

‘The Nile Hilton Incident’ – a real film noir gem

By Sophie Braccini



Poster provided

Based on the true story of the 2008 assassination of Lebanese singer Suzanne Tamim in Dubai, the crime film “The Nile Hilton Incident” tells about corruption at all levels of the administration in Cairo on the eve of the Egyptian revolution. In the Greek tragedy tradition, a man defies the gods: the film’s central character stands up alone against the system, and like in most Greek tragedies, it doesn’t end well.

Set in Cairo on January 2011, a few days before the revolution, the film opens with a young singer being murdered in a room of one of the town’s luxury hotels. Noredin Mustafa, the grouchy investigator in charge of the case, begins to realize that those responsible for the murder might be close to then President Hosni Mubarak.

Think of a very “noir” version of “L.A. Confidential.” The same ingredients are at play here: the murder of a glamorous woman, blackmail, corruption at the highest political level, and the crushing of ordinary people who had the misfortune to be linked to the case. The social and political portrait of the Cairo megalopolis at a crucial historical moment also emerges during this captivating crime investigation.

The story that inspired the movie took place in 2008. At the time a giant of the construction industry and member of parliament, who belonged inside Mubarak’s close inner circle, was arrested and condemned for having paid a high-ranking police officer to kill Tamim.

The Swedish director of Egyptian decent, Tarik Saleh, said in an interview to CineEuropa that the incident made the headlines for months in Egypt. “It was incredible and strange! The trial was for Egypt what the O.J. Simpson case was for America: everyone followed it. So I started writing a screenplay based on these events, as I got the feeling it was a sign of the first cracks starting to appear in the system.” Saleh changed the timing of his movie to 2011 after the Arab Spring started and Egyptians took to the streets.

The prerevolutionary tensions add to the dramatic aspect of the movie as Noredin is slowed in his efforts by the protesters in Tahrir Square and the increasingly violent repression of the demonstrations.

Saleh uses a film technique made to resemble first-hand video filming of live events and puts the spectator in the middle of a very messy system deeply plagued by corruption. All low-level cops get bribes and when an inspector wants to arrest a suspect outside of his jurisdiction he has to give a kickback to his local colleague.

At the beginning of the movie, Noredin is a cop like any other; he belongs to the system and gets his share, as it is normal. But he is also a solitary individual and has a conscience. Something inside him cannot accept seeing others crushed while high power people get away with it. As the film develops, Noredin grows into the form of a tragic hero; he wants to find the truth and bring the culprits to justice even if they are the highest-ranking people in his country, and even if that means risking his own life.

Saleh chose Fares Fares to play Noredin, a forceful and surprising actor with a face as rough as his attitude. “The Nile Hilton Incident” received the grand jury prize for dramatic film in the world cinema section at the Sundance Film Festival a few months ago.

An Egyptian friend of this reporter recalled going back to Cairo six months after the events at Tahrir Square and how his brother was hopeful things had changed. But when he was stopped by a police officer for a traffic violation he was given the old alternative: pay a bribe or face endless administrative hassles. He paid, and was sad to do it.

Saleh’s film underscores how supporting all the little everyday infractions pave the way to larger crimes.

“The Nile Hilton Incident” is part of the International Film Showcase. It will play at the Orinda Theatre for one week starting Feb. 2.

Moraga resident honored

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Established in 1939, the SMC Guild is a women’s group that raises money for scholarships through monthly events such as an annual Christmas Luncheon, a Bridge and Bunco night, and a spring fashion show. Aside from building community relations as the publicity chair, McCormack is incredibly passionate about the Guild’s mission of raising scholarship funding for students in need. It is her dedication to the Guild that landed her this year’s Honorary Alumnus/Alumna Award. Assistant Vice President for Alumni & Community Engagement Mary Poppingo also serves as the Guild liaison. She notes, “Millicent’s passion and enthusiasm for the SMC Guild and for Saint Mary’s College is infectious. Anyone who meets her sees immediately her commitment to our students. At events, the room

lights up when Millie arrives and the fun begins.”

All of the 2018 award winners were notified in early December of their honors. When McCormack first heard the news, she was stunned. “I was shocked, and overwhelmed. I had no idea of its importance and it took a week to set in,” says McCormack. Her zest and passionate support for the Saint Mary’s College community was even evident as she told friends and family. “My husband’s whole family are either Santa Clara or USF supporters. I couldn’t wait to tell them all about the award I will be receiving at ‘little Saint Mary’s over here.’”

Tickets to the Distinguished Alumni Awards are still available and open to the public. For more information, please visit stmmarys-ca.edu/alumniawards.

Moraga resident pursues unique idea in new book

By Jennifer Wake

Simple experiences are often the catalysts for something much larger. In 2013 when Moraga resident Alex Foley and his wife, Linda, visited Gettysburg, site of the seismic battle that determined the outcome of the Civil War, he learned it was also the 150th anniversary of President Lincoln’s famous Gettysburg Address, and it sparked an idea.

“After reading that Lincoln penned five copies of his Address, I wondered if there could be a sixth copy hidden somewhere for all these years,” said Foley. “I thought it would be interesting to revisit the precarious Lincoln presidency and the conditions which challenged the U.S. at that time.” The result? Foley’s first novel, “Caleb’s Watch,” which he self-published last fall.

“American history seems to present us with tumultuous periods every 100 years – the 1760s, 1860s and who can forget the 1960s?” Foley said. “The Civil War period was probably the most divisive era in our history. We forget how close the South came to winning the war. Considering the past few years in our country, what better way to do this than to take the reader through an interesting and intriguing adventure reliving some of those historic events.”

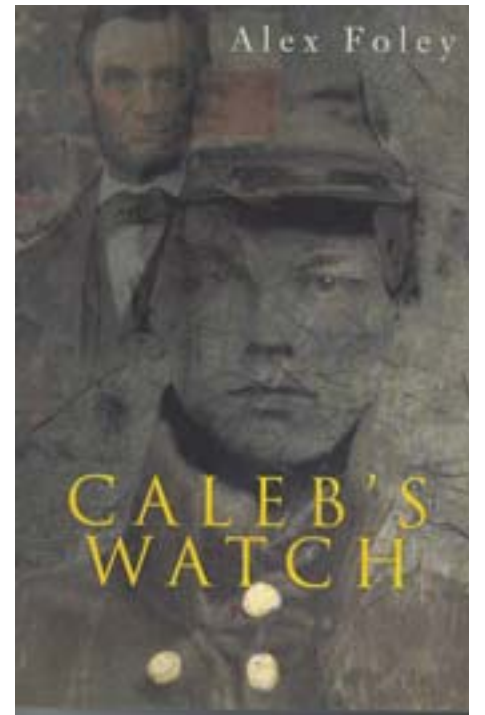
Foley chose a small town on the southern coast of Maine as the starting point of the narrative.

“Perkins Cove, York and Ogonquit are favorite vacation destinations and a close friend had provided me with letters written by his ancestor who was a member of Colonel Joshua Chamberlain’s 20th Maine Infantry Regiment during the Civil War,” he said. “This unit was immortalized in ‘Killer Angels,’ the book, and ‘Gettysburg,’ the movie.”

Foley says his research involved reading over 100 books, periodicals, articles, watching DVDs and visiting numerous websites.

The story begins with the protagonist Zach Rivers on holiday in Perkins Cove. He discovers that Caleb Shandry, a sergeant in the 20th Maine Regiment was killed in Gettysburg the same day Lincoln delivered his Address. This coincidence piques River’s journalist curiosity, setting off a journey to determine how Shandry died and the possibility that a sixth copy of Lincoln’s Address exists.

Rivers hooks up with a professor of American history and they are soon joined by Rivers’ lifelong friend, a military operations security expert, as they travel to various sites, from Gettysburg to Philadelphia, Kittery, Maine to Frederick, Maryland, searching for answers to the mystery, and soon find themselves running from two differing murderous factions intent on obtaining the Address for themselves. The book is available online at Amazon.com.



Contra Costa County High School Mock Trial is looking for volunteer legal professionals

Submitted by Jonathan Lance



Bay Area soon-to-be, practicing, and retired law professionals are needed to provide assistance to their future brothers and sisters at the upcoming 38th Annual Contra Costa County High School Mock Trial Program, held on seven early weekday evenings during January and February at the Martinez Court Rooms. Last year, close to 100 Bay Area practicing and retired attorneys and sworn judges, as well as third-year law students volunteered their time with the Mock Trials.

Coordinated by the Contra Costa County Office of Education, Mock Trial is an academic event provided for high school students. The hands-on educational program was created to help students acquire a working knowledge of our judicial system, develop analytical abilities and communication skills, and gain an understanding of their obligations and responsibilities as participating members of our society. This year’s case, *People v. Davidson*, is a criminal case involving first-degree murder and a pretrial argument on the Fourth Amendment.

Teams of high school students work with teachers and volunteer coaches to prepare their version of the criminal case, from both the prosecution and defense perspectives. Students assume the roles of trial attorneys, pretrial motion attorneys, witnesses, clerks, bailiffs, artists, and court journalists. Mock Trial judges and attorneys score their performance and provide immediate feedback. Winning teams advance through seven rounds of competition. The county’s cham-

pion advances to the state finals. This year, there will be 15 Mock Trial teams competing, representing high schools throughout Contra Costa County.

Volunteers will score two competing schools that argue the case in their assigned court. Each night will begin with a 15-minute rules and regulations training, then the volunteers will go into their scheduled courtrooms to serve as Mock Trial judge and scorers. The Mock Trials’ scorers are made up of Bay Area deputy district attorneys and deputy public defenders, as well as public-sector, private-practice, and corporate lawyers. In addition, seasoned law students are also welcome to participate. A practicing or retired judge or commissioner will preside over each trial, and also serves as one of the trial’s scorers.

The two highest-scoring teams will advance to the finals on Tuesday, Feb. 20. The winning team will then represent Contra Costa County at the California State Mock Trial competition, held in Santa Ana, Calif., March 16-18. The California state finalist team will then compete in the National Mock Trial Competition, held May 10-12, in Reno, Nevada.

In 1977, the Constitutional Rights Foundation introduced the concept of mock trials to the Los Angeles schools. In 1980, the program expanded to the state level. The California Mock Trial Program currently involves more than 36 counties and over 8,000 student participants from more than 400 teams. Approximately 1,500 attorney volunteers serve as team coaches and scorers, and 500 Municipal, Superior, and Appellate Court judges preside over the trials.

Mock Trial will be headquartered at the A.F. Bray Courthouse, 1020 Ward Street, in Martinez.

Interested volunteers can learn more by visiting the CCCOE’s Mock Trial Web page, or contacting Jonathan Lance at (925) 942-3429.

Schedule for 2018 Contra Costa County High School Mock Trials:

Preliminaries: Jan. 30; Feb. 1, 6, 8, – 5 to 8 p.m. (Eight competitions each night)

Quarterfinals: Feb. 13, 5 to 8 p.m. (Four competitions)

Semifinals: Feb. 15, 5 to 8 p.m. (Two competitions)

Final and Consolation: Feb. 20, 5 to 8 p.m. (Two competitions)

Teams from the following 16 Contra Costa County high schools will be competing:

Acalanes (Lafayette), Alhambra (Martinez), California (San Ramon), Campolindo (Moraga), Clayton Valley Charter (Concord), De Anza High (Richmond), Deer Valley Law Academy (Antioch), El Cerrito (El Cerrito), Hercules Middle/High (Hercules), Heritage (Brentwood), Kennedy (Richmond), Miramonte (Orinda), Monte Vista (Danville), Pinole Valley (Pinole), Richmond (Richmond).