

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Woman, Life, Freedom

Matt V · Wednesday, March 22nd, 2023

Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old young woman, was beaten to death by the Iranian morality police for wearing her head scarf loosely. Mahsa Amini who grew up in the Saqqez Kurdistan province, in northwestern Iran was visiting Tehran with her family when she was stopped by the morality police because parts of her hair were showing. Mahsa was getting ready to start university that month and was taken into custody by the morality police for wearing her hijab improperly. She was beaten while in custody, and 2 hours after being detained, her family was notified that Mahsa was in a coma. She passed away a couple days later from, according to authorities, a heart attack (Wendy 1).

The Islamic regime of Iran came to power in 1979 after overthrowing King Reza 'Reza Shah'. The main reason for King Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to step down was his modern views, his support for the United States and foreign nations whose views did not align with those living in Iran. He would also not give any attention to religion and wasn't concerned about making it part of his and or his people's daily lives. The people of Iran are Shia Muslims and King Mohammad Reza, according to Ruhollah Khomeini and his supporters, had no respect or any interest in this religion. The protests of 1978-79 started with students at religious schools coming to the streets, then later Iranian youth, most of whom were immigrants, the majority coming from rural communities. Violence occurred in many of these protests because the king would not step down, many protestors and police were killed. Workers from all industries went on strike. Casualties amongst protestors and violence began to arise in the streets and the king finally stepped down. King Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was suffering from cancer while these protests were going on, fled to America to pursue his medical treatments (Randjbar-Daemi 30).

With the Islamic Regime coming to power came very strict Islamic laws. These laws impacted women more than anyone. Laws that control the way women dress and their behavior. In fact, the only countries that have mandatory hijab laws in the world are Iran and Afghanistan. Women must wear a headscarf while in public. Women cannot sing, work in certain fields, and politics is mainly male dominated. In a recent interview, Sattari, a young woman in Iran, explains, "For more than 40 years the Islamic regime has taken away human rights, suffocated women's rights, stole a countries wealth, destroyed its economy and culture and they still haven't had enough, they are murdering and imprisoning everyone that stands against them."

Women cut their hair to protest and mourn the death of Mahsa Amini. "This is not about Islam. We are all followers of Islam and respect the religion. This is about freedom and choice. This is about a religious orthodoxy that co-opted a popular uprising and took a nation hostage. This nation has

been holding us captive for over 40 years.” (Aslani). Women and men are marching on the streets of not only Iran, but all around the world to raise their voices and stop this violence and control of the government. On social media, as a sign of protest for human and women’s rights women are cutting their hair and creating awareness for this issue. The protestors hope to start a revolution for those who have sacrificed their lives for this cause.



A growing number of women are removing their mandatory head scarves & waving them on the streets of Tehran: a courageous symbol of civil protest against the hijab; forced on women in Iran for decades. Six women so far and it seems they’re just starting! #??????_??????_?????? (Twitter user [Omid Memarian](#))

Six thousand miles away from the United States, the morality police have set up stations in every street and metro station in Iran, where they check women for their hijab and arrest those who are not following the strict rules. Amini is just one of many women who have lost their lives fighting for freedom, equality, and human rights. The UN nor any other organization has taken any action in helping those who have been imprisoned or are in custody for showing parts of their hair. In the upcoming world cup in Qatar, the national Iranian football team has decided to stand with the people of Iran and not sing the national anthem of Iran. The team stated that they will stand with those protesting the death of Mahsa Amini. This act of bravery can lead to being heavily punished

by the Islamic Republic leaders of Iran (Will 1).

The Iranian government has taken away internet access from all Iranians in order to silence the people speaking out against the injustices. They have filtered all social media applications, but despite all the government's efforts, Iranian's have found different ways to connect with the world and raise their voices. "We use filtershekan (filter breakers) to connect to the internet, they have filtered all app stores, every social media networks, all games, and everything that would allow us to reach to outside world." (Aslani). "Iran has taken 15,000 protestors to prisons and has announced to give them the death penalty, they are doing this to deafen and silence us. we need help, and no one is coming to our help." (Sattari). An Iranian hacker group was able to hack into the Iranian nuclear energy program and they have given the Islamic Republic only 24 hours to release all the prisoners arrested for political reasons and if Iran refuses to comply, they will publish all the confidential nuclear energy information publicly. This is just one of the many attempts from the Iranian hacker groups to protect many Iranian citizens. The hackers were able to hack into the national television stations and display the message "Women, Life, Freedom" with pictures of Mahsa Amini and other young women who passed away protesting against the Islamic Republic. Authorities use excessive force; they use metal bullets and tear gas to silence protestors. At least 8 protestors died in the first couple weeks of the protests. Most of them were young women raising their voices against the terrorizing republic who has no value for human rights (SyndiGate Media Inc 1).

Neda Sharghi, an American citizen who was traveling to Iran with her brother Emad Sharghi, when suddenly her brother was taken hostage by the government for political reasons. Her brother is now doing 10 years in political prison for "spying," according to Iranian authorities. She has made many efforts; she has spoken during UN meetings. Months ago, the president of the United States issued an executive order saying that hostage-taking was a national emergency, although so far there hasn't been any attempts by the American government to release American and European citizens imprisoned for political reasons (CQ Roll Call 1-2).

The people of Iran are healing and protesting against Islamic Republic of Iran by not purchasing products from companies that either support or have any relationship with the government. According to a recent interview, prices have decreased 50% or even more on products from companies with a relationship with Ruhollah Khomeini and his supporters. Many protestors stopped working for companies with any relationship to the government and resigned from their positions (Sattari).

The journalist Allan Hogarth of Amnesty International, a leading global human rights organization, explains that "The brave women who are currently taking a stand against these sexist laws, know the risks they are undertaking. Iranian women are uploading pictures of themselves removing their hijabs to protest severe restrictions that prohibit women from exposing their hair in public." The government declared July 12 to be "Hijab and Chastity Day," which means activities will be performed to promote the laws which mandate the hijab for females. Men are standing in solidarity with Iranian women as they remove their headscarves to protest the day. Iran severely restricts women's rights; all women are required to cover their heads in public and those who do not cover their heads or expose some of their hair while covering their heads risk fines or even imprisonment. Three young Iranian women, Monireh, Yasaman and Mojgan, are currently serving more than 30 years in prison simply for handing out flowers to female passengers on a metro train in Tehran whilst unveiled. "The women were filmed, sharing their hopes for a future where all women in Iran would have the freedom to choose what to wear" (Maya). Iranian women are

showing no fear, even risking their lives, 30+ year jail sentences and other punishment by authorities. They are tired of the more than 40 years of living under fear and having unequal and inhumane laws shoved down their throats. “Iranian women will shake the clerical regime by removing their hijab and taking to the streets across Iran to say #No2Hijab. This is called Women Revolution. In Iran, #WalkingUnveiled is a crime. Iranian men will also join us” (Masih Alinejad). ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ Iranian women are healing from the brutality and harsh rules of the morality police through protesting and civil disobedience. They hope to cause a revolution in hopes to regain freedom for the generations of women whom it affects most and whom many were killed and brutally beaten by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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(Featured image from [Wikimedia Commons](#))

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It's Not Just About the Chocolate

Ann Haskins · Tuesday, March 21st, 2023

March is providing an unofficial California festival that serendipitously surveys the ballet-side of the multi-dimensional choreographer/director Christopher Wheeldon.

Earlier this month, Wheeldon was announced as choreographer for *Fred and Ginger*, the film about Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers set for pre-production later this year. The Michael Jackson musical *MJ* that Wheeldon choreographed and directed continues its Broadway run at least to September. Wheeldon nabbed the 2022 Tony for *MJ*'s choreography, an award he previously won for *An American in Paris*.



“Like Water For Chocolate.” Photo by Tristram Kenton

Meanwhile, Wheeldon’s ballet choreography is on view at three California venues this month, including the U.S. premiere of his latest, *Like Water for Chocolate*, a full-length ballet rendition of Laura Esquivel’s book about thwarted lovers, magical realism, and emotion-charged cooking. **American Ballet Theatre** offers the ballet’s U.S. premiere at Costa Mesa’s Segerstrom Center for the Arts with seven performances from March 29-April 2. Another of Wheeldon’s full-length ballets, *Cinderella*, is next up in the **San Francisco Ballet** season with performances from March 31 to April 8 at San Francisco’s War Memorial Opera House. The ballet’s inclusion in the outgoing artistic director’s final season marks a special place in that company’s history and Wheeldon’s career. The casting for SFB’s opening night has the evanescent Misa Kuranaga as *Cinderella*. Kuranaga dazzled audiences here when she guested with Los Angeles Ballet before she joined SFB.

Closer to home, **Los Angeles Ballet** offers a trio of Wheeldon’s abstract one-act ballets at the Broad Stage in Santa Monica March 16-18. New artistic director Melissa Barak danced for Wheeldon while at New York City Ballet and in his short-lived company, a relationship that may bode well for LAB in the future. The upcoming LAB shows include the encore of *Ghosts* (2010) which was seen last year as part of the former artistic directors’ final season, plus company premieres of *Morphoses* (2008), a quartet set to music of György Ligeti, and *Fool’s Paradise* (2007), a large group work referencing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with music by Joby Talbot, a frequent Wheeldon collaborator who also composed the score for *Chocolate*.



Los Angeles Ballet. Photo by Reed Hutchinson

ABT's U.S. premiere of Wheeldon's three-act ballet *Like Water for Chocolate* is highly anticipated. There was a livestream of one Royal Ballet performance of *Chocolate*, but unfortunately not to any LA area theaters, making the ABT performances the first chance to see the ballet.

As with most of Wheeldon full-length ballets, *Chocolate* is a co-production with ABT teaming with Britain's **Royal Ballet** where Wheeldon is Artistic Associate. The Royal Ballet presented the world premiere last June. New York won't see the ballet until late June when it opens ABT's New York season at the Metropolitan Opera. Not only does SoCal gets the bragging rights about the ballet's U.S. premiere, the premiere here further cements ABT's bi-coastal status as the resident dance company at Orange County's Segerstrom Center for the Arts.



Christopher Wheeldon. Photo courtesy of the artist

Wheeldon recently spoke to press about the new ballet, its long incubation from his first encounter with the story, the unexpected positive side of pandemic postponement, and the upcoming U.S. premiere.

Wheeldon first encountered Esquivel's book indirectly during a period of adjustment, if not culture shock. Raised in Britain, he had trained and danced with the Royal Ballet before moving to New York to dance with New York City Ballet. The man who one day would win Broadway and international ballet accolades began his New York career in an ignominious apartment that looked out on brick wall.



The Royal Ballet “Like Water For Chocolate.” Photo by Tristram Kenton

“It was 1993, I was battling a bad case of homesickness and had to get out of that apartment,” he recounted, “I went to the movies and saw the film version of *Like Water for Chocolate*.

Then he read the book.

“I loved the family saga and the magical realism,” Wheeldon recalled, “and it also was the beginning of my journey falling in love with Mexico. Growing up in the UK, we did not have Mexican food or its culture. I began to discover those things in New York, especially after I met conductor Alondra de la Parra who became my gateway into Mexico.”

Parra who grew up in Mexico and first studied conducting there, receives credit as Music Consultant for the ballet and will conduct both the SoCal and New York ABT performances. Parra also introduced Wheeldon to Laura Esquivel. The author and the choreographer developed a strong rapport that led to talk about the potential for a ballet. At that time, Wheeldon had never done a full-length, story ballet.



The Royal Ballet in “Like Water For Chocolate.” Photo by Tristram Kenton

“I grew up up in what can be called the William Forsythe era when shorter, physical, abstract works were what companies were looking for,” Wheeldon recalled. Those also were the ballets bringing Wheeldon high praise and attention. He was ready to explore making a full-length story ballet, but wanted more experience before he tackled the challenges inherent in *Chocolate*.

His first venture into the realm of the full-length story ballet came in 2011 with *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, a rendering and riff on Lewis Carroll that the Royal Ballet co-produced with the National Ballet of Canada. SoCal saw *Alice* in fall 2012 when the National Ballet of Canada brought the ballet as part of the Music Center dance season.



The Royal Ballet in Christopher Wheeldon's "Alice." Photo by Johan Persson

Wheeldon's full-length *Cinderella* was another co-production, this time with San Francisco Ballet and Dutch National Ballet. Amsterdam hosted the 2012 world premiere and in 2013, SFB presented the 2013 US premiere. The special relationship SFB developed with Wheeldon is indicated by the selection of *Cinderella* in the final season programmed by retiring artistic director Helgi Tomasson.

Discussions about Wheeldon's reputation for choreography often emphasize the physicality of his movement, especially in his exquisite pas de deux. Sometimes his command of humor doesn't get the full attention it deserves. A clip of a prior San Francisco Ballet performance of *Cinderella* is at [Christopher Wheeldon's site](#). The segment with Cinderella's two stepsisters and [a video clip of the Queen of Hearts in *Alice*](#) capture better than any words Wheeldon's alacrity with humor in his ballets.



Ellen Rose Hummel and Elizabeth Powell as the Stepsisters in San Francisco Ballet's production of Christopher Wheeldon's Cinderella. Photo by Erik Tomasson

After polishing his skills with several successful full length ballets, in 2019 Wheeldon felt ready, his relationship with Esquivel and Para had matured, and work began on a full-length ballet

interpretation of *Like Water for Chocolate*. The Royal Ballet premiere of *Chocolate* was scheduled for November 2020 with ABT planning for the U.S. premiere in 2021. With the onset of the Covid pandemic in early 2020, *Chocolate*, like so much of the world was put on hold.

“When the pandemic hit, I had broken the ice and knew the direction the ballet would take,” he recalled. “The pandemic gave me lots of time to think it through and also to consider and navigate the cultural shifts occurring. I was working hand in hand with our Mexican collaborators, not literally putting Mexico onstage, but with the goal to abstract the culture in the book.”

Despite the disappointment and disruption, Wheeldon credits the pandemic postponement with deepening the ballet that resulted. Some of that pandemic time included Wheeldon’s time in Mexico with Esquivel.



Marcelino Sambé as Pedro in “Like Water for Chocolate.” Photo by Tristram Kenton

Wheeldon is quick to admit his ballet, like the 1992 film, departs from the book but retains the central elements. The love story of Tita and Pedro remains the pulse of the ballet as does Tita’s otherworldly gift of imbuing her emotions into others through her cooking. Pedro loves Tita but as the youngest sister, family tradition holds she can never marry but must devote her life to caring for their mother. The matriarch instead offers the oldest sister and Pedro marries her to remain near Tita as part of the family, while repressed emotions roil like molten lava below the surface. In a Royal Ballet preview event, Wheeldon explained the rough translation of the title refers to something boiling over which finally occurs.

That Royal Ballet preview event includes Royal Ballet’s opening night Pedro and Tita (Marcelino Sambé and Francesca Hayward) rehearsing a sensuous Wheeldon-esque pas de deux where the lovers never actually touch.

(The rehearsal starts about 8 minutes into the Preview on [YouTube](#).)

The opening night leads for the U.S. premiere are ABT principals Cassandra Trenery as Tita and Herman Cornejo as Pedro. Trenery was part of the recent press event and talked about dancing Tita in the SoCal opening, also her first time dancing a Wheeldon ballet.



American Ballet Theatre's Cassandra Trenery. Photo by Quinn Wharton

"I have always wanted to work with Chris. His movement has a liquid quality with an off balance action that's very physical. It requires finding the group effort in the pas de deux, what we are trying to say to each other." Trenery explained. "Chris sometimes will read passages from the book to help us find the correct intention in the story and unlock the key moments."

So no need to head to New York to sample what makes Wheeldon so in demand. Besides, the national tour of Broadway's *MJ* arrives here just before the December holidays. More preview videos are at [Wheeldon's official website](#) and YouTube.



Christopher Wheeldon. Photo by Lindsey Thomas

Upcoming live Wheeldon ballet performances:

Los Angeles Ballet in *Ghosts*, *Fool's Paradise*, and *Morphoses*. At The Broad Stage, 1310 11th St., Santa Monica; Thurs.-Sat., March 16-18, 7:30 pm, \$84-\$137, \$76-\$124 seniors, students, military & children. [Los Angeles Ballet](#).

American Ballet Theatre in the U.S. premiere of *Like Water for Chocolate*. At Segerstrom Center for the Arts, 600 Town Center Dr., Costa Mesa; Wed.-Sat., March 29-Sat., April 1, 7:30 pm, Sat. & Sun., April 1-2, 2 pm., \$29-\$250. [SCFTA](#).

San Francisco Ballet in *Cinderella*. At the War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness, San Francisco; Fri.-Sat., March 31-April 1 & April 7-8, 8 pm, Sat.-Sun., April 1-2 & 8-9, 2 p.m., Tues.-Thurs., April 4-6, 7:30 pm, \$29-\$455. [San Francisco Ballet](#).

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Review: *Yours, Creature* by Jessica Cuello

John Brantingham · Friday, March 17th, 2023

Yours, Creature, the newest poetry collection by Jessica Cuello, is a collection of epistolary persona poems written from the point-of-view of Mary Shelley. These poems capture the romance

that we as a culture often project on what it must have been to be Shelley and also the horror too. Shelley's life has often been idealized and seen as beautifully artistic, but of course, she lived through the trauma of losing multiple children and her mother. Her father was distant to the point of abuse, and Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley were sexist and controlling. Cuello captures all of these aspects of her life, and she cultivates an understanding of her life so that those trials that she goes through help us to see what is universal in her pain and her life. She who was isolated and often neglected becomes emotionally understandable to we who have lived through the last few years of self-isolation and distancing. Before the pandemic, of course, we were already suffering from the depersonalization endemic to modern society. Cuello's Shelley would have recognized that and understood us. She is one of us and reading this book for me was like exploring the consciousness not only of one of the great writers of English literature but mine as well. *Yours, Creature* is a work of exceptional sensitivity and thoughtfulness.

These letters, especially toward the beginning of the collection, are addressed to her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, who died shortly after giving birth to Mary Shelley, and they address an emptiness that so many people feel. These letters become emblematic of those feelings of exile and isolation that are so present for many people. Compounded with this is her father's, William Godwin, rejection of her. She addresses these feelings in one poem:

. . . Father hated me for being sad.

 . . . I was a tent stitch
 on the pocket of his mind, a grafted

 cut in his bark of book (16).

She feels like an afterthought in her own world, and the true Godwin seems to have used her in this way after his remarriage and certainly after she became pregnant with Percy Bysshe Shelley's child before they were married, and he would not see her. She is used as status or for sex and then is forgotten once she is no longer useful to the people in her life. This isolation is so often a part of the human condition and especially true for many women who are neglected and forgotten. Cuello, however, also shows us the value of an artistic life through Shelley's letters to her creature, her creation in *Frankenstein* to whom she writes:

. . . Sometimes I listened
 for you when I touched P. [Percy]

 You came with his voice.
 His hand could draw you (66-67).

Her creation becomes a way for her to survive the traumas of her life. In this way, *Yours, Creature*, is a discussion of how the artist's life can help to make the pain of life more bearable.

Cuello also develops a character who is trying to fix her past relationship with her present relationships, which is as doomed an experiment for her as it is for all who have tried to do exactly that. That might be most or even all of us.

Until I have a father

 [Percy] can be my father;

Half a father, door-turned
father, father of the residence,

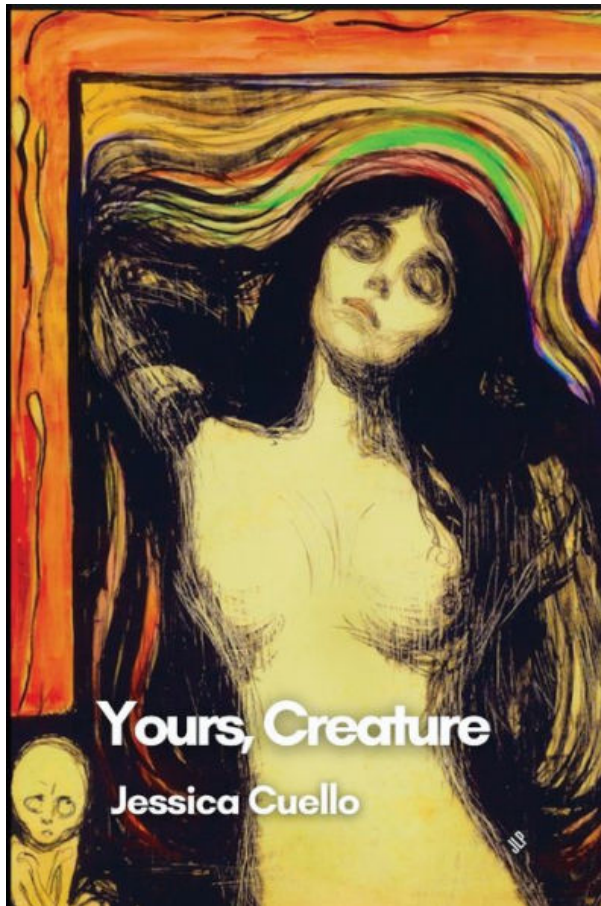
father broke and broken,
father borrowing from

the child, father drubbing,
father pages, father lies (34).

This is so often the way with our relationships. Because those people who should have loved us well haven't, we expect those in our current relationships to step up and fix the wounds inside of us. Of course, there is no way they could possibly do this, and they shouldn't. They are most likely unaware of what we hope from them, and so the process is doomed to failure. Percy Bysshe Shelley failed Mary Shelley on many fronts, but Cuello's poetry seems to suggest that even if he hadn't treated her as poorly as he had, theirs would have been an unsatisfying relationship from the beginning. The missing mother and the absented father seem to have set Cuello's Shelley up for a difficult if not impossible emotional life.

Of course, there is no way to be sure to what degree this represents the actual life of Mary Shelley, but the collection does dig deeply into a profound human truth about the nature of depersonalization and how we seek love when we are in a world that seems to be bereft of it. I feel Mary Shelley's pain deeply because it has been my pain often. I think it has been all of our pain, and Cuello's exploration of that aspect of the genius of Mary Shelley opens up new ways for me to see myself. It also got me thinking about Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the pain of all of the characters involved. *Yours, Creature* is truly an exceptional creation.

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Yours, Creature by Jessica Cuello

Purchase *Yours, Creature* by Jessica Cuello

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Minimalist *Doll's House*, *Best We Could*

David Sheward · Monday, March 13th, 2023

Before Jamie Lloyd's minimalist and strangely powerful revival of *A Doll's House*, Henrik Ibsen's prophetic proto-feminist masterpiece, begins, audience members at the Hudson Theater are treated to the spectacle of Oscar-winning Jessica Chastain sitting in a simple chair on a revolving turntable. As Chastain is spun slowly around, she fixes the audience with a cold stare. Many whip out their camera-phones to take videos or pictures, as if she were an art exhibit. This pre-show photo op reinforces Ibsen's theme of society treating women like dolls or objects. Chastain is objectified by the audience just as Ibsen's heroine Nora is objectified by her condescending husband Torvald. The year of the play (1875) is superimposed above Soutra Gilmour's stark, bare setting to remind us that such sexism has been around for a long time and it hasn't gone completely away.



Okieriete Onaodowan and Jessica Chastain in *A Doll's House*.

Credit: Emilio Madrid

What follows is a bare-bones yet densely-packed staging of a reliable classic. Apart from a few chairs, there is no scenery and no props. Nora's children are prerecorded voices. Co-costume designers Gilmour and Enver Chakartash have dressed the cast in basic black. Apart from Torvald's explosion of anger when his middle-class world may be crumbling, the actors speak in whispers. Lloyd has stripped the play to its essence, a stark journey of a woman discovering her identity apart from the male-dominated society she inhabits. What starts as a somewhat forced melodrama about blackmail becomes a searing manifesto of women's liberation a century before the modern movement took hold. Nora appears to be a feather-headed housewife, beholden to a powerful spouse who has just gained a high position at a local bank. But we gradually discover she has committed forgery in order to save his health. When an equally desperate victim of institutional inequity named Krogstad threatens her and Torvald wilts under the pressure, she breaks free and emerges as an individual, renouncing her domestic bonds.

Lloyd's precise, elemental staging and Amy Herzog's idiomatic update of the script gives us Nora's story with no frills or distractions. The power struggle between the characters becomes clearer as when Nora and Krogstad battle for space on one chair and Torvald's shadow threatens to engulf Nora (Jon Clark created the noir-ish lighting).



Arian Moayed and Jessica Chastain in *A Doll's House*.

Courtesy A Doll's House

The acting is just as raw, basic and intense. Nora is usually played as a giddy, clueless child until her big speech in the last act and then suddenly she becomes Superwoman. Chastain chooses to exhibit Nora's strength and courage from the beginning of the play so that her transformation from doll-baby to independent feminist pioneer is not so jarring. This Nora is a multi-faceted woman with a different personality for each of the men in her life. With Torvald, she is the childish sprite, dancing for her daddy's approval. With Dr. Rank, she is a sly, fun-loving seductress. With Krogstad, a fierce combatant willing to try any means to save her reputation. Chastain conveys all these Noras in a dazzling performance.

Arian Moayed's Torvald is a petty tyrant, tantrum-prone brat, and finally a crawling supplicant as Nora discovers her true strength. Okieriete Onaodowan finds the humanity in the blackmailing Krogstad and Jesmille Darbouze displays the toughness and compassion of Kristine, Nora's girlhood friend who must make her own way in a man's world and eventually finds love with Krogstad. Michael Patrick Thornton, an actor who uses a wheelchair, is well-cast as Dr. Rank, whose failing health does not reflect his rakishness. His scenes with Nora have an unexpected flirtatious spark. Tasha Lawrence makes the most of the small part of Anne-Marie, Nora's nanny, also a victim of society's disapproval.



Okieriete Onaodowan and Jessica Chastain in *A Doll's House*.

Courtesy A Doll's House

A friend asked if there is no scenery, how does Lloyd stage the famous door slam which ends the play? There are no spoilers here, but suffice it to say that the finale of this inventive revival is as theatrical and surprising as all that precedes it. This is a very sturdy, although unfurnished *Doll's House*.

Emily Feldman's *The Best We Could* (a family tragedy), at Manhattan Theater Club's Off-Broadway City Center Stage I, is also performed on a bare stage and delivers an emotional wallop despite its spareness. Feldman's telling of her story of a father-daughter road trip is influenced by Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, with a Stage Manager narrating the action, playing supporting parts, and acting as God-like figure controlling the characters. (*Best* is even closer to Wilder's one-act *The Happy Journey to Camden to Trenton*, which also features a Stage Manager, bare stage, and involves a family auto sojourn.)



Frank Wood and Aya Cash in *The Best We Could* (a family tragedy)

Credit: Marc J. Franklin

Just as Wilder wrote about the universality in the everyday, Feldman presents a seemingly ordinary story filled with apparently mundane details which reveals the joys and despair of the human experience. Ella (moving Aya Cash) is a disorganized but loving daughter driving cross-country with her eccentric dad Lou (touchingly paternal Frank Wood) to pick up a rescue dog replacement for a recently departed and much adored pet. Along the way, they visit Lou's best friend Marc (affable Brian D. Coats) who may be able to help Lou re-enter the work force after a long hiatus. There are numerous funny scenes with Lou speaking to total strangers (all played by the versatile Maureen Sebastian as the Stage Manager figure, called Maps), much to Ella's embarrassment. We also flashback and forward to vignettes with Ella's mom Peg (an amusingly sharp-edged Constance Shulman) who is demanding she and Lou sell the house and move into a smaller space.



Constance Schulman, Aya Cash, and Frank Wood in *The Best We Could* (a family tragedy).

Credit: Marc J. Franklin

Feldman creates a carefully-observed portrait of modern-day America as Ella's loose, unstructured lifestyle clashes with her parents' strict reliance on one's employment providing your identity. When Ella learns the real reason for Lou's joblessness, their relationship fractures and the subtitle becomes alarmingly real. (Sebastian is especially intense as a former co-worker of Lou's.) Daniel Aukin's direction is subtle but hits the comic moments just right, delivering a perfect balance between humor and pathos.

Both *A Doll's House* and *The Best We Could* demonstrate that with the right cast, play and director, all that's needed is two planks and a passion for absorbing theater.

***A Doll's House*: March 9—June 4. Hudson Theatre, 141 W. 44th St., NYC. Running time: 105 mins. with no intermission. [Hudson Theatre](#).**

***The Best We Could* (a family tragedy): March 1—26. Manhattan Theater Club at New York City Center, 131 W. 55th St., NYC. Running time: 90 mins. with no intermission. [New York City Center](#).**

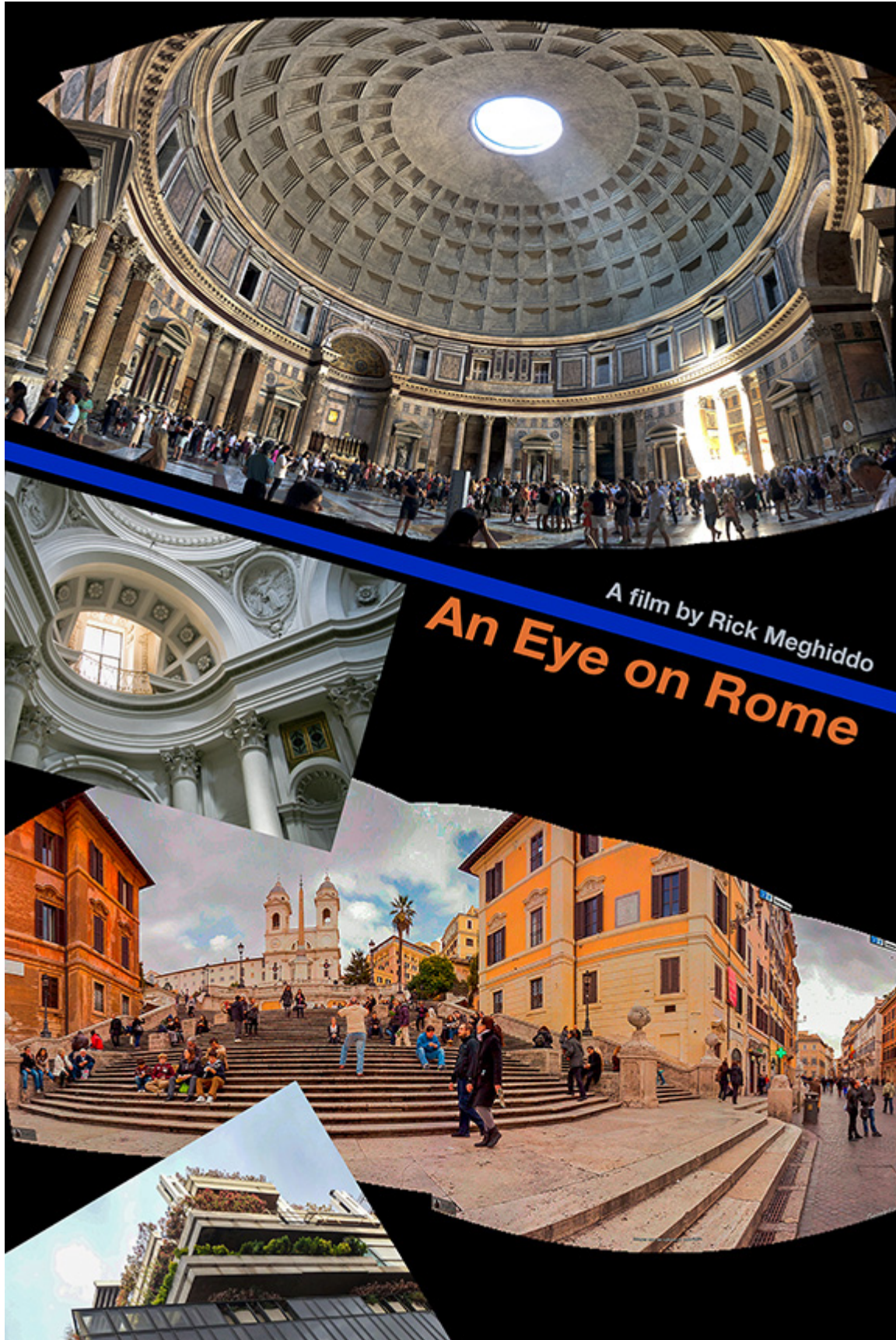
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An Eye on Rome

Rick Meghiddo · Sunday, March 12th, 2023

Rome is difficult to describe; one has to feel it through all the senses. Defined as “The Eternal City,” it implies that its past goes back to immemorial times, and yet, it is a city of an eternal present.

The accompanying documentary, *An Eye on Rome*, attempts to give the spectator a general idea of the city’s main components: history, culture, and people. It is presented from a personal viewpoint.



History

The 2700 years old myth of Romulus and Remus, twin brothers abandoned on the banks of the river Tiber to die, fed by a she-wolf, and saved by the god Tiberius, tells us that they chose the location of the new city amid seven hills, but not why. The location is unique. The climate is temperate, and the Tiber River reaches the close-by Mediterranean Sea, allowing boats to come and leave without fearing storms. This means that the supply of goods is unimpeded.

Early Romans learned art and philosophy from the Etruscan and the Greeks but gave them a grandiose scale to reflect the power of a growing empire. They built not just palaces and temples but buildings for entertainment and celebrations: circuses, amphitheaters, *thermae*, markets, and commemorative arches and columns.

Despite its military power, the Roman empire collapsed from within. It was conquered by a new ideology, Christianity, which was brought to Rome by enslaved people from Judea. When the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (306-337 AD) adopted the nascent religion, the church was born as a physical institution.

The film shows some turning points of architectural evolution in the city, from Ancient Roman to Early Christian, Renaissance, Baroque, and Contemporary. The Pantheon, a temple of all the gods, remains a great example of Roman creativity. First founded by Marcus Agrippa, it was designed in 114 by Emperor Trajan's architect, Apollodorus of Damascus. A sphere of approximately forty-three meters in diameter (142 feet) defines its geometry. The large expanse of its roof is made of concrete, a Roman invention. The building's only light source is the nine-meter diameter *oculus* on the top. In 609 AD, it was turned into a Catholic church.

Santa Sabina (483 AD) tells us about the new directionality given to the Roman basilica. At one extreme, the entrance; at the other, the altar. Four centuries later, Santa Maria in Cosmedin became an elaborated typology of a church, with a tall *campanile* or bell tower as part of it. In the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere (1140-43), the *campanile* is already of Romanesque style. The interior is decorated with late 13th-century mosaics.

In 1503, Donato Bramante (1444-1514) was the first to conceive St. Peter's Basilica. After his death, several architects tried to continue the project: Giuliano da Sangallo, Raphael, and Baldassare Peruzzi. Almost forty years later, in 1547, long after painting the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo was pressured by Pope Paul III to become in charge of St. Peter's Basilica. He was by then seventy-two and worked on it until his death at eighty-eight. His most important contribution was the simplification of Bramante's plan. He devised four massive piers to support the dome instead of the many columns of Bramante's plan. He also redesigned the dome, constructed of two shells of brick. As it stands today, St. Peter's has been extended with a nave by Carlo Maderno, who also designed its *façade*.



Saint Peter's church and piazza



View of St. Peter's from above

Gian Lorenzo Bernini's (1598-1680) first work at St. Peter's was the baldachin, a massive spiraling gilded bronze canopy over the tomb of St. Peter. When commissioned to design the piazza, he created two massive semi-circular colonnades, resulting in an oval shape within which a gathering of citizens could witness the Pope's appearance.

The architectures of Borromini (1599-1667) and Bernini remain magnificent contributions to the city. Both being of almost the same age, they were fierce competitors with different characters.

Borromini was melancholic and quick in a temper. Bernini was a charming courtier in his pursuit of important commissions.

In 1634, Borromini received his first major independent commission to design San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, also known as San Carlino. The church is considered by many to be an exemplary masterpiece of Roman Baroque architecture. Later, from 1640 to 1650, he worked on the design of the church of Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza. The structure's geometry is a symmetric six-pointed star; from the center of the floor, the cornice looks like two equilateral triangles forming a hexagon.



Borromini's Dome of Sant'Ivo, 1642-1660

Besides being an architect and a city planner, Bernini was an extraordinary sculptor. In his twenties, he created masterpieces such as Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius (1619); Rape of Proserpina (1621-22); and Apollo and Daphne (1622-25). He created the Ecstasy of Saint Teresa (1651) and the Four Rivers Fountain in Piazza Navona in his fifties.

Another genial artist preceded Borromini and Bernini: Caravaggio (1571-1610). He lived most of his artistic life in Rome. Besides his skills in the dramatic use of chiaroscuro, he is considered the first independent artist to define subjects by himself. He vividly expressed crucial moments and scenes, often featuring violent struggles, torture, and death. Caravaggio's influence can be seen in the works of Rubens and Rembrandt. He died aged thirty-eight.



Bernini's Pluto and Prosperina, 1622



Bernini's Cardsharps, 1594

Culture

Italian culture is the amalgamation of thousands of years of heritage and tradition. It is steeped in the arts, family, architecture, music, and food.

Family is a significant value within Italian culture. Their family solidarity is focused on extended family rather than the West's idea of "the nuclear family," of just a mom, dad, and kids. Italians have frequent family gatherings, often celebrating around food.

For Italians, food isn't just nourishment; it is life. Italian cuisine has influenced food culture worldwide and is viewed as an art form. Wine, cheese, and pasta are essential parts of Italian meals. Family gatherings are frequent, and the extended networks of families.<

Italy takes dressing very seriously. It is home to a number of world-renowned fashion houses, including Armani, Gucci, Benetton, Versace and Prada, Valentino, Ferragamo, and Dolce e Gabbana. Italians are also great designers of automobiles and household furnishings.



Lamborghini Aventador, 2013. Designer: Filippo Perini



Sofa, Designed by Studio 65, Bocca, 1970

People

Italians think differently. The concept of “azerare,” thinking anew, combined with a deep knowledge of history, is one of the basic components of Italian creativity. Italians are also great communicators. Their body language is frequently more important than their verbal one. Their self-deprecating humor makes it difficult for someone to feel offended by a negative comment.

Personal

An Eye on Rome looks at the city as an insider and an outsider. As one who had lived in Rome for seven years, studying architecture, its monuments, its arts, and interacting daily with its people, I am aware of some aspects of the city hidden behind its facades. As an outsider, Eternal Rome remains for us a source of inspiration.



Mixed-use office-residential by architect Lucio Passarelli

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Marcia Tiago Discusses How You Can Be An Effective Leader In Your Industry?

Our Friends · Friday, March 10th, 2023

Leadership is a key element of success in any industry. It's not only about having the technical skills and knowledge to do the job well – it's also about inspiring and motivating others, setting goals and working towards them, managing resources effectively, and leading by example.

Having great leadership qualities can give you an edge over your competition in today's ever-competitive business world. But how do you become an effective leader? Here are some tips from expert **Marcia Tiago** in Miami, FL, to help you on your way:

1. Find Your Passion And Pursue It Relentlessly

The first step to [becoming an effective leader](#) is relentlessly finding and pursuing your passion. If you're not passionate about what you're doing, motivating and inspiring others to do the same will be challenging. When you're passionate about something, it shows in your work ethic, dedication, and commitment. Pursue your passions with a single-minded focus and let them drive you to success.

2. Set The Tone For Your Team

As a leader, **Marcia Tiago** says it's vital that you set the tone for your team. This means putting expectations high and leading by example. Show your team members what it means to be dedicated and committed to achieving goals. Let them see firsthand how hard work and determination goes into success. They will likely follow suit when you set the tone for your team.

One way to do this is to set SMART goals for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely. By setting outlined objectives that are attainable and realistic, your team will be more motivated to reach them.

3. Delegate And Let Others Take The Lead

One of the most important things a leader can do is delegate tasks and let others take the lead. This doesn't mean that you should abdicate all responsibility, but it does mean that you should trust others to handle specific tasks and projects. By delegating, you free up your time to focus on more important matters. It also allows others to step up and show their leadership potential.

4. Be Decisive And Confident In Your Decisions

Marcia Tiago says a leader must be decisive and confident in their decisions. This doesn't mean that you should always go with your gut instinct, but it does mean that you should trust your intuition when making decisions. Be confident in your abilities, and don't second-guess yourself. Others will look to you for guidance and decision-making, so you must always exude confidence.

5. Communicate Clearly And Concisely

Communication is one of the most important aspects of being a leader. You need to communicate clearly and concisely with your team so that everything is clear about what needs to be done. When everyone is on the same page, it makes achieving goals much more accessible. Practice active listening to understand better what others say and provide feedback when necessary.

One way to make communication more effective is to use visual aids. This could be anything from whiteboards to presentations or even videos. Visual aids are a great way to keep everyone on the same page and ensure that all instructions are understood clearly.

6. Be Flexible And Open To Change

Change is inevitable, so you need to be flexible and open to change as a leader. Things will never go exactly as planned, so you need to be able to adjust accordingly. Being inflexible will only lead to frustration and resentment from those who have to follow your lead . . . not exactly the qualities of an effective leader!

7. Build Relationships With Those You Lead

Marcia Tiago says it's only possible to be effective by building relationships with those you lead. Trust is essential for any relationship, but especially so in a leadership role. Get to know your team members personally, so they feel comfortable coming to you with problems or concerns. When people feel like they can trust you, they are more likely than not going to follow your lead.

8. Embrace Failure

Failure is inevitable, but as a leader, you must embrace failure instead of fearing it. Failure is simply an opportunity to learn and grow. If you're afraid of failing, then chances are good that you'll never reach your full leadership potential. Learn from your mistakes, make adjustments, and keep moving forward.

These are just a few ways leaders can become more effective in their roles.

Final Thoughts

Leadership is a challenging yet rewarding task, but anyone can become an effective leader with the right approach and attitude. Remember to stay focused on your passions, set the tone for your team, delegate tasks, be decisive and confident in your decisions, communicate clearly and concisely, embrace failure, build relationships with those you lead, and remain flexible and open to change. With these strategies, you will be well on your way to becoming a successful leader.

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