Reviews (Films / Documentaries / TV Shows / Podcasts)

All Quiet on the Western Front [film].
Directed by Edward Berger. 2022.

Amusement Park Films; Rocket Science Productions; Sliding Down Rainbows Entertainment; Netflix.
147 minutes.

War is a nightmare. Imagine yourself in a muddy, rat-and-lice-infested trench and being there for days or weeks while dead bodies surround you. Not only that, but imagine joining something that is beyond your wildest expectations. Now imagine you are with a bunch of young high school students. This was the case for the Imperial German Army in 1917, as young men enlisted, albeit unknowingly, to join the bloody frontlines of what is known as the Great War or World War I. In the 2022 Netflix adaptation of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, director Edward Berger recreates the horrors of war on both the French and German sides of World War I. The Netflix adaptation is loosely based on Erich Maria Remarque's 1929 novel of the same name, which has been previously adapted in 1930 and 1979. This is Edward Berger's fifth film, and while he is not known for directing war films, his unique style of capturing the "essence" of a subject is perfectly suited for a movie like *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Berger claims his style was influenced by movies such as *Apocalypse Now* and *There Will be Blood*, where he drew inspiration for how to capture the essence of war, politics, and drama. While *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a war film, it is not your typical *Inglorious Basterds* or Quentin Tarantino action genre. Mixing fiction and history, the movie captures the essence of war rather than the romanticized version seen in cliché heroic war films.

When you think of war films, *Saving Private Ryan* or *Dunkirk* come to mind, with the heroic Americans and British emerging victorious at the end of the film. Berger's new four-time Oscar winning masterpiece captures war from a different angle. In media focusing on World War I, Germany is commonly portrayed as the faceless antagonist, filling the role of unambiguous enemy; the men who make up the military are not individuals but merely a mob. However, in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the audience witnesses the painful reality of what the German soldiers faced on the frontlines, which humanizes them. Taking place on the Western Front in France near the end of the war in 1917 and 1918, the story is seen mainly through the eyes of Paul Bäumer, a newly enlisted young German soldier. The film focuses on both the experience of Paul and his friends as well as the major political and military leaders involved in the war, including German State Secretary Matthias Erzberger, a real member of the German Reichstag; General Friedrichs, a fictional commander of the Imperial German Army; and Supreme Allied Commander Ferdinand Foch, a real French general. The movie captures the angle of war and politics from both sides as it unfolds.

The movie opens with an unexpected outbreak of warfare in the trenches. Bombings, gunfire, and smoke can be seen, showcasing the severity of the war. In

the trenches, a German soldier named Heinrich is seen hiding in fear as a squad member approaches and forces Heinrich to move forward, leaving the relative safety of the trenches. Running across no man's land, he ducks down and finds himself surrounded by the dead and dying. Unable to turn back, he fires his gun until he runs out of ammo and then pulls out his shovel to continue the fight. As he advances, Heinrich encounters French and German soldiers fighting, and he ends up stabbing a French soldier. As his shovel enters the chest of a soldier, the scene goes black, the title of the movie in German flashing across the screen. Cut to a scene revealing the grim aftermath of war: a pile of bodies. Several men strip the fallen German soldiers of their uniforms and boots, while others move bodies and stack coffins. Blood-soaked bags full of uniforms are loaded onto a train and then a truck, which transports the clothing to a factory. There, the uniforms are washed, resewn, and repaired. The scene shifts to Paul Bäumer and his friends in 1917, their faces beaming with anticipation as they prepare to enlist along with many of their classmates. Their spirits are further lifted by an impassioned speech from their principal, extolling the virtues of serving in the war. Joining the conflict is depicted as a noble cause, a chance to bring honor to the Kaiser and to Germany. With promises of triumph in Paris, the principal's speech inspires thunderous cheers from Paul, his friends, and the other young men.

The scene then cuts to a line of newly enlisted Germans getting their uniforms. Paul notices there is already a person's name on his uniform, that of Heinrich, the soldier from the first scene. The enlister sees this and tells Paul that this happens a lot and quickly rips Heinrich's name off Paul's new uniform, implying the cycle of violence keeps repeating itself. The next scene shows Paul and his friends smiling and excitedly donning their new uniforms. They are officially deployed. As they march, they sing songs about marriage and life after war, which gives rather a sad foreshadowing of what is yet to come. Paul and his friends are loaded onto a truck occupied by an officer with a serious look on his face welcoming them to "war." Upon entering the war zone, scenes of wounded and dead bodies are on full display. Paul and his friends enter the rainy, drenched trenches, and their attitude changes as scenes of explosions, gunfire, and gas are shown, with the lieutenant telling them that this is their home now. Paul then meets a man named Stanislaus Katczinsky, or Kat, who gives him food and tells him it will only get worse. Later in the scene, artillery fire rains down on the trenches where Paul and his comrades seek refuge underneath a bunker, which ultimately collapses from the forces of the explosions. Paul wakes up amidst the rubble, but he is rescued by his friends. As he walks around, surveying the piles of dead bodies, he sees that one of his friends has died and takes the dog tag from him.

The scene transitions to German State Secretary Matthias Erzberger meeting with the military administration to begin their talks of armistice with the French. In direct contrast to the political machinations occurring, where world leaders move military troops without acknowledgment that their forces are composed of individual people, the film cuts to Paul and Kat stealing a goose from a farmer,

which they bring back to cook with Paul's friends: Albert Kropp, Franz Müller, and another soldier named Tjaden. They all make jokes about the farmer, the goose, and happily sing. Later, the men encounter a group of local French women, who Müller leaves with, implying he has gone to spend the night. As Müller departs, Kropp, Kat, Tjaden, and Paul talk about life after the war. Tjaden tells his comrades that he is a corporal and dreams of becoming a military policeman. Paul and Kat are using an outdoor bathroom when Kat, who is illiterate, asks Paul to read him a letter from his wife. In the letter, she asks when he will come home. Kat is frustrated, worried about how he will be able to go back to peacetime after the war. In contrast to such a serious scene, the following one sees the return of Müller with the scarf of the French girl he has spent the night with, which is passed on to Kat, Kropp, Paul, and Tjaden, who all make jokes at his expense.

The next scene shows Paul's friends on a mission to find missing soldiers. They arrive at a freight station, where Paul enters an empty building and, to his horror, discovers the bodies of the missing soldiers. Kat and his group arrive, and he remarks to Paul that the dead soldiers were idiots for taking their masks off too early, implying they died of gas inhalation. The scene cuts to a train with Secretary Erzberger and a German delegation heading to Compiègne in France to negotiate a ceasefire. In another scene, German General Friedrichs enters his military compound, where he is met by Major Von Brixdorf. The General, who opposes armistice, rants about how the French are forcing them to agree to unfair terms. Ultimately, he orders an attack on the French lines, sending Paul's regiment to the front. Meanwhile, Secretary Erzberger, who has arrived at Compiègne with his delegation, meets a disgruntled General Ferdinand Foch, who gives them seventy-two hours to accept the Allied terms, or else war will continue.

The movie continues with graphic scenes of warfare, as Paul and his comrades push through the trenches. Amidst the chaos of rumbling tanks and echoing explosions, Tjaden is brutally injured, and Kropp dies, burned alive by French flamethrowers after being shot. Paul is later separated from his regiment and is hiding in a hole, when a French soldier spots him and attempts to shoot him. An explosion hits the French soldier, knocking him off his feet and into the crater with Paul. The two fight, with Paul gaining the upper hand before he fatally stabs the French soldier. Paul sobs in regret as he looks through the French soldier's belongings and discovers a photo of the man's wife and child. This particular scene effectively showcases the horrors of war, as many of those enlisted had lives back home with families. Scenes of atrocity and horror are juxtaposed with scenes of the secretary and the general, whose day-to-day lives are largely untouched by the grotesque realities of the front, symbolizing the corruption and politics associated with World War I. Fast forwarding, the movie continues with more of Paul's friends dying, including Kat, Müller, and Tjaden. Despite surviving his initial injury, Tjaden ultimately takes his own life, realizing that his dreams of becoming a military policeman are impossible because his leg will soon be amputated. It is finally 1918, and the German delegation signs the Armistice in Compiègne,

declaring that the war will end six hours from the time of signing. On that fateful day, Paul finds himself alone, without his friends and his regiment, making the final push when he gets into a scuffle with a French soldier. As they fight, the French soldier tells Paul it is 11 a.m. that the war is over but, unfortunately, Paul is fatally stabbed in the back by another French soldier. Mortally wounded, Paul pulls himself out of the trench bunker and looks in wonder at the horrors of war before dying. The scene then cuts to General Friedrichs sitting in somewhat deep regret. At the end of the film, a young soldier finds Paul's dead body. He takes Müller's scarf and wears it, but forgets to take Paul's dog tag, leaving Paul "Missing in Action" and without his death being recorded.

Berger's Netflix adaptation can be tear-jerking and depressing at times. The film starkly portrays war not as a thrilling action movie spectacle, but as a grave crime against humanity. Political and social issues regarding war, power, and nationalism are present in the film. When it comes to historical accuracy, Berger nails capturing the essence of war, effectively conveying the fundamental character of it. World War I was one of the bloodiest wars in history. Understanding it from the perspectives of a German politician, a high-ranking general, and a young soldier engages the interest of the audience with emotions of anger and sadness. While most of the characters are fictional, they serve as representations of the countless soldiers who experienced similar thoughts of life and innocence during wartime. If you are a military history fanatic or appreciate war films, I recommend the 2022 adaptation of *All Quiet on the Western Front* to you. Watching this film will change your perspective on war and the politics surrounding it today.

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Babylon [film].
Directed by Damien Chazelle. 2022.

Paramount Pictures; C2 Motion Picture Group; Marc Platt Productions; Wild Chickens; Organism Pictures.
189 minutes.

Babylon is a movie about Hollywood by Hollywood, and it reflects the industry's inner workings and glamour, as well as its darker, more cynical aspects. The 2022 film is directed by Damien Chazelle, who has written and directed many famous films such as *LaLa Land* (2016) and *Whiplash* (2014). Chazelle does an excellent job of depicting the diversity of culture in the United States at a time when the country was going through many different transitions. Taking place from the middle of the 1920s to the start of the 1930s, the film follows Manuel "Manny" Torres (played by Diego Calva), a Mexican immigrant, as he rises from being "the help" working at big parties and befriends the famous Jack Conrad (Brad Pitt). Jack is an alcoholic

and a tenderhearted film star who, throughout the beginning of the first act, helps Manny rise through the film industry's ranks. The film also focuses on Manny's love interest, Nellie LaRoy (Margot Robbie), a rowdy, extravagant, self-declared star from New Jersey. Chazelle shows viewers the many different cultural aspects of the 1920s film industry, including the careers of an African American trumpet player, Sidney Palmer, and an Asian-American lesbian cabaret singer, Lady Fay Zhu. The film extravagantly follows the rise and fall of this ensemble as America goes through a huge cultural transition following the effects of the development of film technology. It also shows the effects of the dramatic economic consequences of the Great Depression and how each character deals with these struggles.

The film begins in 1926 in Bel Air, Los Angeles, with the introduction of Manuel Torres. "Manny," as he is commonly referred to, is tasked with transporting an elephant to a lavish party. After securing the elephant and arriving at the location of the party, the film transitions to the start of the party later that night. Here viewers are introduced to Nellie LaRoy, who drunkenly arrives at the party, hitting the mansion's mailbox. She has some problems trying to get into the party, claiming that she is a "star," but nobody around has heard her name before. Luckily, Manny sees her and sneaks her into the party. This moment sets the tone for the complicated friendship that arises between the two main characters.

Once at the party, viewers are treated to an excellent depiction of the lavish culture of the "Roaring Twenties." The room is filled with brilliantly conducted jazz music. The roaring and fast-paced music in the background perfectly expresses the party's wildness. This chaotic energy is particularly evident in Jack Conrad, who is introduced to viewers at the start of the party. He flirts with girls and boasts about his popularity, all the while revealing his struggle with alcoholism. Alcoholism was not uncommon during the 1920s, as the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment had ignited the Prohibition Era, leading to the proliferation of bootlegged alcohol and its consumption. *Babylon* skillfully portrays the widespread obsession with drinking, even in the face of government disapproval. Viewers are then introduced to Lady Fay Zhu, a cabaret singer who is performing to the raucous cheers of the crowd. Something to note from the entire party scene is that Lady Fay Zhu is the only Asian American woman in the mansion. This is historically accurate, as the National Origins Act of 1924 set immigration quotas and excluded a lot of Eastern Europeans and Asians. As Lady Fay Zhu sings, she gracefully moves through the audience, her hand gliding along people's shoulders and the backs of chairs, until she pauses beside a blonde woman. She leans forward and kisses the woman, revealing to the film's audience that she is lesbian. At the end of the performance, the audience cheers, depicting the historical openness to and recognition of homosexuality during the mid-1920s. As the party nears its end, Nellie becomes the center of attention through her dancing, mesmerizing those in attendance. Everyone watches her, captivated by the lavish emerging star known as Nellie LaRoy.

The next series of scenes focus on Chazelle's depiction of 1920s silent film production as the narrative alternates between Jack and Manny on the set of a medieval-inspired fantasy film and Nellie's first day as an actress. The day begins with Jack and Manny arriving on set, where they meet with George Munn, a famous producer. Jack introduces Manny as "The kid. The Mexican I brought," subtly highlighting the racism of the 1920s as Jack does not even bother to learn Manny's name. (00:35:51) The scene then shifts to the production of Jack's movie. Here, the obsession with alcohol during the Prohibition Era is evident, as the tent that all the stars and producers have access to is full of bottles of liquor. Hours go by on set, and numerous cameras break as the director pursues the perfect shot of a battle scene. The breaking of the final camera sends Manny off on a journey of his own, a desperate search for a replacement before the sun sets. Meanwhile, Nellie is taking part in her first film. She plays a minor role, but quickly upstages the star actress, impressing the director and crew with her ability to cry on demand. The scene cuts back to Manny's triumphant return with a camera. The crew grabs Jack, who is so drunk that they practically have to carry him up a hill to film the final scene. After completing both filming sequences, Nellie and Manny find themselves at another party, where Nellie's love of dance reveals her desire to live wildly. One thing the film does well is depicting parties, demonstrating the extravagant spending habits prevalent during the economic boom of the 1920s. Even during the filmmaking process, people were willing to spend money without restraint, a behavior that foreshadows the eventual crash depicted later in the film.

The film enters the second act in 1927, with the introduction of "sound pictures," the newest craze in Hollywood. During the second act, the main stars of the film struggle to adapt to the new technology, and consequently, Nellie and Jack star in fewer films. One scene depicts Nellie's struggle to adapt, as they must reshoot a scene excessively, effectively conveying the changes in film production. Nellie is forced to walk through a door and step directly on her mark. If she misses it in one direction, her voice is too loud, and they must reshoot. If she misses it in another direction, her voice is too soft, and they must reshoot. If a door opens somewhere on the set, the sound is captured, and they must reshoot. An entire industry was suddenly reinvented because of sound. In contrast to Nellie, Manny and Sidney Palmer adapt to the advent of sound, rising through the industry's ranks with Sidney becoming a star and Manny a famous director. One of the biggest struggles was that there was less creative liberty during filmmaking. At 01:15:38, the director and the sound producer on Nellie's set get into an argument because the lights, the microphone, and all the wires are fixed in exact positions so that they can film the scene a certain way. The director is now limited in what they can do because the rigid setup restricts their ability to explore different approaches to capturing the moment. It is a very different era of filmmaking compared to both silent film production and twenty-first century filmmaking.

The next scene begins with yet another party. Loud and energetic jazz music plays as scantily clad women dance across the floor. Drugs and alcohol are very

much present, with the people in attendance freely taking part in such illicit substances. There are a few things that are different about this take on partying during the twenties. Chazelle sets a focus on the jazz band, which is exclusively African American. While smoking cigarettes and discussing their performance, they offer a perspective on their experience as Black men inside these parties versus outside of them, noting that racism and homophobia were not as prominent within the party scene as they were in the world beyond it. The scene then cuts to another performance from Lady Fay Zhu, who dances with Nellie very intimately as the crowd watches in awe. However, the party is soon derailed by Nellie's father and inept business manager, Robert Roy, whom she tries to goad into fighting a snake. Instead, a clearly inebriated Nellie ends up fighting the rattlesnake in an effort to prove that she is still of interest to the public. The snake ultimately bites her, and Fay Zhu sucks the poison out. Having saved and revived Nellie, the two passionately kiss. (01:36:50) By the late 1920s, Hollywood had become less libertine, rejecting homosexuality and the wild personalities of people like Nellie. Nellie begins to sink lower in public opinion. Meanwhile, Kinoscope movie executives decide it is best to fire Lady Fay Zhu from her job as a title writer due to her perceived immorality as a lesbian. When firing her, Manny says, "You're messing with Nellie's career, people care about morals," (01:44:56) an example of Chazelle's awareness of this period's rise in homophobia.

As we approach the final act, a shift in scene takes us to a different kind of party. Gone are the scantily clad men and women, replaced by a more subdued atmosphere. The lively jazz music has been replaced, and alcohol consumption is heavily moderated. The scene starkly illustrates the cultural shift between the mid-twenties and the late twenties. For the rich and famous, the emphasis is no longer on boisterous personalities but rather on an air of culture and sophistication. In an attempt to revitalize her reputation, Nellie attends the party, changing her speech patterns and movements in an effort to appear as the epitome of class: "Show them that you're a lady of sophistication and you'll be back on top." (01:48:30) Ultimately, Nellie fails to maintain her façade of sophistication and unleashes her "wild side," lashing out at the upper-class snobbery of Hollywood's high society. She is shunned and consequently continues to fall in popularity, failing to land acting jobs. Jack also struggles, unable to give up drinking or adapt to sound film. He takes up lower-quality film jobs, which are laughed at, leaving him despondent. The film cuts to Manny directing another film, with Sidney playing his trumpet. Chazelle depicts the lack of acceptance permeating American culture. Manny is told by executives that they have a serious problem because "the band looks mixed…the other players are a lot darker than Sid." (02:02:19) They force Sidney to wear black makeup to look darker so that the film will perform better in the South. Sidney acquiesces to the request after initially protesting, but upon completion of the film, he leaves the studio.

No longer is Hollywood filled with extravagant parties and lust. As the movie winds down, the audience is shown the exact opposite side of the hedonistic world

Chazelle had introduced at the beginning. Now people drink to hide their trauma, calm their anxiety, and drive their sadness away. Nellie struggles with money and becomes indebted to an elaborate crime organization due to her gambling addiction. At one of the final parties of the film, there is no more dancing; instead, everyone mopes around and smokes. Something to note about the party scenes throughout the movie is that they become less and less extravagant over the years, representing the cultural and societal transitions from the Roaring Twenties to the Great Depression. After getting in more trouble because of her gambling debt, Manny and Nellie go on the run, where we see Nellie's final dance. She dances at a party on their way to escape to Mexico, eventually dancing away into a dark alley, never to be seen again.

By the end of the film, viewers can see how *Babylon* is an excellent depiction of the transition of culture from a time of endless economic possibilities to a time of economic depression. While *Babylon* is a fictional representation of the Golden Age of Hollywood, Chazelle does a masterful job of depicting what it was like to dream and live a movie star's life during the twenties and thirties, including the shocking arrival of the Great Depression. For anyone who finds *Babylon* of interest, *Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood* by Quentin Tarantino and *Hollywoodland* by Allen Coulter are similar films discussing the dark underbelly of stardom and acting. While the film's final act abruptly shifts focus to an organized crime syndicate as the reason for Manny's, and, by extension, Nellie's departure from Hollywood, the rest of the film makes up for it because of how well Chazelle is able to illustrate the ups and downs of the 1920s.

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Chevalier [film].
Directed by Stephen Williams. 2022.

Element Pictures; TSG Entertainment; Searchlight Pictures.
107 minutes.

In Paris on the eve of the French Revolution, stands the remarkable master fencer, violinist, conductor, composer, and top of his class in anything and everything: Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-George—the first known biracial classical composer of African descent. The 2022 biopic *Chevalier*, directed by Stephen Williams, seeks to re-introduce this lost figure to a contemporary audience, piecing together the known details of Saint-George's life and adapting them into an empowering film that can resonate past its historical time period and into the present. In preparation for the film, Kelvin Harrison Jr., who stars as the title character, reportedly assumed a rigorous training regimen in violin and fencing to portray Saint-George's virtuoso skills to the best of his abilities. His prior experience with these key skills and his immense preparation and dedication to the arts give him a convincing edge in his performance. Thanks to the meticulous

planning of the screenwriters, producers, and costume designers, as well as the spectacular locations, the audience is transported back to eighteenth-century France, complete with large, powdered wigs, private salon performances, gossip, rebellion, the luring eyes of lovers and rivals, and the grandiose displays of power and wealth among the French aristocracy. The film lets the audience sympathize with the emotional and social trials of the famed mixed-race musician as he is caught between his noble position in French society and his humble African roots.

The film launches its viewers into a packed concert hall, where the renowned musician and composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart asks the audience to choose an encore piece. Among all the loud requests, one catches his attention, namely, one for his Violin Concerto No. 5 in A Major, by none other than Saint-George. In true dramatic fashion, Mozart and Saint-George play face-to-face, trying to upstage each other and "win" the audience's praise. Saint-George quickly steals the audience's attention and receives roaring applause, leaving Mozart in flustered bewilderment, wondering where this mysterious man had come from. This punchy opening scene acts as a brief, clever commentary toward Saint-George's historic title of association, "Le Mozart Noir," and establishes him as an accomplished, esteemed composer and virtuoso violinist in his own right.

The film cuts to Saint-George in his youth, being dropped off at La Boëssière Academy by his father in confidence that the gifted young musician will become an "excellent Frenchman," giving no one a reason to tear him down. In a single scene, viewers watch as Saint-George brands his father's words in every move—he goes from peering into a masterclass to being front and center, showing off his skills before his professor and fencing instructor. Despite being stared at, bullied, and verbally abused by peers and competitors, Saint-George's unfazed, determined expression and reserved demeanor remain the same. At the end of his education at La Boëssière Academy, he engages in a fencing duel with master fencer Alexandre Picard. Not mentioned in the film, however, Picard, for months, had sent letters to La Boëssière Academy asking to fight their "mulatto." The offense was so great that Saint-George refused the challenge at first. However, his father eventually convinced him to accept the duel to prove his honor and that he deserved respect as a formidable opponent. As the film depicts, Saint-George defeats Picard in the duel. This victory impresses Queen Marie Antoinette, and she gives Saint-George the title of "Chevalier" and entrance into her court.

The next scene shows how Saint-George's life has completely changed. Instead of being quiet, reserved, and constantly in pursuit of proving his excellence as a biracial musician in French society, he is greeted everywhere he goes, can casually converse with the queen, sits at the best seats in the opera house, hears his music played at private elitist gatherings, and is accepted as part of the aristocracy. His friendship with Queen Marie Antoinette depicted in the film was not far from the truth. She was known to attend Saint-George's concerts regularly and sometimes played fortepiano alongside his violin concertos. One night, after watching an opera, Saint-George—now generally referred to as "Chevalier"—enters an

"afterglow" among the Parisian elite, where musicians, including women, can show off their musicianship and converse with the upper class. Chevalier is soon approached by the opera's lead soprano, Marie-Madeleine Guimard, who makes advances toward him, which he politely declines. Chevalier walks around the venue, hears the voice of Marie Joséphine, the Marquise de Montalembert (the wife of General Marc-René de Montalembert), and stays to listen to her sing. Chevalier returns to the queen, and with high ambitions, he sets his sights on the title of "Director of the Paris Opera." Queen Antoinette then launches a competition for the coveted title in which the musician who composes the best opera will have their work debuted at the Paris Opera and be introduced as its new director.

The following day, Chevalier receives a letter stating that his father has passed away, leaving him without an inheritance since he is illegitimate as a "mulatto." It also states that his mother, Nanon, has been freed and sent to live with him in Paris. The two are reunited and learn to adjust to living together as mother and son. Although this scene of Nanon's return is heartwarming, it is not likely to have occurred. There is little known evidence of Chevalier's mother. It appears that when Saint-George (Chevalier) was moved from Guadeloupe to Paris at age nine, he was joined by his father, his birth mother, and his father's legal wife.

In the film, Chevalier then starts to build up his opera. He appeals to French writer Madame de Genlis, who has the financial means, deep connections, and familiarity with his work that will help him get a strong start. Once he has established a producer, he starts auditions for a soprano lead. His first pick is Marie-Joséphine. Despite her husband's wishes, she accepts the role. Chevalier's friend, Philippe d'Orléans, finds out that he has cast the wife of General Montalembert, who is known for being violent against anyone who stands in his way. Historically, Philippe d'Orléans was a good friend of Chevalier. He was the son of the Duke d'Orléans, a French abolitionist and liberal aristocrat who got Chevalier to invest time into the rebellion (a.k.a. the French Revolution).

The film quickly spans the process of building the opera from start to finish, including rehearsals, staging, instrumentation, and costume design. It also interweaves the budding love affair between Chevalier and Marie Joséphine with the growing public tension surrounding the rise of the French Revolution against the monarchy. When Marie Joséphine finishes singing her simple melodic line, the opera completes its performance in front of the music committee. Their responses are positive, and the crew celebrates with drinks and entertainment. The next day, Chevalier reads a petition from three opera divas (including Guimard) stating that "our delicate conscience could never allow ourselves to submit to the orders of a mulatto" and is denied the director's position. This is the film's most blatant, direct instance of racial discrimination and an actual, historical experience Chevalier had to encounter. While he looks to the Queen to void their petition and grant him the position he deserves, she remains silent. Chevalier denounces the queen's betrayal and shouts at her for leaving her people on the streets to starve. After being kicked out of the venue, he is trapped by General Montalembert, Joséphine's husband,

who beats him up and threatens to break his hands for having his wife participate in the opera. Marie Joséphine's pleas spare him. After losing contact with his lover and his coveted position, Chevalier is left in depression and immense sorrow for his situation and identity as a mixed-race Frenchman. At this time, his mother tries to pull him out of his anguish and takes him down the streets, where the freed African slaves dance, play music, and converse. He starts engaging with the elders and youth of the community, playing music, laughing again, and embracing the sounds of his African culture. The same night, Chevalier is visited by Madame de Genlis and finds out that Marie Joséphine had carried his child, but that Marie Joséphine's husband had killed the baby since he did not accept it as his own. This time, Chevalier turns to fight. The film shows Chevalier's mother comforting him and giving him cornrows instead of a powdered wig. She describes the horrific ordeals and treatment of African slaves on the plantation where she had been taken. She inspires Chevalier to rebel and put on a rallying concert to support the revolution. Chevalier premieres the tune his mother had sung to him as a child—an adapted version of his Violin Concerto in D Minor, Op. 3 No. I, II. Adagio. The last scene shows Chevalier exiting the concert hall, past the queen, with a crowd of aggressive people shouting "Liberté!" signaling that the French Revolution is in full swing and Chevalier is at its forefront.

The screen turns dark and features written statements about the history of France and our protagonist following this moment. It mentions that Saint-George went on to lead the first all-Black regiment. Despite Napoleon reinstating slavery and prohibiting Saint-George's music, scholars and musicians have started rediscovering his life and works, and he is now recognized as the first known Black classical composer and preeminent virtuoso violinist. The film ends with the audience listening to his Violin Concerto, Op. 8, No. 2.

Compared to *Chevalier*, the 2006 documentary *Le Mozart Noir: Reviving a Legend*, produced by Media Headquarters Film & Television Inc., also provides the audience with an overview of Saint-George's life, his accomplishments, his possible relationships, and his impact on pre- and post-Revolution France. This hour-long film highlights Saint-George's actual compositions, revealing what kind of performer he was, his virtuosity, and his work as a classical French composer from a musicologist's perspective. Unlike the documentary, the biopic *Chevalier* appeals to a contemporary audience, draws upon some missing information about Saint-George's life, and crafts a convincing depiction of his life experiences, thoughts, and emotions using creative liberty. As a result, *Chevalier* focuses heavily on the relational aspects of Saint-George's life. The film invests in how his relationships influenced his demeanor, opportunities, and values. Saint-George's father had told him to "always be excellent," and he was. The queen supported his work. As a result, he was praised, admired, and accepted into the elite circles despite being a biracial musician in a prejudiced aristocratic society. The film shows his mother, Nanon, empowering Saint-George to fight for freedom, for justice against slavery and oppression of his people, and to fall in love with his

African roots through the culture, language, and music he had been taken away from at an early age. Saint-George's friend since the academy, Philippe, was an undying supporter as Saint-George was mocked and bullied for being half African. This intimate look into Saint-George's life allows viewers to sympathize with him as he longed to be wholly respected, loved, and accepted as an accomplished biracial Frenchman and brilliant musician.

Chevalier is a convincing depiction of Saint-George's life that focuses on his significant impact on eighteenth-century French society—making bold strides to be heard, seen, and revered for his brilliance despite the hostile social climate. The attention given by the screenwriters and the director to introduce characters, even those with the smallest of roles or merely mentioned as actual historical figures during Saint-George's time, complete with matching job descriptions and speculated relations to Saint-George, is altogether impressive. Yes, there are some major historical inaccuracies in the film, such as the re-introduction of Saint-George's mother when he was an adult, the flamboyant violin cadenza battle between Mozart and Saint-George, and the major opera competition for the coveted position at the Paris Opera. The film's composers took creative liberties by manipulating some of Saint-George's musical work in the performance setting to fit the specific scenes, including portraying more of an audible emotionally driven response in Saint-George's final "Liberté" concert performance, with added percussion and an almost Caribbean jazz-inspired adaptation of his work—hinting at Saint-George's embrace of his African roots and passion for equality. Such decisions are deliberate compromises to the integrity of the classical style and Saint-George's composed work. That said, the film incorporates many of Saint-George's compositions in its soundtrack, hinting at his later works and displaying a wide range of his repertoire, from his violin concertos to his lesser-known operas. Unfortunately, due to the Revolution, there is limited research on Saint-George from the perspective of musicology, and there are no substantial primary records of Saint-George. In sum, the film does a substantial job of connecting these missing details in a manner that is easy to understand and enjoyable to watch. It sustains a dramatic, empowering work for a modern audience to latch onto and sympathize with. I highly recommend to anyone, musician or not, to watch this film. The fact that the film industry is finally able to take the lost story of history's first known Black classical composer and showcase his incredible accomplishments, as well as the trials he faced as a biracial musician before, during, and after the French Revolution, is ultimately a testament to the fight for minority representation and diversity in the arts and the retelling of the powerful stories in history that were once forgotten because of prejudice.

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The English Game: Season 1 [TV series].
Directed by Birgitte Stærmose and Tim Fywell. 2020.

42; Netflix.
6 episodes (43–55 minutes).

The Beautiful Game, football, fútbol, and soccer are just a few of the names attached to the world's most played sport. *The English Game*, developed by *Downton Abbey*'s Julian Fellowes, is a British historical sports drama Netflix miniseries that relates some of the early stories that led to the popular rise of soccer. It presents the origins of the modern football association in England, a contentious class divide between the elite and working class of the 1880s, all the while attempting to capture the spiritual essence of the game. Set in 1879, *The English Game* is based on the real-life events of two Scottish players, Fergus Suter (Kevin Guthrie) and Jimmy Love (James Harkness), who are regarded as the earliest full-time professional soccer players in the history of the sport. Recruited from Scottish club Partick (not Partick Thistle F.C.) by fictional Lancashire mill owner and manager of Darwen Football Club James Walsh (Craig Parkinson), Suter and Love are promised work in the factory, including a playing stipend.

According to Andy Mitchell, a research consultant for *The English Game* and the F.I.F.A. World Football Museum, football was in its infancy as an amateur sport during the playing years of Suter and Love. Its rules were formalized through the upper elite, composed of lawyers and bankers who dressed for dinner and considered the game for amateurs and gentlemen only. Paid professional players were not accepted by the Football Association (F.A.), so Suter and Love were paid under the table. The Darwen Football Club had been able to acquire the players from Partick due to an established relationship between the two clubs through exhibition matches. Darwen was open to the idea of compensating talent and had the means to do so by charging high gate fees to spectators. Contrary to the events portrayed in *The English Game*, it was Love who first made the move to Darwen from Partick, with Suter following a few weeks later during the 1878/1879 season.

In Fellowes's adaptation, we are offered insights into the evolution of English football on and off the pitch. On the pitch, we see a David versus Goliath story, the working class versus the elite, with spunky little Darwen F.C. from Lancashire facing the showy Old Etonians. In the quarterfinal match of the 1879 F.A. Challenge Cup, the Old Etonians, led by captain Arthur Kinnaird (Edward Holcroft), race to a 5-1 lead at halftime. The Old Etonians are a pack of well-fed giants compared to the scrappy millhands and thus steamroll Darwen across the field. In response, Walsh, Darwen's manager, makes Suter captain as the teams return to the pitch. Suter immediately begins implementing new tactics and revolutionary passing strategies, proclaiming, "This game is about space!" As the Old Etonians charge again, "We'll run right through them!"

Darwen, with Suter's adjustments, ties the game at 5-5 by the end of the match. However, fearful of defeat, the Old Etonians refuse to play extra time, and using their status as members of the F.A. board through a technicality, the Etonians force

a replay of the quarterfinal. With financial assistance from the town of Darwen and its residents, the team manages to cover the expenses to travel for the replay match. During the match, the Old Etonians target and shut down Suter and Love, easily winning the game and advancing to the semifinal. Upon Darwen F.C.'s return to their town, they are warmly and passionately greeted by the townsfolk for the team's efforts.

Off-the pitch, Fellowes deepens the overarching narrative by weaving a tale of history through the lens of sport, thereby strengthening the viewers' support for the working-class teams. Victory in the F.A. Cup would be tremendous for the lives of Lancastrians. During this time, football captivated fans across class divisions, reflecting social changes in Britain and amplifying them. The rapid spread of football forged bonds within industrial communities, creating a sense of kinship that empowered working-class individuals to demand change from the elites. Fellowes, in an interview with the Associated Press, credits the sport for this phenomenon as "something that would bind them into a unit, that would bind them into a community. Most humans spend their lives trying to feel they belong to something that has value."

The English Game thematically presents these ideals as well as the unique power of sportsmanship and the ability of sports to unite people despite their disparities and socioeconomic circumstances. We see Suter's and Kinnaird's relationship begin as tense, opposing rivals, but they find similarities in their differences. Even hotheaded Darwen F.C. footballer Tommy Marshall (Gerard Kearns), who consistently has confrontations with Suter and Love, humbles himself and sets aside his animosity for the greater good of his community and for the sport he loves. This is emphasized as Walsh tells Suter, "You've given these people something to believe in…the game feeds the soul." We see this come to fruition as the working-class communal towns of Lancashire bond together and root for their teams. Victory on the field unites, inspires, and spurs the working-class people to demand changes in how they are treated in terms of pay and working conditions.

Since its inception, the Football Association has promoted football as an amateur gentleman's game made for posh, educated men. Suter is credited as the man who redefined this dynamic, setting a precedent for working-class players. Initially, Suter is seen as an adversary to the sport, especially by those playing for Old Etonians F.C. However, this changes with Suter's development and his relationship with the Etonian captain, Arthur Kinnaird. Both men come to realize their commonalities with each other as individuals and fellow sportsmen, despite their opposing backgrounds and distinctions in social class. As the show presents, Suter and Kinnaird mature together and undergo notable outlook changes, with Suter adapting his strength and asserting his own agency and Kinnaird recognizing the difficulties working-class people experience in their lives.

By the penultimate episode, we see Suter and Kinnaird work together to redevelop the meaning of the game and who it is for. At an appeals hearing, Suter and Kinnarid argue that working-class players are forced to overcome a multitude

of hurdles compared to their upper-class counterparts just to be able to play on the same pitch as them. Directors Birgitte Stærmose and Tim Fywell present this socioeconomic divide by juxtaposing the Old Etonians' luxurious pre-final dinner with the unruly pub celebration the working-class teams enjoy.

Beyond the focus on football, Fellowes creates several subplots in *The English Game* that are not completely resolved. Kinnaird's wife, Margaret Alma Kinnaird (Charlotte Hope), engages with philanthropy to help aid a women's house for single mothers and their children. However, this side plot is not fully developed. Another example is Martha Almond (Niamh Walsh), a self-supporting single mother and Suter's love interest, who finds work in Kinnaird's wife's refuge shelter. Yet, with the focus on Suter's and Kinnaird's stories, this narrative does not receive very much progression, and she is not fully developed as a character.

By the end of *The English Game*, Arthur Kinnaird is hailed as the bridge between the social divides of football. According to football historian Andy Mitchell, Kinnaird "did more to popularize soccer than any man who ever lived" and was hailed as "without exception, the best player of his day." Kinnaird, later titled Lord Kinnaird, took part in nine F.A. Cup finals, a record that still stands, and won five of them. He served as F.A. president for thirty-three years until his death in 1923. Accurately presented by *The English Game*, he was a philanthropist who dedicated his life to good causes, supporting women's shelters and working with orphans to teach them to read and write. A successful banker, Kinnaird would donate much of his wealth to the less fortunate. Under Kinnaird's leadership as F.A. president, the game of soccer exploded, quickly becoming the United Kingdom's national sport thanks to his role in creating comprehensible rules as well as heart-pulling and attractive competitions for spectators. He is perhaps the most influential man who helped develop the modern game that the world enjoys today.

The English Game offers remarkable insights into the early history of football that developed into the game we know today. At the heart of the show is a story of humanity, kinship, and respect for all sides or classes. While *The English Game* is a little too brief to fully resolve all the plots it sets forth, it presents a part of history that has never been told before. For those eager to learn more about different aspects of the sport, *All or Nothing: Manchester City*, directed by Manuel Huerga, and *Captains of the World*, produced by Christian Cerami and Neil Housley, are two series of soccer documentaries. Altogether, Fellowes crafts a must-watch show for avid soccer fanatics. The show's acting, writing, and production all combine to create a story of the conceptualization of the modern game of football, which the world continues to relish.

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Hansan: Rising Dragon [film].
Directed by Han-min Kim. 2022.

Big Stone Pictures; Well Go USA Entertainment.
130 minutes.

Hansan: Rising Dragon is set in 1592 during the Imjin War (1592–1598) and relates one of the most significant naval battles of Admiral Yi Sun-Shin. Though this topic is heavily covered in Korean media, this film aims to bring the naval warfare of East Asia to the big screen with fascinating graphics and sound engineering that will immerse any audience. Directed by Korean director and screenwriter Han-min Kim, *Hansan* is the third time Director Kim has worked with the Korean actor Park Hae-Il, the previous films being *Paradise Murdered* (2007) and *Arrow: The Ultimate Weapon* (2011). In *Hansan*, Park Hae-Il portrays Admiral Yi Sun-Shin. Director Kim's most notable work to date is the first film of the Yi Sun-Shin trilogy, *The Admiral: Roaring Currents* (2014). *The Admiral* won the Best Director award at the 2014 Blue Dragon Film Awards and the Best Film award at the 2014 Daejong Film Awards. When *The Admiral* was first released, Director Kim had intended it as a stand-alone feature, but he subsequently decided to turn it into a trilogy to cover Admiral Yi's three greatest naval battles. This is why *The Admiral* is set in 1597, while *Hansan* is set in 1592. While there are some historical inaccuracies and creative liberties included for dramatic effect, the film stands uncontested in immersing the audience in the naval battles of that time.

The Battle of Hansan is remembered as one of Korea's greatest victories in its entire history. Japan invaded Korea in 1592 under the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who had unified Japan after one hundred years of internal fighting. After Japan's loose unification, Hideyoshi decided to direct all the military might that had accumulated during the civil war toward foreign expansion, and their first target was Korea. Completely unprepared for the massive invasion, Korea's defenses crumbled under the military might of the battle-hardened Japanese troops. With the capital taken twenty days after the invasion, the king of Korea fled north and even considered seeking refuge with China's Ming dynasty. The navy was the only hope left for the Korean forces. As one of the naval commanders, Admiral Yi Sun-Shin won consecutive naval battles against the Japanese navy to cut off the Japanese supply lines. The consecutive defeat of the Japanese navy delayed and eventually immobilized the Japanese troops that were marching north to capture the Korean king. This film highlights Admiral Yi's third campaign, which includes one of his greatest victories at the Battle of Hansan that completely crippled the Japanese navy. To familiarize the audience with some key aspects of the upcoming naval battle at Hansan, the film opens with the previous naval battle at Sacheon, where the turtle ship had first been deployed.

Interestingly, *Hansan* first introduces the antagonist, Wakizaka Yasuharu, who is ordered by Hideyoshi to assemble the Japanese fleet against the Korean navy that is devastating their forces. The film sets Wakizaka up as a formidable opponent by relating a decisive victory he had won over the Korean army on land

a month prior. The first act of the film provides some context and establishes the key characters, like Yi Sun-Shin and Wakizaka, along with their respective commanding officers. Critics have argued that the characterizations of the Japanese officers are more fully fleshed out than those of their Korean counterparts, despite it being a Korean film. However, this is intentional since many of the film's tensions are not in the historical records. The historical battle only took a few hours, but a film based on so little history is not too engaging, so the director fills in the gaps where the historical records are silent. This is not a problem, as the main point of movies is not historical accuracy but entertainment.

Much of the middle section of the film is dedicated to setting up the naval battle. There is not a lot of action because the primary focus is on intelligence gathering and espionage. This part is a bit dull, but not useless. Though historical accounts are lacking, the surrounding evidence points out that gathering intelligence was a crucial part of Admiral Yi's tactics. The preparations leading up to the naval battle at Hansan are no exception. As the director, Kim utilizes creative liberties to tell a compelling story and to build tension toward the upcoming fight. The characterization of Wakizaka as the big, intimidating boss to beat has been clear since his introduction. Another key element in the spotlight is the newly developed battleship called the turtle ship. The turtle ship had played a crucial role in the previous campaign, especially at the naval Battle of Sacheon, but the film highlights some major concerns the Korean navy had about its battle capabilities. Both the Korean and Japanese navy are trying to find solutions around the turtle ship, as they both think the turtle ship will play a crucial role in the upcoming naval battle. Director Kim intentionally spends a lot of time on the turtle ship, as *Hansan* is the only film in the trilogy for him to take full advantage of it in combat. Though the turtle ship had appeared in the 2014 film *The Admiral*, *Hansan* is the first to show its participation in actual combat. The constant set-up for the turtle ship does not disappoint when it enters combat during the last act.

Unfortunately, during this middle section of intelligence gathering and espionage, it is easy to get lost in the dialogues, as they introduce a lot of characters. Director Kim includes and names a lot of characters in both the Korean and Japanese navy, but it is difficult for the audience to remember them all. While most characters are historically based, the choice to include such a large cast takes away the focus that is needed to sharpen the main characters. Though the intent is to provide as much context as possible, the overwhelming number of characters that do not play a significant role detracts from the main story. And the constant cuts between the Korean and Japanese sides are only made clear by the difference in language and armor. I understand Director Kim's intention to create a parallel between the Korean and Japanese navy, but it is not utilized effectively to justify the constant cuts. Another plot device that is poorly utilized are the flashbacks because they insert something that is irrelevant to the upcoming battle. For example, Admiral Yi has a sudden flashback at 00:30:41 that is difficult to

understand. Even with prior knowledge of Admiral Yi's military past, the flashback does not serve its purpose of driving the story forward.

The key highlight is the cinematic fight in the third and final act. Director Kim's strength is showcased during the naval training scene and battle, as he displays the harsh conditions of operating a navy and the complexities of maintaining the warships in formation. My favorite scene is when the Korean fleet moves in an orderly formation together at the start of the battle. The aerial view of the fleet is breathtaking, and it provides the audience with a sense of scale for the battle at hand. Though there are some historical discrepancies, Director Kim does an amazing job of bringing the realistic naval battles of that time to life. And he fully utilizes the turtle ship to his advantage to highlight its prowess. The dramatic music, with the additional tension of the turtle ship entering the fray, makes for one of the best scenes in the film that fully immerses the audience. The sound design of the turtle ship's charge is done exceptionally well. As the turtle ship charges through the waves, the sound resembles a roaring dragon, reminding the viewers why this film is subtitled *Rising Dragon*. One of Director Kim's best decisions is to utilize two different models of the turtle ship, which is a nod to the historical debate over the structure of these ships. Scholars still do not know exactly how the turtle ship was structured, as no schematics or designs exist. Currently, two of the most likely structures are a two-floor plan and a three-floor plan. Instead of choosing one over the other, Director Kim includes both to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Understandably, Director Kim takes creative liberties to fit a lot of details into the film without making it too convoluted. Most of the characters are historical figures, but there are some that do not fit into this particular narrative. One of the most confusing parts is the land battle. Alongside the naval Battle of Hansan, the Japanese troops also planned a land assault on the province headquarters in Jeonju. Though mentioned briefly, this is confusing because Admiral Yi's naval base was located on the province's southern coast, while the province headquarters were located up north. Unfortunately, the film positions the land battle in such a way that it looks like the province headquarters and the naval stations are close to one another when, in actuality, they were on opposite sides of the province. Many of these historical inaccuracies are inserted for the sake of dramatic and cinematic effect, but this one changes the regional map completely.

Overall, *Hansan: Rising Dragon* is an excellent film to watch for those interested in medieval naval warfare. Instead of the Western warfare that many may be familiar with, this new and fresh perspective on Eastern naval warfare is definitely worth seeing. The film also serves as a good introduction to the historical figure of Admiral Yi Sun-Shin, who is noted as the greatest admiral in Korean history and ranks as one of the most successful naval commanders in the world that rivals even Admiral Nelson. Though the lack of Admiral Yi's characterization in this film is hard to overlook, the amount of detail that goes into the naval battle itself is

reason enough to see this film. Once the battle starts, you are immersed in the battle and gain a good understanding of the naval conflict.

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Impeachment: American Crime Story: Season 3 [TV series].
Directed by Ryan Murphy, Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre, Rachel Morrison, and Michael Uppendahl. 2021.

20th Century Television; Ryan Murphy Productions; Color Force; FX Productions.
10 episodes (58–73 minutes).

In many ways, *Impeachment* (2021) is an odd choice for Ryan Murphy's third and most recent installment in his acclaimed FX series, *American Crime Story*. For starters, none of the characters (or, in this case, real people) commit a violent act. The first installment of *American Crime Story* details the gruesome double homicide of Nicole Brown-Simpson and Ronald Goldman in *The People v. O. J. Simpson* (2016). Its successor, *The Assassination of Gianni Versace* (2018), tells the story of the shocking murder of fashion legend Gianni Versace. *Impeachment*, however, revolves around the infamous sex scandal between then-President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky and the ensuing impeachment trial and political fallout. Yes, it has the staples of a Ryan Murphy series: it revolves around a controversial subject, occurred in the 1990s, features an incredible leading performance by actress Sarah Paulson, and intersects with topics like gender, power, and fame. However, by the end of the final episode, no one is convicted of a crime, no blood is spilled, and yet, like all Murphy shows, no one walks away unscathed. If a crime has occurred at all, its victims are undoubtedly the season's main subjects: Monica Lewinsky, Paula Jones, and yes, even Linda Tripp.

Impeachment arguably pairs better with *The People v. O. J. Simpson* than *The Assassination of Gianni Versace*: both use nonfiction books by Jeffrey Toobin as their source material; both revolve around women from Los Angeles (Attorney Marcia Clark in *Simpson* and Lewinsky in *Impeachment*); both have ten episodes; and both shed light on the shameful media circus that ensued. However, both *Simpson* and *Assassination* share a detrimental trait not shared with *Impeachment* – the narratives are told overwhelmingly (and nearly exclusively) by men. This could not be further from how *Impeachment* is depicted. While the single thread that ties Lewinsky, Jones, and Tripp together is indeed the same man, not one episode is told from his point of view. Lewinsky even served as co-producer of the season and is credited at the end of each episode. Ultimately, this creative decision is *Impeachment's* crowning achievement and what sets it apart from its predecessors.

Episode 1, "Exiles," lays the foundation for what becomes the beginning of Lewinsky's shock and horror at realizing that her secret relationship with

President Bill Clinton (Clive Owen) is no longer a private matter. Even though the story is well known, when the camera shows a chipper Beanie Feldstein as Lewinsky waving to her soon-to-be former friend and confidante, Linda Tripp (Sarah Paulson), there is a sinking pit in one's stomach that only grows as Tripp walks closer to Monica. Sitting alone in the drab, gray mall food court, the depiction of Lewinsky, blissfully unaware that her days as a private and unknown citizen are about to end, is heart-wrenching. As one of the lead FBI investigators tells Lewinsky that she is part of a "federal investigation authorized by the Attorney General to investigate crimes committed in relation to the Paula Jones lawsuit," she looks to Tripp, her eyes widening in fear. (04:48) At Tripp's insistence that the agents have spoken to her as well and that it is "for your own good," the stage is set for the next ten episodes, perfectly executed within the first five minutes. (04:57) *Impeachment's* accompanying storyline, revolving around former Arkansas state employee Paula Jones's sexual harassment lawsuit against President Clinton, unfortunately suffers from shaky pacing. While the Jones storyline starts off strong in the first few episodes, not even the incredible performance of Annaleigh Ashford as Jones can save it from the show's inability to decide how large a role she should play in *Impeachment*.

Episode 2, "The President Kissed Me," is packed with moments familiar to those who followed alongside the scandal during its 1998 unfolding, like the President's successful re-election campaign, footage of a beret-clad Lewinsky hugging Clinton on national television, and the President and First Lady (Edie Falco) slow dancing at the inaugural ball. The two most pivotal moments, however, are the depiction of the President's flirtatious courting of Lewinsky and the doomed moment in which she divulges that she has been romantically and sexually involved with the commander-in-chief.

This episode largely meshes with its successor, Episode 3, "Not to Be Believed," which does a better job of fleshing out Paula Jones and those who surrounded her during the lawsuit. Due to Ashford's excellent performance as Jones and the direction by Michael Uppendahl (the episode's director), the episode reaches its emotional peak as Jones's naivete about the true intentions of those around her is laid bare, culminating in the unlikely chance to settle her lawsuit. Eager to put this time of her life behind her, as well as elated at the opportunity of receiving $750,000, she almost accepts the settlement. However, she is discouraged from accepting this offer, depicted as a lifeline to Jones, by her new self-described "conservative feminist" handler, Susan Carpenter-McMillan (Judith Light). McMillan, along with Jones's deadbeat husband (Taran Killam), for their own separate but equally greedy reasons, are depicted as vultures preying on the weak. Jones's decision to reject the Clintons' settlement offer is tragic to watch, as she is manipulated by McMillan, who is seeking to leverage this into an attempt at removing Clinton from office, and Steve, her husband, who is determined to further cash in on his wife's assault. On the Lewinsky-Clinton front, the most impactful moment comes halfway through the episode when the President

attempts to end his affair with Lewinsky. As she and the President draw further away from one another, she draws Tripp in closer, increasing the amount of time they spend with one another after work.

If Episode 3 focuses primarily on the Jones lawsuit, Episode 4 ("The Telephone Hour") does the opposite, revolving exclusively around the relationship between Lewinsky and Tripp. It is in this episode that Tripp makes the infamous decision to betray her 24-year-old friend and agrees to secretly record her daily phone calls with Lewinsky at the urging of a tabloid journalist. Tripp attempts to convince herself that she is doing so for the altruistic purpose of possibly using the tapes as a way to get Lewinsky help for her rapidly deteriorating mental health.

Episode 5, "Do You Hear What I Hear?" is when the two principal stories of Lewinsky/Tripp and Paula Jones merge. Due to Jones's lawsuit moving forward, both Lewinsky and Tripp receive subpoenas and arrive at completely different ways to tackle this. Tripp, unsurprisingly, revels in this latest development and reads as nearly smug, all too eager to "take on the president." Similarly unsurprising is Lewinsky's choice to protect Clinton, even at the risk of perpetrating a federal crime and committing perjury. Both women unsuccessfully urge the other to either lie or tell the truth—equally convinced that the other is making a colossal mistake. Their friendship quickly unravels, and Lewinsky begins to suspect that Tripp is recording their conversations.

Episode 6, "Man Handled," was reportedly so painful to relive for Lewinsky that it was the only episode in which she was not on set to watch or provide feedback in her role as producer. At the episode's end, it is easy to see why. "Man Handled" returns to the initial few minutes of the first episode and fleshes out what happened that fateful January day. As dozens of FBI agents follow Lewinsky to a makeshift interrogation room at the Ritz-Carlton D.C., Feldstein as Lewinsky unleashes every possible human emotion through the remaining fifty minutes. Her performance is at its most haunting when she belts a truly blood-curdling scream at Tripp, crying, "Linda, what did you do?" (08:45). The episode is expertly directed by Ryan Murphy, as each shot feels increasingly claustrophobic, heightening the lack of control and agency that Lewinsky now has in her own life.

Episode 7, "The Assassination of Monica Lewinsky," continues the link between the Paula Jones case and Lewinsky/Tripp, as all three are depicted as having been cast aside by their once-supposed allies. While Jones again gets little screen time (a mere eight minutes), Ashford manages to do an incredible job at portraying the meek Paula, who is so upset by the President's emphatic denial that he sexually harassed her that she is reduced to tears and forced to excuse herself from the room. For a few brief minutes, when Tripp watches herself depicted by a man on a *Saturday Night Live* skit, telling her children she has been mocked for her looks through every moment of her life, one even begins to feel bad for her. This is a tribute to Paulson's incredible acting abilities, her creative decision to show Tripp as a deflated, lonely woman no longer needed by the federal prosecutors she had so desperately sought to please. Ultimately, it is again Lewinsky who faces

the most public character assassination by the media. However, it is not the endless parade of deeply personal insults and mischaracterizations directed at her that sends Lewinsky to a new emotional low. It is the President referring to her as "that woman" that cuts the deepest of all. (55:40)

Episode 8, "Stand by Your Man," focuses most of its attention on the First Lady, Hillary Clinton, and the rollercoaster of emotions that engulfed her during this time. First, she receives widespread criticism for her perceived cold demeanor in a joint interview with her husband. Following this, she publicly defends him against the "vast right-wing conspiracy" just before he admits to her that he did indeed have an extramarital affair with Lewinsky. (10:20) Betrayed and humiliated, the First Lady's frustration at being caught between equally painful predicaments—either staying with the President or leaving him—is palpable.

Episode 9, "The Grand Jury," and Episode 10, "The Wilderness," could have easily been combined into one long finale. Both episodes serve to wrap up the season and depict the President's impeachment and subsequent acquittal. Jones, having lost both the lawsuit and her marriage to Steve, faces crushing legal bills and agrees to pose nude for a magazine for payment. Her supposed supporters, having long dumped her, are nonetheless disgusted by her decision yet make no effort to help her now-shambled life. Tripp, proverbially stuck in her former friend's shadow, is facing an indictment from her home state of Maryland as a result of recording her conversations with Lewinsky without her consent. The interest the public had in her, and all the potential tell-all books that came from it, have dissipated. Mocked in public, fired from her long career in the federal government, and branded forever as the face of betrayal, she too has lost everything. But it is again Lewinsky who walks away as the most scarred of all. The twenty hours of taped conversations between her and Tripp are now public information and available to anyone with access to the internet; her most personal conversations are quickly combed through and ridiculed on the national stage. This, combined with the public reaction to her answers to the Office of the Independent Counsel's explicit questions, paints a harrowing depiction of a woman who had been essentially tarred and feathered in every way possible before she even turned twenty-five years old.

While the third season of *American Crime Story* suffers from shaky pacing and uncertainty as to the role that Paula Jones should play, *Impeachment* proves to be yet another knockout season of television by Ryan Murphy and his team. Finally, this infamous story is told with careful precision and, above all, impeccably related through the lens of the women who lived through it.

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My Best Friend Anne Frank [film].
Directed by Ben Sombogaart. 2021.

Netflix.
103 minutes.

A Netflix original film, *My Best Friend Anne Frank*, presents the story of a lifetime, a new perspective on a familiar narrative. It is directed by Ben Sombogaart, who has won an Academy Award for his film *Twin Sisters* (2002), and written by Marian Batavier, known for the film *Missing!* (2018), and Paul Ruven, known for co-writing the Oscar-winning *Alaska* (1989). *My Best Friend Anne Frank* tells the story of Anne Frank from the perspective of her best friend, Hannah "Hanneli" Goslar. The film is in Dutch with English subtitles, though other languages are spoken, including German, Hungarian, Hebrew, and English. The film is based on Alison Leslie Gold's book, *Anne Frank: Reflections of a Childhood Friend* (1997), a memoir that recounts the story of Hannah Goslar and her friendship with Anne Frank. At the outset of the film, it is stated that the director and writers have chosen to dramatize parts of the film. Overall, the film is presented as a fictionalized account of Hannah Goslar's life and friendship with Anne Frank, from Nazi-occupied Amsterdam to their "reunion" in a concentration camp.

My Best Friend Anne Frank moves back and forth between events in 1942 and 1945; sometimes there are clear cuts and sometimes the transitions are almost unnoticeable. The film opens in 1942 in German-occupied Amsterdam, where two typical teenage girls—Hannah Goslar and Anne Frank—are spending time together. The Star of David that is sewn onto their clothing is the only indication that they both belong to Jewish families. As they play hide-and-seek, they discover the door that leads to the annex where the Frank family will eventually hide, but they are interrupted by a disturbance in the street. The film then moves to 1945, and we see Hannah at the Bergen-Belsen Exchange Camp in Lower Saxony, Germany, a facility where Jewish prisoners are exchanged for German prisoners-of-war. Unexpectedly, Hannah hears whistling from the other side of the wall—from Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp—that she recognizes as a code used by her and Anne during their happier days together. Back in 1942, we see Hannah and Anne going for walk and trying to get a boy's attention. Both girls speak German but agree to never speak it again when two German soldiers take their ball. In 1945, during roll call in Bergen-Belsen, Hannah tells her little sister, Gabi, that Anne lives on the other side of the wall.

Back in 1942, we see Hannah and Anne in a park. A boy promises them a surprise and sneaks them into a movie theater where Jews are not allowed. While a propaganda film is running, the boy makes a pass at Anne. We learn that Hannah's family wants to escape to Palestine. Meanwhile at the movie theater, Hannah gets Anne out of the boy's clutches by saying that she has jaundice. They return to find a series of broken windows and are told by a German on the street that they stink. Hannah's family is denied permission to leave the country, and when Hannah's father Hans tells her mother to have faith, she is not interested.

Hannah suggests that Anne's father might be able to get them passports, to which her mother replies, "If Otto [Frank] could get passports, they would be gone already." Hannah's father gives her a family ring but makes her promise to keep it a secret. The doorbell rings and Otto Frank is at the door to ask Hans to let Hannah go somewhere with his family, but only Hannah, to which Hans replies that he and his wife need Hannah to help with their other children. When Hannah goes to see Anne, Anne is distracted with other girls. They all head to school with Hannah straggling behind as the other girls make fun of her and exclude her. Hannah takes out her new ring and puts it on. At school, their class is joined by a class where the teacher has not arrived yet, and no one knows where she is.

In 1945, at Bergen-Belsen, Hannah and her sister Gabi are taken to the infirmary to see their father, who is sick but who tells them that they are at the top of the list to leave the Exchange Camp tomorrow. During roll call, there is an air raid, and the German soldiers all go for cover, leaving the women and girls standing with their hands up in the open. While the Hungarian prisoners are singing, the sirens stop. Back in 1942, Hannah and Anne are both very flip about the Jewish rules and do not take them seriously; they look out the windows and even make prank phone calls. In 1945 at Bergen-Belsen, Hannah goes out into the rain to take out the waste buckets and goes to the wall. She calls for Anne but ends up speaking to someone else and tells them about Anne and Anne's sister Margot. Back in 1942, we see the girls putting on lipstick and planning their future—careers, babies, and so forth. They follow a noise and end up back at the secret door. They discover a book about female anatomy, get into a fight, and Hannah leaves. On her way home, she sees a family being taken away. The next morning Hannah goes to Anne's and is told that the Franks have departed for Switzerland, leaving behind their cat and not saying a word to anyone. Hannah and another girl look around, and they notice that the Franks have left things they might need in Switzerland. But Anne's diary is gone. Back at the Goslars, Hannah tells her parents that the Franks have gone. When there is knocking at the door and Hans will not open the door, Hannah does. German soldiers ask if they are hiding anything, and a soldier assaults Hannah's pregnant mother. When the mother goes into labor, Hannah is sent for a doctor even though she is not supposed to be outside at night. When she returns without a doctor, she finds that her mother and the baby have died. As Hannah and her father celebrate the Sabbath, Hannah says that her mother is in heaven. Again, there is knocking at the door, and when Hannah's little sister Gabi cries, they are discovered and ordered outside.

In 1945, in the barracks at Bergen-Belsen, the woman next to Hannah has just died. Hannah sneaks out of the barracks to the wall, whistles for Anne, and calls her name. This time, the whistle is returned and Hannah hears her name being called. The girls finally speak. Anne is coughing, and she asks Hannah about the baby that has died with her mother. Hannah says, "God will help us." Anne replies, "When will God help us?" Anne asks if Hannah has food. She is crying and tells Hannah that she, her family, and others had hidden in the annex of their

house in Amsterdam until they were discovered by German soldiers. Now at Bergen-Belsen, Anne and Margot are all alone, as they have been separated from their parents, and are both very sick. Then Anne just stops talking and disappears. Hannah asks to see her father, offering her ring for permission to do so. She gets to the infirmary, where her father is very sick, and asks him if they can stay to help Anne. She tells him that she needs to stay and get food to Anne in the night even though she is supposed to be transferred the next day. She leaves Gabi with her father and sneaks out to take Anne food, because Anne is her best friend and she feels she must. When Hannah goes to Anne, one of the Hungarian women prays a Hebrew prayer over her. There is an air raid, but Hannah whistles for Anne as bombs are exploding in the distance. She calls for Anne and then throws food over the wall. There is a fight over the food on the other side, with Anne crying hysterically and Hannah getting away from the wall just before she can be caught. Someone comes for Hannah from the infirmary where her father is dying. As she holds his hand, he dies. When Gabi shakes him, Hannah tells her, "Papa is asleep." The Hungarian prisoners offer Hebrew prayers and give the girls rocks of remembrance. And Hannah gets her ring back. Hannah returns to the wall with food. She gets it over the wall and then claws through thatch to see Anne. Anne is on the other side, crying, in rags, tiny, with her hair cut. She tells Hannah they will soon be liberated, and that—when they are—Hannah should do what makes her happy. Remembering one of their 1942 parties, Hannah says she will go with Anne to travel the world if that is still Anne's plan, and Anne says that it is. As Hannah leaves the wall, she faints in the yard. At the close of the film, we see women coming out of the barracks, including Hannah—with Gabi—carrying a suitcase. Prior to the end credits, screen text informs us that, shortly after Hannah's meeting with Anne, the Nazis fled; that Hannah never saw Anne again; that Anne and Margot passed away shortly before the liberation; that Hannah became a nurse in Palestine but that, in her thoughts, she still travels the world every day with Anne; and that, between them, Hannah and Gabi have seven children, 38 grandchildren, and 27 great-grandchildren. On October 28, 2022, just over a year after the movie's release, Hannah Goslar passed away in Jerusalem at the age of 93.

One of the most emotional scenes in the film is when Hannah struggles with her father, as he is laying sick in the infirmary at Bergen-Belsen, over being obedient to him and getting ready to be transferred, or sneaking out to help her friend Anne by taking her food. Hannah expresses that, although she wants to be there for her family and she knows the responsibilities of being an older sibling, she also wants to be with her friend. Earlier in film, Hannah had learned about the famous English nurse and social reformer Florence Nightingale, and she had told Anne that she wanted to be a nurse one day to help people, which is what happened. As this film shows, Hannah's desire to help people has gone far beyond nursing. By sharing her story with the rest of the world, she continues to educate people about of World War II and the Holocaust. While it is not a documentary and creative liberties have been taken, *My Best Friend Anne Frank* is very powerful

and sends a strong message to the rest of the world to never stop caring, helping, and learning people's stories.

My Best Friend Anne Frank is a recommended film to watch to continue to learn and have conversations about the Holocaust, Nazi-occupied Europe, World War II, and friendships during dark times. Grab your tissues, because there are many emotional scenes. The cast in this film does phenomenal work in reenacting the lives of Hannah Goslar, Anne Frank, their family members, and their friends. While watching this film, I could not help but be reminded of another exceptional film about similar events, namely, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2008). So, what part of the film struck you the most? Might there be other survivors' stories from the Holocaust and World War II that have yet to be told to a larger audience?

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Operation Mincemeat [film].
Directed by John Madden. 2021.

Warner Bros. Pictures; Netflix.
128 minutes.

The 2021 war drama film *Operation Mincemeat*, directed by John Madden, is based on British author Ben Macintyre's book on the British-led "Operation Mincemeat" during World War II (1939–1945). The film was first shown on November 5, 2021, at the British Film Festival in Melbourne, Australia. Warner Bros. Pictures subsequently distributed the film in the United Kingdom on April 15, 2022, and later on Netflix in North and Latin America on May 11, 2022. It stars Colin Firth, Kelly Macdonald, Matthew Macfadyen, Penelope Wilton, Johnny Flynn, and Jason Isaacs. *Operation Mincemeat* depicts the true story of the eponymous successful British-led deception operation leading up to the 1943 Allied invasion of Sicily ("Operation Husky"). For "Operation Mincemeat," which was intended to fool "Abwehr" (the German military intelligence), British intelligence clothed the body of Glyndwr Michael, a deceased homeless man from Wales, in a Royal Marines uniform, placed personal items on him that suggested his identify as that of a William Martin, as well as letters between British officers that pointed to an imminent Allied invasion of Greece and Sardinia (rather than Sicily).

John Madden is a British film director best known for directing the 1998 film *Shakespeare in Love*, which won the Academy Award for Best Picture. He has also directed other acclaimed films, such as *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2012) and its sequel, *The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (2015). Madden's career spans theater, radio, television, and film, showcasing his versatile talent in the entertainment industry through this latest film he directed in 2021, *Operation Mincemeat*.

The film follows a unique sequence in that it flashes back from July 10, 1943, when the Allied invasion of Sicily took place, to the events of "Operation

Mincemeat," which had started months earlier. The whole story displays various historical figures who are familiar, including all-star British actors and actresses such as Colin Firth as Lieutenant Commander Ewen Montagu, a Jewish barrister serving as a Royal Navy (RN) intelligence officer; Matthew Macfadyen as Flight Lieutenant Charles Cholmondeley, a Royal Air Force (RAF) intelligence officer; Kelly Macdonald as Jean Leslie, a secretary who is involved with the operation; Johnny Flynn as Lieutenant Commander Ian Fleming; Jason Isaacs as Admiral John Godfrey; and Simon Russell Beale as Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The extra casting characters include U.S. Army soldiers, both white and African American service members, British service members, British and Spanish civilians, and the actor Lorne MacFadyen as Sgt. Roger Dearborn and Glyndwr Michael.

As for the film's soundtrack, its composer Thomas Newman is known for his work on films like *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), *WALL-E* (2008), as well as the James Bond films *Skyfall* (2012) and *Spectre* (2015). The soundtrack plays a crucial role in conveying the storyline's tension, drama, and emotions. One particular scene is especially impactful: as the orchestra plays a heroic theme, Sgt. Roger Dearborn is seen in battle uniform, battered with dirt, with his helmet off, observing the spectacle of the successful Allied landing in Sicily—one of the most significant deception operations in history, which turned the tide of the war.

The film strives to accurately portray the era in which its historical events occurred, the early 1940s during World War II. Military uniforms, insignia of British, American, and Nazi German officers, and other characters' clothing are crafted to reflect period designs. I noticed this when they put the deceased body of Glyndwr Michael (to be known under the false identity of Royal Marines officer William Martin) into a Royal Marines khaki uniform, rather than blue battledress, since they wanted the enemy to think that his plane had crashed into in the ocean, while he was carrying intelligence, and his death caused by drowning.

The production, including the sets and locations, also seeks to immerse the audience in the wartime period of the 1940s, using historical and recreated locales from World War II. Filming leveraged both authentic and reconstructed locations, predominantly in the United Kingdom, including the capital city of London, iconic sites like Clive Steps, the Old Admiralty Building, and the Duke of York Column, ans by transforming Saunton Sands in Devon to depict a Sicilian shoreline, emphasizing the movie's dedication to historical accuracy and set during the Allied Invasion of Sicily. Beyond the United Kingdom, the production extended to the City Hall Building in Málaga, Spain.

The film references the Pacific War in the scene where RAF Flight Lieutenant Charles Cholmondeley is informed and bribed by RN Admiral Godfrey to spy on his co-worker Lieutenant Commander Ewen Montagu, because Godfrey suspects Ewen's brother, Ivor Montagu, to be a spy for the Soviet Union despite England's alliance with Joseph Stalin. During World War II, communism was considered a threat to Western governments, both political and military, because British and American men and women recruited as Soviet spies posed a threat to Western

countries' interests at home and abroad because these spies were gathering sensitive information and potentially undermining the trust and cooperation between the Allied powers, which could have long-term geopolitical implications even though they were temporarily aligned against Germany, Italy, and Japan. In return, Godfrey would locate and return the remains of Cholmondeley's brother, who had been killed at Chittagong in Bengal while serving in Asia fighting the Japanese. Since the film focuses on the European Theater, this incident brings awareness to the Pacific Theater, where the Allies are at war with Japan. *Operation Mincemeat* is especially recommended to those interested in the history of World War II. *Resistance* (2020), directed by Jonathan Jakubowicz, and *Six Minutes to Midnight* (2020), directed by Andy Goddard, are two similar war drama films that are worth watching as well.

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Oppenheimer [film].
Directed by Christopher Nolan. 2023.

Universal Pictures; Gadget Films; Atlas Entertainment.
180 minutes.

BANG! FLASH! BOOM! silence ... It is July 16, 1945, and the world will never be the same. Dozens of brilliant minds watch as an atomic bomb is tested for the first time. Centuries of human evolution and scientific innovation have come to an astounding stop as mankind has finally achieved the ability to indiscriminately destroy the world. The work of J. Robert Oppenheimer and his fellow scientists is a success. But at what cost? This question and others are explored in the 2023 film *Oppenheimer,* directed by Academy Award-winning director Christopher Nolan.

In the beginning sequence of the film, Oppenheimer is interrogated by a panel of Red Scare politicians for his past affiliations with known Communist Party members. At this point in 1954, the Cold War is in full swing. The Soviet Union has tested its own hydrogen bomb a year prior, and the United States government looks to the "father of the atomic bomb" to understand how the current arms race had begun. As Oppenheimer answers the panel's intrusive questions, the film flashes back to the past as the great physicist recounts his early life. Nolan clearly separates scenes from Oppenheimer's past with color film, while the present trial and interrogation are presented in black and white. The immediate contrast of color serves to portray Oppenheimer's past as full of vibrant color and life, whereas the present appears to be devoid of life and any color. The film is shot mainly from Oppenheimer's perspective, and Cillian Murphy does an extraordinary job playing the role of J. Robert Oppenheimer. In the earliest scene, Oppenheimer recounts his days at the University of Cambridge. Here, he is shown

to be an awkward and clumsy student with a brilliant mind. He daydreams about the possibility of theoretical physics and is eager to study under some of the prominent figures in the field. Oppenheimer gets upset at one of his professors and, in a heat-of-the-moment decision, decides to inject poison into an apple sitting on that professor's desk while no one is around. Shortly after committing what could have been a fatal assault, Oppenheimer shows immediate regret and disposes of the apple before his professor can get to it. This scene mirrors an actual event in Oppenheimer's life where he poisoned his tutor's apple for similar reasons. Luckily, the tutor did not consume the laced fruit. Nolan chooses to include this story in the film because it adds to Oppenheimer's complex character.

The flashbacks begin with Oppenheimer's university days in the 1920s. One aspect of his life that is ignored is his childhood and family life. Although Nolan chooses to skip this part of Oppenheimer's upbringing, a brief mention of his family's success would have added more context for the viewer to understand his own success. Then again, at a whopping 180-minute runtime, perhaps Nolan chose well to cut these scenes out. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that J. Robert Oppenheimer was the son of a successful Jewish immigrant who grew up in a wealthy neighborhood of New York City. His family's prominence in the textile industry allowed him and his brother to attend prestigious schools at a young age. This early academic success served as a springboard for Oppenheimer's later achievements and undoubtedly assisted in his enrollment in prestigious universities in Europe and the United States. Following Oppenheimer's apple incident, the film shows his brilliance through his ability to give a scientific lecture entirely in Dutch, which he had studied only six weeks prior to this lecture. During his time at Cambridge, Oppenheimer is seen interacting with figures who would play prominent roles later in the Manhattan Project., and he admits to several individuals his goal of bringing theoretical physics back to the United States.

After graduating from Harvard and the University of Göttingen in Germany, Oppenheimer secures a position as an assistant professor at the University of California, Berkeley. It is here at UC Berkeley that the film begins to show Oppenheimer's mature character development, and the audience is introduced to a number of key figures in his life. One of these key characters is Jean Tatlock, who is played by the astonishing Florence Pugh. Jean Tatlock is an active member of the Communist Party and becomes Oppenheimer's on-and-off love interest. The film flashes forward to the present black-and-white trial, where Oppenheimer is intensively interrogated about his relationship with her and the party. As Oppenheimer recounts his time with Jean, actor Cillian Murphy's eyes display all the passion and pain one naturally shows when recounting the precious time spent with a loved one. The film flashes back to a passionate moment between Oppenheimer and Tatlock, where Nolan decides to use the famous quote Oppenheimer would later use after testing the first atomic bomb. During this scene, Oppenheimer acknowledges his ability to read Sanskrit and quotes the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, stating, "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds,"

as he passionately makes love to Tatlock. In reality, Oppenheimer is caught on film using this quote as his remorseful reaction to the first atomic bomb testing in 1945. Instead, Nolan decides to use this powerful statement during a heated scene between lovers. While the quote's inclusion is greatly appreciated, perhaps saving such profound words for the possible destruction of humanity would have better suited the film's tone. But perhaps Nolan wants to highlight that the loss of a loved one does sometimes feel like the destruction of one's humanity. Suffering from depression, Jean Tatlock later, unfortunately, takes her own life. During his time at Berkley, Oppenheimer meets his future wife, Kitty Puening. Perhaps surprisingly, Oppenheimer is seen as quite the ladies' man.

During his trial, Oppenheimer recalls being recruited to join the Manhattan Project in 1942 by Matt Damon's character, Lieutenant General Leslie Groves. By this time, the United States had entered the Second World War, and the race to develop an atomic bomb was on. Groves appoints Oppenheimer as the head scientist for the project, and he sets about recruiting many of his former and current colleagues to assist with the development of the bomb. Nolan includes an all-star cast of actors whose faces are immediately familiar once they appear on screen. These stars are seen during Oppenheimer's recruitment montage and add to the film's already great writing and direction. At this point in the movie, tensions start to run high as the scientists begin to gather together to make the impossible possible. Oppenheimer suggests that they need a facility that can house the team and their families, so a town is built in Los Alamos, New Mexico. As the project continues, more scientists who have escaped from Europe continue to join the team. The film then flashes back to the present trial, and Robert Downey Jr.'s character—Lewis Strauss, a high-ranking member of the United States Atomic Energy Commission—is introduced. It is gradually revealed that Strauss is the one behind Oppenheimer's current interrogation and the government's lack of trust in his allegiance to the United States. Strauss never forgave Oppenheimer for humiliating him in front of Congress, causing him to accuse the physicist of being a Soviet spy during the Manhattan Project.

Back in 1945, the Nazis are all but defeated, and the Manhattan Project team is about ready to test their experiment. The date is set for July 16, and the team prepares for the inevitable. During these scenes, the film reaches its climax, as the bomb is now ready. The atomic bomb is placed several hundred miles south of Los Alamos, and the scientists anxiously wait for its detonation. There is the possibility that the bomb could ignite the atmosphere and cause the whole world to instantly go up in flames. As the music thunders, everyone stares in curious terror. The countdown starts. The button is pushed. A flash of heaven-like light. Complete silence. And then, after several painstaking minutes, the loudest BOOM thunders across the screen. They have done it. They have created the destroyer of worlds. The movie then flashes forward to the present, where it seems that Oppenheimer will be condemned for his affiliations with Communist Party members from his youth. Strauss is about to take his revenge when a scientist who

had had disagreements with Oppenheimer in the past attests to Oppenheimer's loyalty to the United States. The trial concludes with Oppenheimer not being found guilty but with his reputation in shambles. The film's final scene shows a powerful conversation between Oppenheimer and Einstein. Both men discuss how Oppenheimer could have destroyed the world when he tested the first atomic bomb, and Oppenheimer acknowledges that he did, in fact, destroy the world.

Oppenheimer is an extraordinary film that deals with complex characters engulfed in an even more complex situation. Oppenheimer's love of science gave humanity the ability to destroy themselves. The film does a great job showing his remorse after the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He meets with President Truman to persuade him not to develop the hydrogen bomb, and President Truman calls him a "crybaby scientist" and sends him on his way. The cinematography is stunning, and Nolan does such a phenomenal job that the film is highly recommended for history buffs and moviegoers alike. If *Oppenheimer* catches your interest, *Day One* (1989), an Emmy Award-winning made-for-TV docudrama praised for its historical accuracy, examines the inner workings of the Manhattan Project and is worth the watch. Ultimately, Nolan's *Oppenheimer* will make you question your own pursuits and how destructive humanity can be.

ABOUT THE REVIEWER: *David Castillo of Garden Grove, California, earned his B.A. in Asian Studies and Japanese (2019) at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), and his M.A. in History (2024) at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF).*

RRR (Rise Roar Revolt) [film].
Directed by S. S. Rajamouli. 2022.

Pen Studios; Lyca Productions; KVN Productions; HR Pictures.
182 minutes.

There is one scene from *RRR (Rise Roar Revolt)* that keeps on playing in my mind; A crowd of ten thousand or so people are surrounding a flimsy chain-linked military barricade guarded by at least 15 soldiers—the officers British and the soldiers Indian. This is happening because of a revolutionary fighter for independence has been arrested. All this goes on for a bit until one of the protestors throws a rock and hits a portrait of an English monarch. This is when one of the officers tells the soldiers to arrest the rock thrower but the crowd shuts the officer up. But then Alluri Sitarama Raju or Raju (played by Ram Charan) steps up and manages to parkour his way out of the twelve-foot fence into the crowd. There is a three to four-minute scene of Raju fighting his way through the crowd. He is hit on the head with a rock, breaks a couple of protestors' arms with his bare hands, but somehow retrieves the protestor, all the while dispersing the crowd.

The film's director, S. S. Rajamouli, is well known for his massive production movies. *RRR* is not historically accurate. Many inaccuracies could be listed here, but let us focus on inaccuracies pertaining to the main characters. First, while the two protagonists—Komaram Bheem (played by Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao Jr.)

and the aforementioned Raju—did exist and were both revolutionaries who died fighting for Indian independence or at least against British oppression, they likely never met each other or could do any of the amazing physical feats of heroism that the movie shows. Secondly, the film's main antagonist, Governor Scott Buxton, is not even a real person. I could continue the list of historical inaccuracies, but that would be a distraction from what this movie is all about. At its very core, *RRR* is a buddy-action movie with a ton of drama to go along with it.

The overall plot revolves around Raju and Bheem and their relation to the British Empire. At the beginning, a young girl named Malli from Bheem's village is kidnapped by Governor Buxton and his wife, Catherine Buxton. The film then introduces us to Bheem, who somehow manages to outrun a tiger and capture it. He then heads off into the capital in search of Malli. Our introduction to Raju is the scene recounted above. Then we get to see what Raju's supposed motives are for becoming an officer in the British army. He has been passed up to become an officer, but luckily for Raju, news of Bheem has reached the capital, and the governor wants him captured. The reward is the rank of special officer and Raju steps up and accepts the challenge. While Bheem is in the capital, he sees an English woman named Jennifer and falls head over heels for her. In a collision course to meet each other, Raju infiltrates an Indian revolutionary headquarters and suggests they assassinate the governor. Everyone laughs it off but one, who is an accomplice of Bheem. Bheem's accomplice almost leads Raju directly to Bheem, but he catches on that Raju is an officer and flees to meet up with Bheem.

Then a calamity occurs with the life of a child on a knife's edge. Both Raju and Bheem—without realizing each other's identity—work together to save the child's life and soon a montage of their friendship begins. When both men see Jennifer (played by Olivia Morris) from afar, Raju notices that Bheem likes Jennifer. Raju becomes cinema's greatest wingman and gets Jennifer and Bheem to go out on a "date". During the date, neither of them speaks the other's language, but when Jennifer utters Malli's name, Bheem knows what he has to do. Jennifer invites Bheem to a dance which Raju also attends. After the dance, Jennifer takes Bheem, who is hurt, in a car to the mansion, where he finds Malli and plans her escape that same night. Raju finds a clue to the whereabouts of his sought culprit (who is none other than Bheem) in Jennifer's car. Heading toward a car repair shop near the capital, Raju finds Bheem's accomplice, captures him, tortures him for information, but gets nothing but a snake bite that no Western medicine could cure. This leaves Raju immobilized only for Bheem and his other accomplices to make a cure from traditional Indian medicine. During this time, Bheem tells Raju about his plan, which shakes Raju to his core. Bheem and his crew break into the mansion during another party, using captured animals as a distraction to create chaos and almost freeing Malli, until Raju reappears. After Bheem's shock, the two proceed to have a fight for the ages—all leading to Bheem's capture.

After his capture, Bheem is publicly tortured by none other than the newly appointed officer Raju. During this scene, Bheem begins to sing. This gets the

crowd in an uproar which almost starts a riot in the streets. After the torture, Bheem's execution is scheduled to be performed in secret. We then learn about Raju's actual motives, which are not simply to become an officer, but to free his country. We are treated to a flashback of Raju's past as a child, when his father, an anti-colonial revolutionary, was killed by British officers, leading Raju to his decision of becoming an independence fighter. After this flashback, Raju can no longer stand it and proceeds to risk everything to free Bheem, and he succeeds, but not before sending some weapons to his birth village. While escaping with Malli in tow, Bheem meets with Raju's lover who tells him about Raju's goal. Bheem then decides to rescue Raju, and they both go on to destroy a British fortress, killing the governor and his wife in an explosive ending to the film.

RRR is an action movie through and through, but between the scenes of violence, mayhem, and romance, there are interesting dualities that make it more than just a 1920s period piece. When Bheem and Raju meet to save the child, Bheem drives a motorcycle while Raju is riding a horse: Bheem's whole reason for being in the capital is to rescue Malli, yet the guy from the country is seen on a motorcycle while the cosmopolitan Raju is riding on a horse. When it comes to the two protagonists' love interests, Bheem ends up with Jennifer, who would not seem to be used to the simple life of a country village; meanwhile, the cosmopolitan Raju stays loyal to the woman he has known all of his life, staying, in a way, married to his village, to his home, and never straying away.

Another theme in *RRR* is nationalism. The characters are not merely Raju and Bheem, but Indians together in a struggle against the British. It does not matter that Bheem and Raju are complete opposites in personality; they struggle and fight for the same thing. There is so much use of patriotic imagery that it becomes pretty clear that *RRR* is not just a movie about these two but, rather, a movie about India—the (re)birth of India. And therein lies the question: If the themes and desires of this film are so clear, did the film deliver in its desire to not just be a patriotic film but also an entertaining one?

The answer is "yes," on both fronts. The storyline as described above pales in comparison to what unfolds in detail on the screen and what it is like to watch the film and experience the emotions it inspires. Admittedly, the story itself is indeed that of a simple buddy-action movie. But there is not one moment of boredom. At every plot point, I was drawn in by the action, the sound, and the sights. The actors did a fantastic job of convincing me that these characters were what and who they claimed to be. Some scenes may be a bit overdramatic, but the action scenes simply took my breath away. The music used throughout *RRR* fits like a glove, and if these praises are not enough to convince you to watch the movie right now, then—for your own sake—watch *RRR*'s "Naatu Naatu" song and dance; it will become obvious why it won the Best Original Song award at the Oscars. So, I highly recommend watching this movie. It may not be the most historically or physically accurate rendition of 1920s India, but *RRR* is the definition of entertainment.

RRR's patriotism should be examined in the context of the rise of Hindu nationalism in India today. There are a couple of scenes in *RRR* that bring up religion, yet not by naming any religion explicitly. One scene that comes to mind is when Bheem is heading into the capital and he disguises himself in traditional Muslim clothing that is typical for the region, even though he is not a Muslim. In another scene, Raju looks upon an altar and takes inspiration from it when he has his final battle with the governor. Overall, the movie's love of India seems, at least on a surface level, not discriminating against the many Muslims of India.

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Welcome to Wrexham: Season 1 [TV series].
Produced by John Henion, Andrew Fried, Sarina Roma, Dane Lillegard, Nicholas Frenkel, George Dewey, Rob McElhenney, Ryan Reynolds, Humphrey Ker, Drew Palombi, Jeff Luini, and Aaron Lovell. 2022.

Boardwalk Pictures; DN2 Productions; Maximum Effort; RCG Productions; 3 Arts Entertainment; FXP.
17 episodes (20-47 minutes).

"Every day, it's a-getting closer / Going faster than a rollercoaster / Love like yours will surely come my way / A-hey, a-hey-hey / Every day, it's a-getting faster / Everyone said, 'Go ahead and ask her' / Love like yours will surely come my way / A-hey, a-hey-hey / Love like yours will surely come my way." *Everyday* (Buddy Holly)

The opening credits for *Welcome to Wrexham* begin with an early-twentieth-century black-and-white shot of smiling soot-covered industrial coal miners heading into a quarry, followed by a frame of a slowly moving mine cart. The lighthearted jingle of Buddy Holly's "Everyday" plays to red flashes and shots of a football team's glory years during the 1970s with on-field pitch celebrations, bus parades, and balloons. Then there are gloomy frames of dilapidated buildings being demolished in the town during the 1980s, intermingled with gray and the hopeful faces of locals supporting their town's football (soccer) team through thick and thin in modern times. The credits close with an aerial view of the world's oldest active international football stadium as Holly sings, "Love like yours will surely come my way," while the red Welsh dragon fills up the screen. *Welcome to Wrexham*.

Welcome to Wrexham is a sports documentary series that tells the life and stories of Wrexham Association Football Club—Wrexham AFC—following the club's purchase by Hollywood superstars Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney in February 2021. The FX TV series is based on the pair's attempt to resuscitate the Welsh club and the town of Wrexham, documenting the team's performance under their stewardship. Neither Reynolds nor McElhenny have any previous experience directing a sports team. The documentary also highlights the lives of Wrexham's inhabitants and their hopes that a sprinkle of Hollywood magic may bring their team and town back to their former glory.

Wrexham AFC was founded in October 1864 at the Turf Tavern by members of the Wrexham Cricket Club, making it the oldest professional football team in Wales. Deeply rooted in the origins of the game and as an epicenter for Welsh football, the team is the third oldest professional football club in the world. Wrexham AFC's home ground is known as the Racecourse Ground, as it had been used for horse racing prior to its adoption by the football team. On March 5, 1877, the Racecourse Ground hosted the first ever international home match for the country of Wales, earning it its reputation as the oldest active international football stadium in the world. Wrexham was put on the map during the Industrial Revolution when the population surged due to its coal, tanning, and brewing industries. With a working-class population making up a significant portion of Wrexham townsfolk, they sought their entertainment at the Racecourse Ground for cricket and horse racing, and eventually for the football club that bears the town's name. The town and team have faced their ups and downs, but Wrexham, the people, the team, the Racecourse Ground and the Turf Tavern still stand.

When Reynolds and McElhenney purchased the historic football club, it was languishing at the bottom of paid professional non-league football and struggling for promotion back into the English Football League. The town's and club's numerous difficulties on the field and off since the 1980s had led to Wrexham's relegation from league football in the 2007–2008 season, thus ending its 87-year stay in the English Football League. In *Welcome to Wrexham*, Reynolds and McElhenney seek to tell the stories of the trials and tribulations of Wrexham's AFC hiatus from league football, while simultaneously giving the historic team and town a much needed lift from being down on their luck.

"Why Wrexham?" is the question that gets asked throughout this documentary TV series. Why would two American Hollywood stars, albeit one a TV star from *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, with no knowledge of how to run a sports franchise want to buy a football team in Wales? It is a valid question from the residents of Wrexham and supporters of the club who have watched their team suffer at the hands of previous greedy owners. Rob McElhenney offers his own personal sentiments for "Why Wrexham" as the driving force for the whole story. He admits his lack of knowledge of the sport itself, however, what uniquely connects him to Wrexham is the spirit of its people: "Even though I've never been there, it reminds me of Philadelphia." Through his hometown of Philadelphia and his love for the Philadelphia Eagles, McElhenney has witnessed the power of sports and how it can bring a whole community together. He accentuates the spiritual essence of the game of football and how it creates this clear, yet inexplicable bond between people, their town, and their team, which is passionately expressed in forms of loyalty and brotherhood. This connection allows people to take pride in their origins as their daily existence is validated every Saturday when Wrexham AFC kicks-off at the Racecourse.

While it is Reynolds's and McElhenney's goal to bring some good fortune back to Wrexham, as they offer hope and financial support with their superstar status,

the documentary is at its most gripping when it pulls away from the two and focuses on the town, the club, its supporters, and players. With a touch of Hollywood charm, games are filled with behind-the-scenes action reveling with high-tension excitement as they are enhanced with a suspenseful soundtrack, dramatic slow-motion shots, and edge-of-your-seat cliffhangers. However, where the documentary succeeds the most is in its telling of the lives of the people of Wrexham as they share their love of Wrexham AFC as fanatics of their team who love their club with such stubbornness and fervor. This allows viewers an insight into how valued the club is for the surrounding community and show that the bond between people and the sport goes well beyond winning and losing.

To some, Wrexham AFC means everything. The vulnerability of humanity shines as people talk about financial hardship, difficulties with family, illnesses, and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. "There's got to be something more to life than this," Shuan Winter says, a divorced father of two young boys who despises his repetitive job as a painter, yet comes alive when he reminisces of the glory days of going to Wrexham games with his father. Throughout the series, we see Winter struggle to cope with the collapse of his relationship with the mother of his children, but he finds joy in sharing his love of Wrexham AFC with his boys. The idea of Wrexham AFC represents identity for its supporters, a type of shared history that is difficult to come by and explain. Wayne Jones, the owner of the historic Turf Tavern where the club was formed, captures this sentiment, "You can't put into words what the club means to people here. It suffered almost as if we lost an arm. There are those who say it's just a game, but it's so much more than that. For the people of this city, their football club is everything."

Welcome to Wrexham is a sports tale rollercoaster with wonderful twists and turns, one that highlights the valuable passions in life that give people a little something to live for. The series touches the soul in ways that are entirely human as you feel for the people, the town, and the club. The sincerity Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney display for Wrexham makes it impossible for the viewer not to adopt Wrexham as a second home and second team. It does not matter if one has zero interest in history or football, *Welcome to Wrexham* has a little something for everybody in the marvelous stories and narrative it portrays. The FX TV series is like watching history unfold before one's very own eyes as it does an excellent job of illustrating the background of Wrexham and its club, while also breaking down the rules of the English football system for those who may not have any knowledge of the sport. As Ryan Reynolds most aptly puts it, "I don't know how you don't root for a town like Wrexham."

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