant to the Deputy Director of Operations. She wants to give him an assignment, swearing the kill order against him will not be in force. Here's what has happened...

A Swiss banker of Ukrainian ancestry, Alex Velesky, has been approached by Igor Krupkin, a Russian financial "planner" whose job is to launder billions of dollars throughout the world. The money comes from corrupt Russian clients. This new information includes data showing the origins of the money and the shell corporations it goes to.

Off the Book Shelf

by Sally Carpenter



Velesky, working for Brucker Sohne Bank, Switzerland, has only to pair this info with his own damning info to cause international chaos and get some revenge for the family in Ukraine he lost to the Russian invasion. As this journey of money from Russia also finds its way to the U.S., Brewer tells him, *"The file contains CIA money transfer information that could compromise us, if not destroy us."*

"Getting hold of this product will protect American assets and, with a little luck, it will also provide critical intelligence about Russian financial operations...This is making a difference." And that's where you insert "the end justifies the means."

Krupkin is found dead soon after turning over the phone to Velesky.

Gentry takes on the job at the same time his former girlfriend, Zoya Zakharova, formerly Russian foreign intelligence and a former CIA contract asset, takes on the similar task for a rival bank. This presents some interesting possibilities...

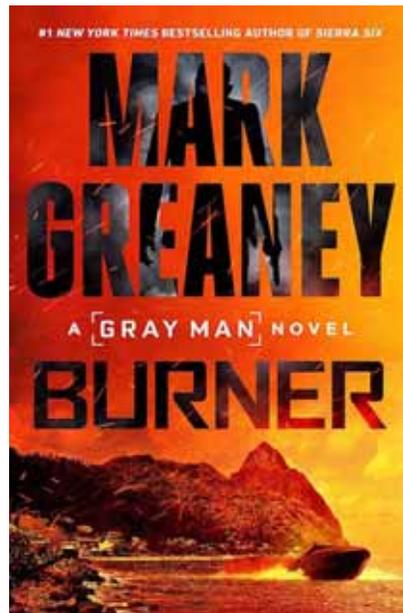
Russian secret service, Ukrainian spies, CIA, they're all chasing each other in a series of encounters that include a shoot-out on a train from Milan to Zurich, as well as wild car chases, underwater knife fight and combat inside an airplane hangar.

The action culminates in New York City in a Manhattan high rise with Ezra Altman, an American forensic accountant, frantically putting all the information together while hand-to-hand combat is happening outside his office. Who will be left standing when the smoke clears? It's anybody's guess, but you won't be able to put down the book until you know.

Greaney's ability to give you two exciting confrontations at the same time in two different places, while moving back and forth with such speed and dexterity, might give you motion sickness. And, it's clear Greaney knows a lot about firearms and close-range combat. He trained alongside military and law enforcement to enhance the reality of it here.

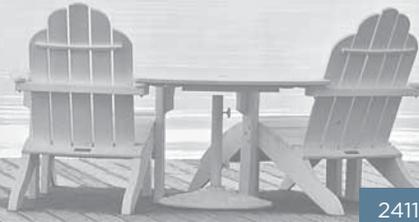
Final word: Lies and secrets from the government on down. The best of intentions are often confused with the "end justifies the means." It's rough-and-tumble reading with rough-and-tumble language. Not a read for the faint of heart, but for those looking for spies, lies, political intrigue and misplaced loyalties. The Gray Man never fails to deliver.

Till next time, happy reading!



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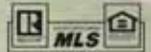
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