


FILM REVIEW: THE HOBBIT: THE BATTLE OF THE FIVE ARMIES

Tolkien's Middle Earth comes full circle with last instalment

By Mark Jackson
Epoch Times Staff

Peter Jackson made zombie movies so studios could see he had the right stuff to handle J.R.R. Tolkien's universe. So began his "Hero's Journey."

The "Lord of the Rings," and now "The Hobbit," two massive film trilogies describing Hero's Journey (Frodo's and Bilbo's), have become his crowning body of work.

Jackson completing this journey with "The Battle of Five Armies" is known as bringing the gold back to the village compound: his audiences have been enriched. His every set piece, costume, and character have done Tolkien proud.

Speaking of bringing back gold, that giant sucking noise you'll soon be hearing is Warner Bros. hoovering up a billion dollars worldwide, just like the previous films hauled in. This one's definitely the best in the series.

Starting with a bang

This third and final Hobbit instalment picks up right where the last one left off—Smaug

the dragon (voiced by Benedict Cumberbatch) is having a dragon-sized tantrum, spewing mass arson and razing Lake-town to fizzling embers.

But Bard the heroic bowman (Luke Evans) kills the baleful beast with Lake-town's legendary, corkscrew-like Black Arrow. Normally, starting a film with that big of a bang leaves nowhere to crescendo to. But not this Hobbit film—not even close.

Dwarf-king Thorin (Richard Armitage) swoons with "dragon sickness" (greed) for all his ancestor's reclaimed gold and jewels lying around, with no dragon squatting on it.

This condition stems mainly from not finding the brick-sized, opalescent Arkenstone, cornerstone of the entire dwarvish kingdom. That's because Bilbo is hiding it.

Thorin becomes ever so evilly truculent, not to mention possessed, and starts breaking promises and declaring war. Which is very annoying to Bard and the good people of Lake-town, as well as elf-king Thranduil (Lee Pace), who rides an elk with double-wide moose antlers and whose own fey, elfin snoot-

iness is very annoying in and of itself.

Meanwhile, out at castle Dol Guldur, Dark Lord Sauron has wizard Gandalf the Grey hanging from a parapet in an iron birdcage.

The evil One Ring is symbolic of all human addictions and attachments.

Unluckily for Sauron, Gandalf intones spells, surreptitiously summoning his gang, the White Council. But then Sauron responds by getting his own gang, the nine Nazgul (undead, zombified former kings of men). Soon we've got a Middle Earth rumble.

Here, the CGI is stupendous! We all had the sneaking suspicion early on that you don't ever, ever, ever want to mess with Galadriel (Cate Blanchett), and it turns out our premonitions were correct. Blanchett blows the roof off.

This sets us up for Jackson's best thing: a massive, sense-rattling, standing-on-the-shoulders-of-Spielberg, outrageous battle scene (the battle for which the movie is named). It's a doozy.

Coming full circle

While Luke Evans as Bard is a dashing new Viggo Mortensen, Orlando Bloom's Legolas is putting on weight. It's a good thing the whole series has wound to a close while everyone's still good-looking. Still, we get some excellent Legolasness out of Bloom, like bat riding and navigating a torrent of falling rocks in the manner of a gravity-defying stepladder.

All in all though, it must be said that "Lord of the Rings" (LOTR) was the true masterpiece, with the Hobbit trilogy falling somewhat short.

There was a lot of publicity concerning the 3D and the 48 frames-per-second-shooting. The result is not spectacular; it's just nice, detailed CGI. But "LOTR" already wowed us with Gollum-CGI, while also benefiting from the best of low-tech.

For example, the over-reliance on graphics takes the edge

off two fully computer-generated Orcs in "The Hobbit": Azog the Defiler and Bolg. When you put their pasty-white CG skin up against the gnarly, black-brown prosthetic makeup of the behemoth Uruk-Hai of "LOTR," they (ahem) pale in comparison in the magnitude of their shock-value.

Hardcore fans will still hate the fact that there's a random, made up female elf who falls for dwarf Kili, who's two feet shorter than her. But you gotta have a romance, right?

Lastly, there's the issue of one small book having been chopped into three movies. But we all already know that integrity tends to get compromised in showbiz to benefit the bottom line.

On a positive note, in "Battle," Jackson neatly brings the story right back, full circle, to the start of "The Fellowship of the Ring," his first movie. Now, enviably, when newcomers to the series watch all of them in order, there will be a progression from pretty good to awesome.

Enlightenment

Finally, all hail Peter Jackson. Bravissimo. What did he accomplish? He gave filmgoers the pre-

1. The dragon Smaug destroys Lake-town in "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies."

2. & 3. Opposing sides get ready for battle.

4. Dean O'Gorman and Aidan Turner play dwarf brothers Fili and Kili.

5. Gandalf (Ian McKellan) and Dain the Dwarf King (Billy Connolly) right before the big battle.

mier enlightenment story of our modern times.

That's the real reason these books and movies are so popular the world over—they're a taproot leading down to the underlying reasons of human existence.

The evil One Ring is symbolic of all human addictions and attachments; it had to be destroyed, and much pain endured (karmic debts paid) before the ring bearers—Bilbo and Frodo—could find inner peace.

In the end, they journeyed into the West (a heavenly paradise) with the elves, having reached a high state of moral purity, meaning they would never again have to return to Middle Earth.

The big battles in "The Hobbit" are fun, but so are, say, those in "Braveheart." What sets J.R.R. Tolkien and Peter Jackson apart from all the rest is this classic, timeless story of the human attainment of spiritual enlightenment.

'The Mikado': A love of life and music

Mezzo-soprano Mia Lennox returns to Toronto operetta stage

Madalina Hubert
Epoch Times Staff

TORONTO—Mezzo-soprano Mia Lennox has performed in a number of operatic roles, from "Carmen" to "Madama Butterfly," yet if you asked her father what his favourite was, he'd say her grade six performance in the chorus of "The Mikado."

With its catchy melodies and humorous plot, Gilbert and Sullivan's 19th century work has become a staple for amateur and school productions, remaining one of the most beloved works of the operetta/musical theatre genre to this day.

"It's a really accessible kind of show ... it's just good fun," says Lennox.

"Sometimes people really want to escape, laugh, and immerse themselves in what's absurd without asking themselves too

many questions. I think that's what Gilbert and Sullivan bring quite often to audiences."

However, in her view, "The Mikado" is not without its moments of truth and beauty, as well as intelligent writing.

All of these qualities contribute to making the operetta an enduring work that appeals to people of different ages and backgrounds.

In the Toronto Operetta Theatre's (TOT) production, Lennox plays the character of Katisha, an older woman at the court of the Mikado (the title given to the Japanese emperor) who has set her sights on the emperor's son Nanki-Poo. Faced with the perspective of marrying the unattractive Katisha, the young man runs away, only to find himself caught up in a series of colourful, absurd, and hilarious adventures.

Although a bit of a caricature, Katisha is a determined woman,

and Lennox enjoys playing her. "She just charges on stage and takes it over, and I love that."

This is the singer's second time with the TOT after performing in its world premiere of "Ernest, The Importance of Being" in 2008. At the time, she was nine weeks pregnant, and she says it was an experience to remember.

Balancing a singing career with motherhood has been challenging, but something that Lennox was determined to do.

"Ultimately when you love something, you just find a way to make it happen," she explains.

"You only live once ... so you really want to make the best of the time you've got. If this is what you love to do you have to find a way to do it."

As a singer, Lennox believes that talent, passion, and hard work are a must. However, they are not the most important factors in a career—she feels suc-

cess is directly linked to one's character.

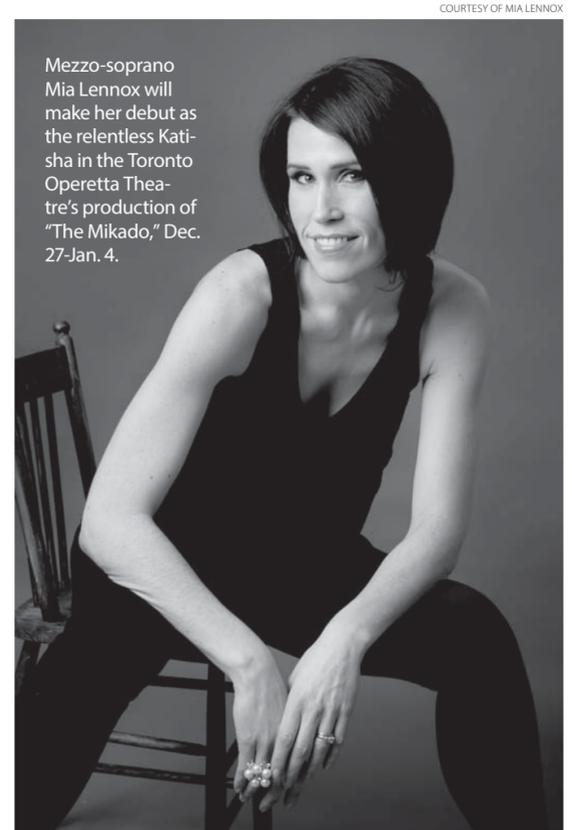
"The singers I know who are the most successful are generally some of the kindest, most modest people you'll find. I really think that's what keeps your career going," she says.

"I do believe there's a very, very important space for kindness and support as a singer with both the companies and your colleagues," she adds.

Making the best of one's time performing is also key.

"You have to have fun. If you're going to do it, you might as well have fun doing it."

The Toronto Operetta Theatre's production of "The Mikado" will take place Dec. 27-Jan. 4 at the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts. For more information, visit: <http://www.torontooperetta.com>. Epoch Times is a sponsor of the Toronto Operetta Theatre.



Mezzo-soprano Mia Lennox will make her debut as the relentless Katisha in the Toronto Operetta Theatre's production of "The Mikado," Dec. 27-Jan. 4.