

Recommended Movie

Zorro, The Gay Blade, starring George Hamilton. Superficially, this is a raucous and sometimes bawdy comedy. Woven deeply within its laughter, however, is a generous amount of insight.

Much of the comedy is based upon the idea that people see only what they want or expect to see. It is always the obvious that escapes us and this is demonstrated within this movie in a hundred different ways.

In looking at the relationships between various individuals within the movie. Respect and disrespect are given as many different and contrasting costumes to wear as the persona of Zorro himself (within this movie, at least, Zorro does not always wear black). Love may be a deep current within the greater unfolding of the movie's overall plot, but surface emotions and intellectual passions are more often the causative agents. Yet the characters remain to the very last moment and perhaps beyond, quite unaware of just how close to the edge they have been dancing, just how very close they all came to being killed. It's as if death is not now (nor ever was) particularly real to them.

And yet it had to have been, since the inciting incident of the story is the death of the previous generation's Zorro. It is rather their calm acceptance of the possibility of death at any moment that disturbs me as I think back upon the movie. It's as if the main characters of this movie have no need of the emotion of grief. Because death is a normal part of life and because they are living life to the fullest, their trust that life will not end any sooner than it's supposed to, is quite commendable. Essentially, they are demonstrating faith for everyone around them.

Additionally, they each contribute the best of what they have and are, to social and political ideals much greater than themselves. Though they occasionally are caught up in silly self-centeredness, they respond to the call of greater nobility and self-sacrifice as if such higher qualities had never left their minds for even a moment. Perhaps this is one of the challenges of the movie, to see that a single person may encompass extremes of both foolishness and heroism. The most abiding theme within the

actions of the main characters, however, is that no matter what the situation or how ridiculous the odds, they do whatever they can. The good deed knows not whether it will be successful any more than the evil deed does. From one moment to the next, the characters just keep moving, seizing whatever is available to alter the circumstances they are facing in some hopefully helpful way. The idea of defeat as a permanent condition never seems to even occur to them. Why surrender when there is one more counter-attack to try? Onward with a smile! The first note of the bugle calling for another charge, dispels any notion that defeat is an accomplished fact. As long as anyone lives, embodying unpredictable divine potential, defeat is never an accomplished fact.

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Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you.
---Sister Who

"10 Years in Gold Hiking Boots"

On Saturday, June 9, 2001, from 7:30-9pm, at the Metropolitan Community Church of the Rockies, which is located on the southeast corner of Clarkson Street and 10th Avenue in central Denver, Colorado, I will be performing nearly a dozen songs, sharing various anecdotes, and reminiscing about the steps and the growth of Sister Who's first decade of existence.

Late in the show, after requesting financial support, a basket will be passed and the donations collected will be given to the Pieta House, a residence for people with AIDS. Please pass the word to anyone interested in being present at this celebration. Blessings, love, and peace to all!

Ten Years in Gold Hiking Boots

Has it been ten years already? Wow. I don't think I had any way of comprehending ten years ago, the number of television shows, newsletters, newspaper columns, book manuscripts, Internet website pages, appearances, public lectures, photo sessions, workshops, personal conversations, volunteer job assignments, blessings, prayers, parades, mountain hikes in full costume and makeup, and hundreds of thousands of lives with which I would become involved, by becoming Sister Who.

What does the next ten years hold? Hopefully many more television shows, speaking engagements, personal conversations, mountain hikes, and so forth, as well as the completion of the book manuscript, Reinventing the Sacred Clown and the establishment of a new non-profit organization, out of which will grow an interfaith retreat facility known as, "The Center for Spiritual Growth and Celebration." Having just typed those words, I find myself momentarily stunned at the scale and implications of such a dream. I actually have already drawn an initial floorplan for the retreat center and was dumbfounded when I finished the design to discover that the final structure encompassed more than twenty thousand square feet of rooms (meeting rooms, a library, temporary and permanent residences, a workshop, etc.).

Preposterous? Only if God is not real. My job is to dream the dreams, create the plans, prepare my body and my mind, and then wait for the opportunity to show up and do the work.

Half the job of succeeding at anything is simply being willing to show up (on time) and do the work. Perhaps the retreat center will never be more than a dream, but if that's so, that particular future does not need my help. In virtually every form of loss, the process of losing does not need anyone's help. The loss will happen in its own way and in its own time, if it really needs to happen at all.

This is exactly what I said a couple of months ago to a friend dying of AIDS-related complications, when he expressed a certain apprehensiveness about dying. Death will happen without your help. While you are alive, live in the best possible way you can.

Until you have finally and completely lost, continue to nurture a victory of some sort, in whatever ways you can. When and if you ever find that you have finally and completely lost, look for some way to sow the seeds of a future triumph and thereby rob your oppressor of the last word.

I recall being told, "Smile. God loves you (even though the speaker doesn't?)," the implication being that God's love somehow makes every painful struggle less important. But pain still hurts, sometimes with unbearable intensity. Then I read somewhere, "Smile. It makes people wonder what you've been up to (and therefore also what sort of deception you're attempting to pull over on them)." A more light-hearted tease perhaps, but there's no real muscle behind that. The paraphrase I would like to now offer, bearing a bit more insight and a bit of assertive strength, is, "Smile. It's the most adversarial yet non-violent thing you can do to anyone who is trying to bring you down (an emotional form martial arts, perhaps)--and it may even serve to start bringing them up."

Love is not just a sweet and sappy emotion that sugar-coats everything and obscures whatever negative qualities or events may exist. It is also the power of transformation by which cycles of violent exchange and re-exchange are broken. Love is the force that meets an angry spirit and diverts the negative energy into God's

transforming hands instead of reflecting the anger back into the world again. Love is the vision that pierces ugly appearances so that wounded souls within may be healed. Love is the divine spark within each of us, waiting for an opportunity to shine.

A new decade of spiritual and societal work is dawning. Let us each go forth to shine with all of the divine brilliance available within each of us.

"It is not essential that we throw out all existing religious systems. It is essential, however, that we use our religious systems as tools to find God, rather than using God as a tool to support our religious systems."

--- Sister Who

If You're Ever Told Any of These Things, Don't Believe It for Even a Second

"That's all there is to it." Translation: "I don't want to look any further."

"There's nothing you can do about it." Translation: "Don't fight me. I'm worried I might be wrong, that there really is something you could do."

"All good things come to he who waits." Am I supposed to conclude that everything that didn't "come" to me wasn't a good thing? The other question is "how long?" If someone is falling from an airplane, a parachute may be offered, but the ground below may get there first.

"Hard work guarantees success." Perhaps not, but laziness doesn't guarantee anything either.

"Nobody helped me get to where I am today." Every successful merchant is dependent upon consumers. Every successful politician is dependent upon voters. Every successful teacher was at one time a student and the best teachers remain students all of their lives.

"It's all so simple." Translation: don't confuse me with details.

"It's so complex." Translation: I'm having trouble seeing beyond all of the details.

One of the common themes I have observed within the work of sacred clowns through the ages of humanity on earth, is that everything is interconnected, that life is in fact a very collaborative effort.

The point of this article, is not so much to prove or disprove any of the above statements as it is that our language reveals more of our perspective than it reveals objective truth (that which remains true regardless of context). Describing something as good, bad, tall, short, large, small, significant, or meaningless requires a context. Most opinions are based upon or inspired by some element of personal experience. To say that the opinion is categorically wrong is to deny the existence of the relevant experience. On the other hand, to say that the experience is a "one-size-fits-all" answer denies all of the reality beyond the reach of the particular individual momentary experience.

Each experience, insight, thought, conclusion, feeling, and thing is real within its context--but it's not all there is. More exists than

any particular experience, insight, thought, conclusion, feeling, or thing can encompass.

During my second year of college, I was faced with a difficult but very important life lesson, of which I must be reminded every other year or so, it seems, because I so easily forget to live by its insight. I had a lot going on in my life at that time, dealing with psychological, emotional, and social issues while still trying to maintain a minimum of academic respectability. Finally I chose to take a more assertive (perhaps quietly rebellious) and broad-minded approach. More concisely, I realized that nearly every time someone informed or reminded me of an "obligation," it was an exaggeration at the least and a lie at the most.

A particular report, for example, required for the final grade of a particular class, was due before leaving for Christmas break in mid-December. Some evenings prior to that, I had taken time off to attend to my own psychological health instead of working on the report's composition. My roommates were aghast. I looked them directly in the face and said, "The world will not cease to exist if I fail to submit this assignment on time. Life will in fact go on."

As it turned out, I finished the report on time but in the busy-ness of packing for Christmas break, forgot to turn it in. I gave it to the professor when I returned and he said it was very good but of course would not count toward my grade. I shrugged my shoulders, accepted a "C" for the course, and moved on to other things.

There have been people who have been very successful in life, often in unconventional ways, who were also high school and college drop-outs, people with significant physical and mental disabilities, and generally completely unqualified for the field in which they eventually excelled. Any one of us may be the next example of such a person.

So the next time someone says you're unqualified, just understand that there's some other door of opportunity waiting for you, of which that person is quite unaware, and continue the search for it. Blessings, love, and peace to you as you continue to do so.