

The Last Act

December 30, 2020

The birthdays seem to come faster and the sense that this is the last act has become a solid reality for me.

Years ago, I took my son to see “Phantom Of The Opera” on Broadway. As we sat mesmerized during the final scene, I felt him punching my shoulder. I turned my head and looked at him. He was so taken by what was happening on stage that he couldn’t control himself. He was leaning forward in his seat, his eyes fixated on the stage, and pounding my shoulder at the same time. He had to do something. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing and hearing. The Phantom, Christine and Raoul were all singing separate lines at the same time, and they each hit their high note in a totally exhilarating finish to a fabulous show. My son was taking out his exuberance on my shoulder, and I was glad he did. It meant he “got it.” The drama and music had all built to this and the last moments were the culmination of a fantastic show.

I believe that life can be looked at in three acts, and in a truly great show the final scene is the greatest highpoint in the show. The first act is the formative act. Birth to thirty years old. It sets the stage, the drama, the character of who we are. It is where we are formed.

The second act – the next thirty years – are the building years. We build on the first thirty. We build a career, a family, a life. We strive. Work hard. Invest. We know this stage matters and what we do during these years will determine how good our last act will be.

The last act, the last thirty, is the finale.

Some of you are in your last act. You have lived a good life and now you face the remaining years. Ten, Twenty, maybe twenty-five or even thirty more years. It’s the last act of a great show but what are the high notes you will hit now?

We’ve been told by our culture that the finale is supposed to be the “golden” years. The years of retirement. Slowing down and enjoying the rewards of hard work: play golf, go out to eat, enjoy the grandkids. But that’s not how a good show ends, and you wouldn’t sit through one that did. A great show doesn’t end with the cast falling asleep. A great show ends with a big number

that has the crowd on its feet yearning, cheering, crying for more.

I was standing backstage one night waiting to go on and one of the other performers turned to me and said “You know, it’s all about the high notes. Hit the high note and no one will remember anything else.”

Life is about the high notes. In any great show, in the last act, you have to hit the high notes. The show has been building for this. The drama has increased, the music has built and now as it all comes to a close it has all built to this; the big song, the big number, the big notes. The old saying, “The show isn’t over until the fat lady sings,” is because the large opera singer, the diva, the star soprano is going to hit her highest note in the last act, and then, only then, is the audience satisfied, and only then can the show be over.

The last act is the time when you are finally prepared for the high notes. Your voice has warmed up, the audience has decided they like you and now they are waiting to see what you have for the big finish. You have what it takes to hit the high notes and now is not the time to meander to an unfulfilling end.

In the final act you have the financial security, the years of experience and knowledge, and most of all you should have the courage to really hit the high notes. What have you got to lose? It is not a time to timidly face the end of the show. Instead, it is time to embrace it with everything you have left in you and leave them wanting for more. The Phantom, Christine, and Raoul leave it all on the stage and when it is over the audience is exhilarated and spent. It is awesome!

I think of my friends who are an inspiration to me, who are hitting great high notes in their last act. My high school friend Bill, who after selling his business, now works with a consulting company helping young entrepreneurs with their businesses. Or Jim, who after retiring from a successful law career went to work at a seminary when he was in his late sixties and has been their Provost for the last five years. Or Chris, who last year – at the age of 74 – took up learning to fly gliders! Or my mentor Dr. Paul Kooistra, who in his seventies, graciously agreed to be on the Timothy Foundation Board and has so much passion and energy I can barely keep up with him. Until the Covid crisis hit, he was still teaching at a seminary in the Ukraine! Or another one of my mentors and professor from my Seminary days, Jerram Barrs - who also in his seventies - is still teaching and joyfully spent two days impacting our Timothy Foundation Fellows.

Or Duke Fakir, the last remaining original member of the fabulous Four Tops. Duke is in his eighties and he still tours! He still sings with the group, and granted some nights he rests on a stool, but he still helps make the great harmonies of the Motown sound. He is *literally* still hitting the high notes.

All of the people I mentioned above have one thing in common. The people they are today are the people they were in their first act. Of course they have grown and matured, changed and are wiser, but the core of who they are is the same. They are hitting the high notes in their last act because it was always about the high notes, and they have been hitting them their entire lives.

Bill always cared about others, Jim was always investing his time in the community, Chris was landing planes on aircraft carriers in his twenties, Dr. Kooistra and Professor Barrs have taught faithfully and with courage their entire lives, and Duke has been singing with the Four Tops since his teens. They are simply being who they have been their entire lives.

One of the annoying things about “The Phantom Of The Opera” is that once I listen to the music it stays in my head for weeks. I always think twice before I listen to the soundtrack because I think, “Am I ready to have this music in my head for the next two weeks?” A great show (much like a great wine) is one you remember. It stays with you. You are still singing the songs in your head for days. The music sticks with you and you can’t let it go. A great life, with a great final act, is one that inspires others to sing their own song, to hit their own high notes, for many years afterward – a song they can’t get out of their head.

As we think about our lives it is good to begin with the end in mind. This newsletter isn’t only for those of us who are already on stage for our last act. It is also for those of you who are in your first and second act. Those of you thinking about your life and what it will become. Those of you who wonder what the final act will look like and how you will feel when the curtain falls.

What are you doing in your first and second acts that will enable you to have a truly great final act? What investments are you making in yourself and your relationships that will guarantee a great final act?

Your final act can be your best act. Don’t settle for someone else’s song. Craft a life that includes a great final act and hit the high notes in every act of your

life.

When the curtain falls your life will be a great song that the world cannot stop singing.

Know Who You Are And Be It!