



*THE  
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# First Friday News & Views

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## TIPPING POINT

by Jonathan Wilson

I was an adult throughout the Vietnam War. That conflict never enjoyed clarity of mission and it was perpetuated as long as it was based on manufactured fear of dire consequences from failure. None of those fears were real. The false fears upon which the war depended have not materialized. There has been no domino effect of communism creeping closer and closer to the United States. That didn't happen and, in reality, there was never any chance that it would.

I remember how the Vietnam War ended. It had nothing to do with the course of the conflict or achievement of any particular objective. It ended -- abruptly -- when we reached 50,000 body bags filled with young men and women of this country who died for no good reason. When we passed that threshold number of body bags, the moms and dads of this country rose up and, as if with one voice, declared that the war was over. They didn't care whether the "leaders" called it a win, a loss, or a draw. It didn't matter. More senseless deaths was not an option. No appeal to patriotism could overcome the force of their united voices. The voices of those few who continued to feel that false fear -- and there were some -- were drowned out completely and utterly marginalized.

That threshold represented a tipping point. It was difficult to reach. There were starts and stops getting there. No one knew what the threshold was beyond which there would be no further tolerance for the war. At the time there was no knowledge as I recall that there even was such a tipping point at some number of body bags. But when it happened the politicians recognized it in unequivocal terms and responded quickly. I will never forget the images of our final day in Saigon when helicopters were needed to air lift stragglers from the roof of the US Embassy as we beat a fast retreat.

What's the lesson to be learned? In politics, there is a tipping point; a point of no return; a point where policies are irrevocably changed; a point when irrefutable facts dispel false fears. It's necessarily unclear what that tipping point will be on any given topic, but the crucial lesson is that there is a tipping point.

At some point it was reached on the subject of the First Century belief that the earth is flat. At some point it was reached on the subject of the First Century belief that the earth is the center of the universe. At some point it was reached on the subject of the First Century belief that slavery is okay or that people are superior or inferior based upon the pigmentation of their skin. At some point it was reached on the subject of the First Century belief that women are inferior to men.

And the same is true when it comes to the First Century belief that all of God's children are straight, that "gay people" don't exist, and that those engaged in same-gender intimacy are merely straight people misbehaving. I can't tell you exactly when it happened, but I can confidently tell you that we've passed the tipping point on this topic. It has been a gradual but accelerating process. Think back to the Stonewall Riots in 1969 when gay citizens came out of the closet collectively and demanded that government-sanctioned harassment stop. Think back to 1972 when the American psychiatric community determined that gay people do exist, being gay is not a mental illness, and homophobia is. Think back to a growing number of states decriminalizing same-gender intimacy. Think back to states adopting non-discrimination laws prohibiting gay employers from discriminating against straight employees. Think back to school board members and other elected officials coming out of the closet. Think back to the appointment of an openly

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### CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, August 5, 2011 at Hoyt Sherman Place, 15th & Woodland, Des Moines, IA.
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by August 3 to [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or 288-2500 by phone.

gay US ambassador. Think back to the election of openly gay members of Congress. Think back to 2004 when a conservative United States Supreme Court abolished all remaining anti-sodomy laws. Think back to an openly gay Republican running for President of the United States. Think back to states legalizing same-gender civil unions and even civil marriage, as our third most populous state has recently done. Think back earlier this month when the most populous state in the Union adopted legislation *requiring* the public school curriculum to recognize the existence and remarkable, positive contributions of gay people in history, science, literature, the arts, and politics.

I can't tell you precisely when it happened, but I can tell you that it has. As more and more citizens have come out and at younger and younger ages, their moms, dads, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends have become political allies. You do the math. We have inseverable blood ties into the majority.

There will be those who still hold to First Century beliefs on various subjects, including this one. They will, in the short term, be able to leverage the residual fears among some voters for political advantage, just as Governor George Wallace did by fear-mongering over racial integration. But those days are numbered; the number is a small one; and the outcome is virtually assured. We've passed the tipping point.

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## DMMO

By Bruce Carr

At our FFBC meeting on July 1, the Des Moines Metro Opera was represented by its marketing director, Des Moines native Nick Renkoski, who brought with him both his movie-star good looks (yes, you can find him on the Internet Movie Database) and a quick run-thru of DMMO's three productions in this summer's festival.

This season -- the company's 39th, June 24 through July 16 -- comprised:

--**Don Pasquale** (composed in 1842), the 69th of Gaetano Donizetti's 71 operas. "One of the world's greatest operatic comedies contains a plot as old as time. The characters and their roles in the farce are clearly based on *commedia dell'arte* -- Italian improvised comedies. Pasquale is the old bachelor who always has an eye for the young ladies; Malatesta is the Doctor whose attitude and carriage is of profound erudition -- but whose wisdom is questionable; Ernesto is the young, passionate and often witless lover; and Norina is the willful, vivacious young woman caught in the center of the intrigues. Fashioned for four incredible singing actors, the opera is durable and timeless and the music charming, buoyant, and as enduring as springtime itself!"

--**La Boheme** (composer in 1896 by Giacomo Puccini), "the world's most popular opera! It's Christmas Eve in Paris, com-

plete with the abandoned revelry of Bohemian life. The novelist Henri Murger wrote a journal about his youth in Paris in the 1830s, and from its pages -- which would inspire **Rent** in our century -- comes a musical version to which Puccini gave beautiful and passionate melody so eloquent in its expression of love won and lost that it thrilled every succeeding generation."

--**The Dialogues of the Carmelites** (composed in 1956 by Francis Poulenc), "one of the twentieth century's most powerful, important and emotionally challenging operas. Set against the terrifying backdrop of the French Revolution, it tells the story of a young noblewoman who becomes a nun, against the wishes of her father and brother; she is deeply terrorized by the world in which she finds herself and joins the convent in an attempt to find refuge where she can live and work without fear. And then the Revolution begins and nothing is ever the same again. This is a story about real people but told with some abstractions that reflect the fact that often what we say to each other is not exactly what we mean. The opera records the everyday happenings and conversations in Blanche's life as she watches those around her deal with faith and courage and the events that lead her to her own crisis of faith versus fear. The final scene [*SPOILER: the holy sisters are all executed*] stands alone and apart as one of the most powerful moments in all musical theatre."

In Q&A following his outline, Renkowski noted that the first opera he ever saw (a school-tour production by DMMO) was in fifth grade at Holy Trinity School in Beaverville; and that his favorite opera is **Don Giovanni**. No surprise there....

Further information may be found at [desmoinesmetroopera.org](http://desmoinesmetroopera.org).

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## Back from Broadway

By Bruce McCabe

Last March I began planning another trip to New York. I intended to be there for five days in mid-June and wanted to see as many Broadway shows as possible. I read a few reviews and finally bought tickets to **Book of Mormon**, **Jerusalem**, **War Horse** and **Billy Elliott**. When the Tony Awards were presented on June 13, two days before I flew away to my short vacation, I was pleasantly surprised to see that **Mormon** won Best Musical, **War Horse** won Best Play, and Jerusalem's Mark Rylance won Best Actor in a Play. These were simply lucky picks on my part, but I did feel satisfied that I had picked a *theater trifecta* of sorts.

**Book of Mormon**, in my opinion, is a "see it one time" show. It pokes ample irreverent fun at the origins of the LDS church and has some catchy musical numbers, but I'm not sure the show has *staying power*. As I sat through it, I pondered whether the creators from South Park might have a subtle political agenda, since two 2012 Republican presidential hopefuls, Romney and Huntsman, are Mormon. It also occurred to me that this play couldn't be pulled off using any other church as the target. It seems Salt Lake is suffering in silence, but I could imagine Baptists, Muslims, and even Catholics in front of the

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*Don't count the days; make the days count.*

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## L'amour fou

Review By Gary Kaufman

Occasionally, when visiting obscure movies in the art houses, you come upon an absolute gem. One such movie is **L'amour fou**, a documentary of fashion designer Yves Saint-Laurent as told primarily from the viewpoint of his lover, Pierre Berge. When Christian Dior died in 1959, the French fashion world feared that it would be the end of "haute couture" (high fashion) and wondered if the famous House of Dior would be closing down. But those governing the House of Dior decided to leave the designing of its clothing to Yves Saint-Laurent, a shy designer who was suddenly put into the spotlight. His first show was a tremendous success, yet after two years he was fired from the House of Dior because the owner was a war hawk and Yves had avoided being drafted into the Algerian war. Suddenly, this designer was out in the cold. His lover decided that the only thing to do was to set up their own fashion house with Yves as the designer. Their first show was again a success, and Yves Saint-Laurent went on to be a fashion design superstar.

But this film is more than a film about Yves and his fashions; it is also about the relationship he had with his lover, Pierre Berge. This was a time when gay relationships were not mentioned and almost everyone hid that aspect of themselves. Yet the very night this couple first met, they decided to live with each other and Yves was very public and out-there with his relationship. The other aspect of the film is showing the art collection gathered by Yves and Pierre during their years together. The punctuating moment of the documentary is the sale of the art at a New York art house.

Even if you aren't a fashion buff, I am sure you will find the fashions of Saint-Laurent imaginative and generally quite fun, and the art collected by an artist and his wealthy lover is also interesting to review. The director of the documentary added some staged moments which contributes to the emotion. It is not a drab documentary but a film about creativity and relationships. Although the film has already left the Des Moines theaters, it is definitely a film worth seeking out.

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*Tax breaks for the rich won't create American jobs; consumer demand creates jobs. Give tax breaks to the rich and there's no telling where it will be invested. China? South Korea? Taiwan? Supposed "trickle down" continues to be voodoo economics just as the first President Bush said. Give tax breaks to the middle class and the poor and the money gets spent, creating demand. If the demand is there, entrepreneurs will be able to justify starting or expanding a business and add jobs in the process. If the demand is there, lenders will readily lend capital needed to meet the demand. Demand is the key. "Percolating up" is the path to our prosperity.*

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*Learn to listen; opportunity sometimes knocks very softly.*

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## Broadway (cont.)

Eugene O'Neill Theater angrily waving axes and torches if they had been similarly ridiculed.

**Jerusalem's** first two acts didn't keep me on the edge of my seat and I found myself wondering if I should ask for a refund of my ticket price, but the third act vindicated the Best Actor award for Rylance and left me in tears. See it but don't sit in the front row.

**War Horse** at Lincoln Center employs brilliant puppetry and, a few minutes after the beginning, had me believing I was watching *real* horses. Spielberg's upcoming movie version will be challenged to duplicate the stage version's magic, mainly because it attempts to tell the story without the genius of The Handspring Puppet Company of South Africa. Spielberg has even recently admitted frustration that "real horses weren't nearly as expressive as the puppets." So maybe Broadway can still beat Hollywood in some aspects of the entertainment game.

I saw **Billy Elliott**, winner of the 2009 Tony for Best Musical, last September. Revisited it in June of 2011. Will see it again when it comes here to the Civic Center. 'Nuff said. My daughter JoLene, seeing her first Broadway show with me, was competing with me for who could use the most tissues to dab the tears from our eyes. Thanks to FFBC member David Nolan for recommending a visit to *LIPS*, which has raucous, hilarious drag queens serving the food and also performing on stage. JoLene said she envied their feminine attributes. Newly relocated to 227 56<sup>th</sup> Street, fairly close to Central Park. Reservations necessary.

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*Did a gay man invent the hospital gown?*

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*Buy a truck and you'll learn that lesbians drive trucks; gay men maneuver them.*

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## BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the August 5 meeting no later than August 3. E-mail [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com) or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Suku Radia, President and CEO of Bankers Trust Company.

▼ ▼ ▼  
Thanks to Arthur Breur for his enlightening remarks at the last meeting.

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Thanks to Michael Thompson and Allen Vander Linden for hosting the annual picnic at their home in Urbandale.

▼ ▼ ▼  
Be sure to peruse the front table for a book you might like to read. Book donations are always welcome. Thanks to Fred Mount for coordinating the book exchange .

▼ ▼ ▼  
Consider a tax deductible contribution to the scholarship fund.

# FFBC

*First Friday  
News & Views*

*Des Moines, Iowa*

**AUGUST 2011**

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## My M.O. (Monthly Observations) The Mystery of **Accessline** (continued) and Other Things

Steve Person

Last month I reported that someone at the Iowa Capitol was tossing all copies of **Accessline** into the trash and of my efforts to rescue the monthly Iowa gay and lesbian newspaper for those who come to the Capitol and wish to have a copy. The saga continues.

The July copies were duly delivered to the building, and I was given an extra stack just in case someone decided to take it upon himself to rid the Capitol of anything that might have to do with gay/lesbian issues. Such is the atmosphere in which the State of Iowa operates nowadays. The copies of the newspaper stayed where they were until July 8. Then it happened again! When I left the Capitol at 2:15 on July 8, the papers were in their usual spot near the south elevator in the basement. When I came to work on Saturday, July 9, they were in the trash next to the elevator. So, I have a window of when they were trashed but now have no idea who did the dirty work. My earlier suspicion was that they were dumped by an extremely right wing senator, but I have not seen that person since the legislature left the building on June 30, so the plot thickens.

I rescued the remaining copies and put them back, bolstered by a few of the additional copies that I had been given. By the way, I still have many copies, so if these current ones get thrown away while I am not there, new ones will be put in their place. There have been many right wing candidates and their cronies at the Capitol in the last few weeks, so it could have been done by any one of them. I will keep watch.

On to other things.

I recently purchased a delightful book from The Book Store in downtown Des Moines. It is entitled **Queenan Country: A Reluctant Anglophile's Pilgrimage to the Mother Country** by Joe Queenan. Queenan is an American with a British wife and, like me, has made numerous trips to the Mother Country. That, however, is pretty much where the similarity ends. His book is a delightful send up of all things British, with most of which I do not agree but do, on a certain level, understand. When he speaks of British literature, he writes: "At a very early age, I became aware that Great British Literature breaks down into three broad groups: books that are very depressing, books in which nothing happens, and books that are incomprehensible."

Queenan must be forgiven in this analysis since he was educated in a Catholic school in suburban Philadelphia, but he has a quick wit and a great sense of irreverence, both of which I greatly admire.

So, as August brings on the impossibly ridiculous Iowa State Fair—a celebration of all things fat—I wish you good reading.

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*Softening rhetoric in political dialogue has its place in order to avoid violence by the violent-prone among us. Beyond that, calls for softening the rhetoric are the perennial cry of the establishment, the advocates of the status quo, those who are up to no good, or those who are trying to placate or pander to them.*

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