

USA PLETTENBERG BAY NEWSLETTER

April 2012

There are four Monday and four Wednesday presentations this month, with Easter Weekend falling on Good Friday (April 6) and Easter Monday (or Family Day, as it is now termed in South Africa) on April 9. Our April programme is varied and interesting, and introduces two new series. We also have two speakers whose lectures promise to be most informative. Before I launch into details, I would like to share a few extracts from an article I read in a recent *International Express*:

Do you sometimes find the dialogue in modern movies almost impossible to understand, no matter how loud it is? This has little to do with getting old. The problem with sound in the cinema is both the actors mumbling and what is called “the director’s mix.” The director knows the dialogue backwards and insists on the speech being held down so that sound effects like music and other special effects give what the directors call “the feel of the film.” Forties and Fifties films, by contrast, are always perfectly clear, even when actors mumble. In those days, every effort was made to make the dialogue clear.

Dolby Laboratories, the company responsible for the sound on most movies, admits there are growing complaints from audiences – but directors ignore their recommendations and “squash the sound effects to the upper end of the dynamic limit.” It becomes like an incessant drumbeat, with the noisiest parts chopped together to make it more exciting and harder to ignore. Remember, these films are made for cinemas with surround sound and wide dynamic range. Turn the effects down to a reasonable level and the dialogue becomes almost unintelligible.

And you thought all you had to do was get a hearing aid?

Monday *The Battle of Quebec, 1759*

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10:00
FGV

Or, as it should more correctly be termed, *The Battle of the Plains of Abraham*, was fought where Quebec City now stands, on a steep-sided plateau on the St Lawrence River. This area was a pivotal point of French exploration into the Canadian interior, when explorers, hunters and trappers, known as *Couriers de Bois*, travelled the vast web of waterways during the 18th century. At the same time, English settlers were established along the Atlantic seaboard, from the great peninsula of Nova Scotia down to Virginia and Maryland.

War came to a head when the British not only felt threatened by the French but wanted access to the great St Lawrence river. U3A committee member, **Moesch van der Spuy**, who was born in Toronto, will present this fascinating film, related by a young Canadian historian who grew up in the region and researched thoroughly the historical facts. It was an astonishing battle that would change the whole course of Canadian as well as English and American history.

Wednesday **The Nanking Cargo**

4

**10:00
FGV**

In June 1983, Captain Michael Hatcher, an enterprising and successful Australian ingot salvager, found the wreck of a merchant ship that, *en route* from Canton to Europe, had hit a coral reef and sunk, 235 years earlier. The Chinese vessel was carrying some 150,000 pieces of porcelain destined for the fashionable dining tables of 18th century Europe. Most of it survived without chipping or breakage because it had been packed in chests of tea leaves (also due for sale). It became known as **The Nanking Cargo**, and in 1986 was auctioned at **Christie's** in Amsterdam.

Before her marriage, **Annabelle, Dowager Marchioness Conyngham**, who now lives in Plettenberg Bay, headed Christie's, Amsterdam, and the auction of **The Nanking Cargo** was held under her management. Lady Conyngham will be showing us a film about the Nanking Cargo, describing this (and other) famous auctions of Christie's and will bring some of her personal collection of this precious porcelain for us to view. If you have the slightest interest in porcelain and antiques, this is a meeting not to be missed!

Monday **Family Day (Easter Monday).**

9

Wednesday **Count Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec - the full story**

11

**10:00
FGV**

(Part one of two)

He was one of the great painters of the post-Impressionist period – and one of the more colourful characters of late 19th century Paris. Rich and dissolute, he was endowed with extraordinary ability as a painter but a childhood accident crippled him for life, turning him into a violent, obsessive alcoholic, about whom so much that is misleading has been written. However, during his short life Lautrec produced a body of art that was truly revolutionary in tone and impact. His pictures show the brilliance and glitter of the *fin de siècle* world, with all the excitement and energy of the music hall and circus. Lautrec portrayed his surroundings with a vividness that still appears fresh more than a century later.

This documentary is written and presented by **Waldemar Januszczak**, art critic of the London *Sunday Times* and noted art historian. We showed his excellent documentary on Paul Gauguin last year. U3A committee member **Jetty Oppenheimer** will be introducing this two-part series.

**Two
Mondays**

Monty Don's Italian Gardens

(New series: part one of four on Monday 16, part two of four on Monday 30)

16

30

**10:00
FGV**

Monty Don is definitely one of the best garden guides on TV. Engaging, informative, knowledgeable and enthusiastic, in this short series he explores both the culture and politics that shaped Italy's loveliest gardens – and interviews contemporary horticulturists who have restored these historic gems. This isn't one of your "smell the roses and look at the daisies" garden series. Monty Don unravels the history, drama, romance and intrigue of some of the most famous gardens in Europe.

The first episode takes the viewer to the Renaissance gardens around Rome, created by the Emperor Hadrian and various popes and cardinals to demonstrate their power and prestige. The second episode embraces Florence and the Tuscan countryside, where gardens were created as works of art. This series is a celebration of history, man and art, as well as nature.

Wednesday **Face to Face with the endangered Mountain Gorillas of Uganda**

18

10:00

FGV

These gentle giants are the star attraction of Uganda's beautiful **Bwindi Impenetrable National Park**. Bulkiest of the primates, these peace-loving animals share 95% of their genes with humans. It is a rare privilege to visit them, because tourists must book months ahead and only 30 people a day are permitted. Tour operator **Louis Parnell** will be giving us a PowerPoint presentation as she shares her personal experience of this compelling experience when, to gaze into their pensive eyes is, Louise told me, "as humbling as it was thrilling. No less so when one realises that fewer than 700 individuals survive."

Monday

Civilisation

23

10:00

FGV

(Part one of this outstanding 13-part series)

Forty-three years ago **Kenneth Clark**, one of the best known art historians of his generation, presented a series for BBC Television on the history of Western Civilisation as seen through its art. It was one of the first UK TV colour documentaries, produced after three years of research at the request of **David Attenborough**, then Controller of Programmes for BBC2. Its aim was to answer the growing criticism of Western Civilisation from its value system to its heroes. Broadcast to universal acclaim in 1969, ***Civilisation, A Personal View***, became a landmark documentary and is still regarded by many as the most important documentary ever produced. It was replayed on BBC4 in 2005 and digitally re-mastered in 2011 for broadcast on the HD channel.

Part 1 of 13

Plett U3A's knowledgeable historian, **Alain Leger**, will be introducing it. He writes: "Over the past few years we have reviewed the history of and considered many people in many lands over thousands of years – and trust that we have become the richer for it. This is now an opportunity for us to reacquaint ourselves in greater detail with the greatness of our cultural European heritage, whether it be found to be Eurocentric or not."

The first episode is called ***By the Skin of Our Teeth*** and is the story of Dark Ages – the six centuries following the collapse of the Roman Empire. It takes us from Byzantine Ravenna to the Celtic Hebrides, from the Norway of the Vikings to Charlemagne's chapel at Aachen. Following its original broadcast, Kenneth Clark was created Baron Clark of Saltwood – and nicknamed Lord Clark of Civilisation!

Wednesday **A Brief History of Western Music**

25

10:00

FGV

(Part one of three)

Music is not a fringe activity. It began when primitive man found he could sing or make noises by banging objects together or blowing through animal bones. In every society, in every period, people have made music – sung to it, danced to it, used it in solemn rituals and light-hearted entertainments. ***Music is a central and necessary part of human existence.*** Within our own Western Culture I will be looking at the history of music as we know it *from the time when notated musical scores started appearing*, during the later Middle Ages. There is a great deal to be encompassed into three lectures of an hour each, thus my first illustrated presentation leaps from the period of the **Gregorian Chant** to the sublime music of **JS Bach and Handel**, from *circa* 600 AD to the mid-eighteenth century. (The time span is not quite so great for lectures two and three!)

Monday

30

18:15
FGV

Film Club

Midnight in Paris

This film is a love letter to the French capital – and also a salute to the bittersweet lure of nostalgia. The scene is set in the lengthy opening sequence, composed from picture postcard views of Paris, the boulevards, the Seine and pavement cafés in the rain and the sunshine, all set to the haunting, plaintive music of a clarinet.

Scriptwriter Gil (Owen Wilson) sees Paris as a bastion of culture, philosophy and bohemian endeavour in stark contrast to his lucrative hack work in Hollywood. He is on holiday with fiancée Inez (Rachel McAdams) and her fairly revolting, stuffy, straitlaced parents. He is also grappling to write his first novel. One evening, warm with the glow of a few glasses of wine, Gil strolls the cobbled streets, a clock strikes midnight – and an old 1920s chauffeur-driven motorcar draws up and he is invited to jump in and join the party. Gil somehow tumbles down a hole in time to his dream Paris of the Twenties. Wilson is a perfect Gil, blustering, dithering, alternately hopeless and helpless but always endearing. *Midnight in Paris* is playful and witty, with great Gallic charm. I loved it.

Regular monthly meetings

Tuesday 10th April (the second Tuesday of this month)

Plett U3A Book Club meets at the home of **Elsa Baartman, 11 Oriental Place**, at **14:30**. *Please telephone Elsa to confirm your attendance.* Her telephone number is **044 533 5848**.

Wednesdays

The Beginners and Refreshers Bridge Club meets every Wednesday at the **Angling Club** at **13:45**. Please contact **Gill Brown on 079 875 2177** or **Pam Rodwell on 082 822 8422** if you have any queries.

Thursdays

The Plett Panters: The **Course List** details the outings for April. Please contact **Robyn Eidelman (044 533 0438)** for further information.

Fridays

The French Conversation Group meets at the home of **Merle Decot, 7 Glennifer Street**, at **10:00**. Merle's telephone number is **044 533 5879**.

Look forward to seeing you all – and enjoy!

Angela

044 533 1437
ae@piab.co.za