

# Editor's Note

or: How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Mormon Art

BY KATHERINE MORRIS

I recently performed in a staged reading at a fundraiser for New Play Project (see MA issue 1). It was one of those kinds of stimulating theatre events where the cast ends up being larger than the audience, and most of the people who do show up have comp tickets anyway.

But that's not the point of the story. The point of the story is that I, mild-mannered, slightly shy, and nigh unto Molly Mormon that I am, very nearly came to blows with an esteemed member of our audience during the talkback session after the reading. Why? you may be asking yourself. Well, because he made a few remarks about Mormon art that ended in a statement like this: "There is no good Mormon art, and Mormon cinema is dead."

Yikes! This was precisely the moment where I not-so-precisely lost my head and passionately burst out something like, "That is absolutely not true." At which point esteemed audience member snapped a few defensive words back himself, I reacted, and poor Davey Morrison Dillard found his role shifting from discussion moderator to dispute mediator, telling us that maybe we should save our argument for later. Esteemed audience member said jokingly, "I'll meet you by the flagpole afterward" and then settled back into his seat, looking rather uncomfortable.

Of course, by this time, my Mormon guilt had kicked in, and I felt bad that I'd reacted with such hostility toward him. I also felt kind of awkward

that I was wearing his wife's wedding ring, but that's not really relevant to the story.

After the talkback session, I hopped off the stage to meet esteemed audience member, we both apologized (apparently his Mormon guilt had also hummed into gear) and then proceeded to have an excellent, engaging discussion about Mormon art, particularly Mormon film, since he was a film student. It turns out that we had a lot in common, even more than a proclivity for indulging in passionate outbursts in public places.

In fact, what had caused our argument actually stemmed from the same thing. He's been eating his heart out that we don't have a Mormon Steven Spielberg, just as I've been eating my heart out that we don't have a Mormon Chaim Potok (I would've said "Shakespeare," but let's go ahead and preserve the Jewish parallelism here, shall we?). The only difference betwixt this good fellow and me was that his feelings have turned cynical, while mine are overly optimistic and idealistic. A friend of mine once told me that cynics are just disillusioned idealists, or was it idealists who've bumped up against reality? I don't know—it was something really cynical.

Anyway, during this discussion, I realized that this fellow didn't want to be cynical about Mormon cinema. He just hadn't found a reason not to be.

So I told him about some upcoming Mormon cinema events and essentially found myself in the position that *Mormon Artist* as a publication finds itself in: sharing the good news that interesting and downright exciting things are happening in Mormon art.

My experience has been that the more I participate in the Mormon arts community, the more I find reason to be optimistic. And the more I find reason to engage in what's going on in productive ways. Such as having yelling matches with people who disagree with me about Mormon art.

With that long introduction, let's turn to the present issue of *Mormon Artist*, our first special issue and first contest issue. When we published a call for submissions to our Young Writers Contest back in January, a lot of people were confused as to why we limited the age of submitters to under thirty. Part of this was that James Goldberg and I have a feeling that young Mormon artists are engaging their religious culture in ways that are interesting and somewhat different from older generations of Mormon authors. Their experiences are different, and we wanted to explore that.

For example, in the personal essay, "Faith," by Eliza Campbell, we get a glimpse of a theme that is popping up in a lot of younger Mormon authors' writings of recent years: the kind of angst that results from a disconnect between one's own values and the values of one's friends and peers.

In other words, between the values of Mormonism and the values of mainstream modern culture. This disconnect, from what I've observed and experienced myself, tends to find its most intense moments of painful contrast in high school. In this way, Eliza Campbell speaks to the experience of thousands of Mormon teenagers who are figuring out their faith in the pressure cooker of the high school experience.

Sarah Page and Davey Morrison Dillard, with their poems "Coring the Apple" and "Blind Man," continue the tradition of setting biblical scenes to verse, casting these stories in the light of Mormon understandings about the story of Adam and Eve, as Boyd Petersen explicates in his essay response to the two works. But with "Adam and Eve," we have a modern twist on the biblical tale.

In Tyler Chadwick's poem, about a protagonist who meets a man in a red jacket during an early morning jog, we have a very urban experience. While the experience itself could be compared to works by older generations of Mormon authors, the very urban setting is indicative of a shift from a tendency toward setting Mormon narratives in small town Wasatch front spaces to urban spaces.

There also seem to be larger numbers of young Mormons writing from multicultural perspectives. Although the piece was not a part of the contest, we chose to include James Goldberg's "Tales of Teancum Singh Rosenberg," a made-up multicultural Mormon folktale, to represent this trend.

In this issue you will read works by young authors, some short interviews with them about their works, and some short readers responses. Some of the responses are more academic, some by people who've never met the author, and some by people who know the author well. In this way we hope to do several things: First, to present examples of some good Mormon writing by young Mormon authors to show that—though none of them is a Shakespeare yet—there is reason to be hopeful; second, to show serious readers engaging these works thoughtfully and seriously; and third, to encourage Mormons to keep creating and keep encouraging others to create. ■