

# ARF NOTES

Publication of the Association of Retired Faculty  
California State University, Northridge



VOLUME 36 no. 5

March 2024

WEBSITE: <http://www.csun.edu/arf>



## President's Message:

### Cynthia Rawitch

**ARF** has had a busy start in 2024 --with problems solved, issues addressed, knowledge gained and entertainment enjoyed. I hope most of you, our **ARF** members, have been able to experience some of these activities and discussions.

In the “entertainment enjoyed” arena, about 30 **ARF** members and friends joined the rest of the Soraya audience on January 19 in commemorating the 1994 Northridge earthquake with a spectacular and intense Diavolo dance performance of *Existencia*, commissioned for the event. Those who attended also could visit the Soraya art gallery exhibit of campus photographs in the weeks and months after the quake, as well as mingle at an **ARF** reception.

Just weeks ago, we were treated to “knowledge gained” from CSUN math professor and activist Maria-Rita D’Orsogna, who told us about a successful, decades-long campaign to stop oil drilling along the Italian coast. (And that’s quite a coastline!) The real message gleaned from Dr. D’Orsogna’s presentation is that one person can make important change through hard work, determination and the ability to inspire others.

Have we “solved problems?” We’ve been busy working to ensure our “retirees center”—(**ARF** and **ERFSA** offices)—remains ours and viable, with prominent identifying signage still in the works. Next on that agenda is a mini-clean-up crew of Board members to organize and declutter the **ARF** office. Wondering where that office is? Try Santa

Susana 110—or as we all knew it, FOB 110. Much thanks go to **ERFSA** administrative support Melanie Mamakos, who has served admirably as our liaison and “keeper of the key.”

We’ve “addressed issues” too. **ARF** accepted the opportunity to become home to five plaques that were homeless when the University Club/Orange Grove Bistro was torn down earlier this year. They will be displayed in the newly-organized office. We do have a mystery, however. The primary plaque we wanted, which lists all the faculty who helped in the construction of the Faculty Club back in the early 70s, has gone missing. Perhaps one of you reading this message has some idea of where else to look, who else to ask?

As for our equally busy second half of the year: Elections are coming up in early June at our annual general membership meeting and picnic, when the 2024/25 Board will be chosen. If you have an interest in one of the positions, please contact me or another member of the Board for details and to throw your hat into the ring. All **ARF** members should have gotten email from me in early February with details and encouragement.

March 8 brings us a light brunch and a presentation in honor of International Women’s Day. In April, we will be day-tripping to the Huntington Library and Gardens, and early May features our brunch and Graduate Student Awards. What fun!!

See you there,

Cynthia

P.S. I’ve run out of dogs—my own, my extended family’s and those volunteered by their owner. The photo this month is me! Thanks to Cynthia Desrochers for volunteering one of her three Yorkies last month.



**NEWS  
FROM  
CSUN**

### **Faculty Senate Report, February 15, 2024**

The three most important issues (in my opinion) addressed at the February Faculty Senate meeting were:

Starting in Fall 2024, all 3-unit morning classes will begin at 8:30 a.m., instead of 8 a.m. This will push the scheduled start of daytime classes by ½ hour all day.

Approval was given to the new preamble for Sections 600 and 700 of the Faculty Handbook, which lays out the roles of equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility in the RTP process. Included in the preamble were definitions of each. Also approved were language changes to the body of Section 600 RTP processes to reflect the new preamble.

Nominations for the Faculty Senate election were presented, with other nominations coming from the floor. There are two nominations for President, Theresa White (Africana Studies) and Jeff Wiegley (Computer Science).

Enrollment report: 34,011 students are enrolled for Spring, slightly above CSUN's assigned target. 26,000 applications have been received for Fall; up from last Fall. *Cynthia Rawitch, ARF Faculty Senate Representative.*

### **Black Power Movement Oral Histories**

California State University, Northridge historian and archivist Keith Rice, working with Africana studies professor Karin Stanford, has spent the past decade collecting the oral histories of Los Angelenos who played key roles in the fight for recognition and social justice for America's Black citizens. Some of those stories are now available on CSUN's Tom & Ethel Bradley Center's website and others can be accessed through the University Library's archives.

"The interviews reveal that the Black Power Movement was a serious and often times deadly undertaking," Rice said. "It was much more than public posturing in leather jackets, berets, and chants of 'Off the Pig,'" he said. "It was a war over the right to exist as Black American citizens with all the rights and privileges that go with it. These interviews reveal the common philosophies, sometimes conflicting ideologies and the camaraderie that existed between some of the leading organizations within the Black freedom struggle in Southern California."

### **ARF PROGRAM REPORTS, January and February 2024**

I hope the New Year has been treating you with kindness and that the incessant rains have not caused undue hardships. Our ARF Programs have resumed after the December Holiday hiatus, with a wonderful January Soraya event and an inspiring February speaker.

On January 19, 2024, ARF was treated to an exhilarating show at the Soraya - *Diavolo: Existencia*. A group of 30 ARF members and guests attended the performance, which was preceded by a reception catered by the Orchard Center. We enjoyed catching up with members while sharing treats and libations. The Soraya is a spectacular venue and meeting in the 'Gallery' where numerous photographs depicting CSUN campus days after the 1994 Northridge earthquake were on display, was indeed delightful. Our thanks to the Soraya's staff for their help with all the moving parts, including securing tickets for the performance at a discounted rate.



*Diavolo: Existencia* – the background (with appreciation to The Soraya Artistic and Executive Director Thor Steingraber for his insights):

In January 1994, California State University Northridge experienced what has been called the worst natural disaster ever to hit a university campus in the United States. What followed next were extraordinary acts of courage and perseverance. Within two weeks, classes resumed in trailers and outdoor locations. Months later, degrees were conferred, and a little more than a decade later, the campus was restored to an even better version of itself.

In 1994 the dance company *Diavolo | Architecture in Motion* had set up shop in Northridge. The Company was the brainchild of Jacques Heim, a recent CalArts graduate. It was inspired to meet the moment with daring and innovative works that celebrate the resilience of the human spirit. In 2011, when The Soraya's doors first opened, the performing arts center would become the cultural heart of the vast San Fernando/LA region and it was here that *Diavolo* found a regular home. Thirty years after the Northridge earthquake,

Diavolo—Architecture in Motion returned to the Soraya to commemorate the 1994 destructive seismic event with an original dance piece choreographed by Jacques Heim, and ARF members were witness to its world premiere. *La Dance Chronicle* sums up the company's artistry as a union of "movement and apparatus unlike anything you will experience anywhere. Founder and Artistic Director Jacques Heim imagined and brought to life a world onto itself." As spectators, we were immersed, intrigued, and even jolted by the intense, constant aerobic movement on the stage. Music, poetry, percussion, large metal props moved about the stage (by the dancers) with inexplicable precision and as if made of feather light material, high flying acrobatics, and memories engaged our senses and our thoughts, for some of us in very personal ways. The commemoration of the Northridge Earthquake was an emotional experience, in some cases maybe even a bit disturbing. Either way, it was immersive, it was art in motion and appreciated by all who attended. The original score written and performed by Thana Alexa and Antonio Sanchez was equally phenomenal and crowned the evening. This new very powerful work is a reflection on how a community resets and evolves in the face of disaster. Far more than mother nature's destructive power, what resonated with everyone in attendance, was the "representation of the resilience, humility, and selflessness born from facing the unknown and wrestling with mortality."

## ARF SPEAKER SERIES



The ARF Speaker Series resumed on Friday, February 9 with a brilliant talk by CSUN's own Maria Rita D'Orsogna, "Saving Italy from Big Oil." Attending Dr. D'Orsogna's talk were 35 ARF members. The presentation was preceded by our customary brunch/lunch and gave attendees

an opportunity to mingle and introduce themselves to Maria Rita. Her credentials are impressive: she received her PhD in Theoretical Physics from UCLA in 2003 and is currently a professor of Mathematics at California State University, Northridge and Associate Director at the Institute for Pure and Applied Math at UCLA. Her scientific interests cover a wide range of topics within biology and sociology, and she has worked on creating mathematical modeling of virology, cell biology, multi-particle swarming, migration, crime patterns and recidivism. By Italian standards she is a 'Renaissance Woman'!

As she took the podium, we discovered that Maria Rita D'Orsogna is also a dedicated environmentalist and a focused activist. She created a grassroots movement in her home country of Italy to fight big oil from taking over areas of unspoiled countryside and beach-

es. Her commitment to saving pristine environments in her native Italy was relentless, and her passion unparalleled.

Maria Rita shared that oil companies planned to drill onshore and at sea in Abruzzo, Italy, uprooting century-old wineries to build wells, refineries and pipelines, effectively turning scenic Abruzzo into an oil district. She vehemently fought back and has kept fighting for nearly two decades. Her personal story mesmerized all of us. We listened and wanted to hear more about her passionate fight, her vicissitudes, her personal sacrifices, and her final triumph. She graciously shared her journey with us.

As she began her talk and introduced interesting data and timelines, it became clear to all of us that, behind her gentle, calm, disposition Maria Rita was a force to be reckoned with. She first learned of proposed oil activities during a trip to her home region of Abruzzo, Italy. Although based in California - 6,000 miles away - Maria took it upon herself to raise awareness and educate the public at large. She blended her scientific training, her experience as a professor, and her strong desire for social justice into an environmental movement that rapidly spread across the country. She traveled from town to town in Italy, educating citizens about environmental and health effects, debating Big Oil, exposing political corruption, putting pressure on decision makers to act for the common good. In California, she used social networks and blogging to coordinate letter writings, to keep raising awareness and spur action. Finally, thanks to public uproar, spearheaded by Maria's unwavering efforts, the city of Abruzzo banned oil drilling and for the first time ever, the Italian parliament imposed a no-drill zone of 12 miles encompassing all of Italy's 5,000-mile coastline. Overall, she helped stop at least 40 oil leases, earning the nickname "Erin Brockovich of Italy."

Even before the Q & A, we pondered in amazement: how could just one person have impacted an entire country, a political system, indeed even the Vatican's Bishops? We all agreed that Maria Rita is the definition of perseverance, grace under fire, and passion in untold measure. Her presentation was truly inspiring at all levels.

Her story is a testament of how, by engaging with the community, scientists and educators can truly make a difference. *Patricia Miller*

## FUTURE PROGRAMMING

Please stay tuned for our next Speaker Series event on March 8 with guest Dr. Loraine Lundquist. Dr. Loraine Lundquist is a physicist and a climate activist. Her research has ranged from solar magnetic activity to science education. Prior to coming to CSUN, she worked as a researcher at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics and served as a Science and Technology Policy Fellow for the National Research Council. She has

received certificates in green building techniques and permaculture design. Emails with detailed information will be coming to your inbox soon including a tentative calendar for AY 2024-2025. *Pat Miller – Chair, ARF Program Committee*

**Emeriti News**

**Robert Chianese (English).** I am pleased to announce that my essay "Building with Nature," about bio-based architecture, has been published in the Jan/Feb 2024 issue of *American Scientist* magazine.

This essay follows through on a related and previous essay, "Sculpting Science," (Sept/Oct 2022 issue) as part of my assigned "beat" for the last ten years to report on science-art connections for the magazine.

*American Scientist* is a great resource about both the history of and new innovations in science (and you can subscribe for \$36 for the year and receive 6 well-illustrated issues) <https://islandviewmedia.net>



**IN  
MEMORIAM**

**Dr. Helen Giedt (Psychology)** passed away on November 19, 2023. She was one of the original members of the faculty in psychology, hired in 1958 within a year of the establishment of the campus, then known as San Fernando Valley State College. Dr. Nora Weckler was the founding chair of the department and had a major role in hiring Helen. Decades later, when Nora was asked how it happened that the CSUN Psychology Department had -- from the beginning -- such a good representation of women faculty, she replied "We just hired the best people."



Helen was indeed, among the "best people." As Emerita Professor of Psychology Tricia Keith-Spiegel recalls, "Helen's colleagues remember her for her always pleasant and positive demeanor and her engaging laugh. Her students loved her for her dedication to them and helping to ensure their future success. It was com-

mon for us to hear students tell about Helen going above and beyond to assist them with finding needed resources, supporting their chosen academic pathways in whatever ways she could, and offering quality counseling about coping with their current lives."

Helen was also among the more humble among us. During one departmental faculty meeting in the

1980's, she commented that she would likely not have been hired using the standards then in place. Her self-assessment was far too self-deprecating. From her first days on campus, she stepped into numerous leadership roles outside the classroom that had a common thread: enhancing opportunities for student achievement.

Within a year of being hired, Helen hosted the first meeting of a Psychology Club, in the home she shared with her husband Hal (a Director of the Counseling Center) and their children. A decade later, she launched a Help Line for students, staffed by graduate students in her Counseling and Interviewing class. The graduate students' task was to refer the student callers to the appropriate campus program, center or department. In the late 1970's, Helen launched the Interdisciplinary Center for Education and Research in Gerontology. The Center awarded certificates upon student completion of an integrated set of courses and advocated for senior citizens to be allowed to attend classes on any CSU campus without paying fees.

In November, 1973, Helen gave a public lecture on campus entitled "Acceptance of Death." Five decades later, she passed away in the northern California town of Angels Camp, with her son at her side.

Helen and Hal (who died in 2018) were avid members of the **ARF** Bridge Club. In 2015, they co-wrote the final installment of the Bridge Club Notes, thanking colleagues for years of honing skills and cultivating lasting friendships. A fitting farewell. Rest in Peace, dear Helen. *Michele Wittig*

**Thomas R. Maddux, (History)** passed away on December 30, 2023. Tom's life was so well lived that everyone who knew him and learned of his passing thought, first and foremost, of the positive impact he had on their own lives. While his passing and his eleven-month struggle against pancreatic cancer are cause for sorrow, his life was a treasured gift to be long remembered.



Tom was born in Cincinnati, earned his B.A. at Dartmouth in 1964 and his PhD at the University of Michigan in 1969. He was immediately hired at San Fernando Valley State College/CSUN in 1969, where he taught U.S. diplomatic history, Cold War, and Vietnam, retiring in 2014 after 45 years. At CSUN, he served several stints as History Department Chair, including during the trying times in trailers and tents after the 1994 earthquake. Since his retirement, he continued to contribute to his field as an editor for *H-Diplo* and turned his leadership experience to his

after the 1994 earthquake. Since his retirement, he continued to contribute to his field as an editor for H-Diplo and turned his leadership experience to his church's Harvest Food Pantry in the Conejo Valley.

As a chair and colleague, Tom was caring toward his students and his colleagues and always an attentive listener. His contributions to conversations were brief and clear and kind—and often graced by a twinkle in his eye and a wry rejoinder. He was a builder, encouraging faculty to develop new courses and interests. After the 1994 earthquake he led a hardhat tour of the old Art Building (slated for demolition) to assess the damage to the Whitsett Room, then located there. While it would have been easy to bemoan the damage, his focus was on what could be saved and how a new site could be an even better resource for the History Department's students and events. In the most contentious meetings and situations on campus, he never raised his voice but brought reason and courtesy to bear, always prioritizing student learning. His moral compass was unerring. All in all, he was an unforgettable mentor and role model to us all. *Merry Ovnick*



**Patricia (Pat) Y. Murray (English)** was born in 1930 and spent her childhood in New Mexico. She earned her BA from the University of New Mexico in 1953 and began her teaching career as a high school English teacher, later

earning her M.A. from California State University Northridge in 1962. She graduated from the University of Southern California with her PhD in Rhetoric in 1980 and joined the faculty of the English department at CSUN in 1990 as the Director of Composition. She served on the ARF board as a member at large in 2017-18.

Pat was a remarkable colleague. The Freshman Writing program was growing at this time. I was the Coordinator of the Developmental Writing Program which boasted a large enrollment and many lecturers. We were so glad to have a trained rhetorician at the helm, and she quickly won the respect of her colleagues, seeing what was working well for our students and willing to initiate changes as necessary. We had instituted portfolio grading in the Developmental Program, and she incorporated it into the Freshman Writing Program as well, making the whole freshman writing program more coherent. She ran workshops for faculty to help improve assignment design and teaching practices. Since *New Voices*, a journal of student writing which had been published by the Developmental writing faculty for

10 years was successful, Pat logically decided that the Freshman Writing students in English 155 should have the same opportunity. She founded *Wings* to showcase student writing at that level. She also revamped the upper division writing courses to make them coherent and appropriate for their particular clientele.

She and Dr. Barbara Kroll designed the stellar two-course preparation path for the Teaching Associates who would teach the Freshman Writing 155 course. At English Council meetings Pat would be bombarded with questions from faculty across the CSU about this revolutionary new way to prepare the writing faculty. The first semester was a study of composition theory and its application to classroom use. Seminar students observed experienced teachers, prepared and delivered mini lessons to their fellow classmates, and prepared a syllabus for their own class that they would teach the next semester. The second course was a practicum, meant as a support for these new teachers to problem solve, exchange teaching ideas, assignments, and grading practices.

Pat was generous with her time and her suggestions. She led our committee meetings with grace, humor, and a sense of practicality that endeared her to her teaching colleagues. She opened her home for potlucks, for casual get-togethers after portfolio readings, and other events until she retired in 1997. Pat died in November 2023. Her colleagues remember her as “an exceptional model of leadership,” “a voice of reason,” “calm and sensible” and for her “incredible fund of knowledge” and her “unfailing humility”. *Pamela Bourgeois*

### **Brief Remembrance Notices**

**David Anderson**, Professor Emeritus of English, November 9, 2023.

**Barbara Camilleri**, January 4, 2024. She was 98 and still an active member of **ARF**.

**Jim Dole**, Professor Emeritus of Biology, February 13, 2024. Jim was a past President of **ARF** and the founder and leader of **SCCARF**. **A memorial article in *ARF Notes* is forthcoming.**

**Shirley Jones**, December 27, 2023. Shirley was the wife of long-time **ARF** member Ken Jones, and a regular participant in many **ARF** activities. A memorial service is pending.

**John McGhee**, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics, 2023. He was 98.

**Weston Nathanson**, Professor Emeritus of Mathematics, March 13, 2023. He was also a professional actor in theater and film. Wes was a long-time member of **ARF**.



## BOOK GROUPS

The **Science Book Group** met on February 21st to discuss *Storm in a Teacup: The Physics of Everyday Life* by Helen Czerski, 2022.

Despite glowing reviews (see Amazon) not all of us were overwhelmed by Czerski's introduction to the physics of everyday life. She has a very lively writing style and is easy to read. However, she provides only a tiny description of the physics which control many different events. For example, she uses the pendulums inside the Taipei 101 Observatory tower to explain equilibrium and how it relates to earthquake protection in a high-rise building. She then jumps to a different, unrelated item, as the next paragraph discusses photosynthesis.

She also provides answers to vexing questions: How do ducks keep their feet warm when walking on ice? Why does it take so long for ketchup to come out of a bottle? Why does milk, when added to tea, look like billowing storm clouds? Unfortunately, she tends to answer these questions with long-winded, somewhat simplistic answers. Most of the group felt that, although some of the topics were potentially interesting, her writing style made the content hard to follow. *Heidemarie Lundblad and Phyllis Russell.*

We agreed to discuss the following book at our March 20th meeting: *Eve: How the Female Body Drove 200 Million Years of Human Evolution*, by Cat Bohannon, 2023. From a review: ".....the real origin of our species: a myth-busting, eye-opening landmark account of how humans evolved, offering a paradigm shift in our thinking about what the female body is, how it came to be, and how this evolution still shapes all our lives today."

### Monday Book Group

*The Feast of the Goat* is a powerful historical novel by the famed Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2010. Because our group had enjoyed the author's light and entertaining novel *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, set in middle-class Lima society, we were unprepared for the contrast of this more recent book, which is based on people and events in the Dominican Republic during and after the reign of dictator Rafael Lopez Trujillo. *The Feast of the Goat* was published in Spanish in 2000, with the English translation by Edith Grossman a year later.

The book covers mostly events and people in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Prior to this period, Trujillo instituted some beneficial reforms and was

seen as a bulwark against communism. He was heralded as the beloved Chief, the Benefactor, Generalissimo, and his wife as The Bountiful First Lady. Later, he became more despotic and was opposed by the Church, the OAS, and increasing numbers of people, who privately called him "the goat". He cemented his rule by controlling the police, military, press, and the country's financial affairs, often giving money, property, or business opportunities to his strongest supporters. Trujillo was a womanizer, with the power that enabled him to have almost any woman he wanted. But he destroyed those he did not favor and was an apt Machiavellian. The public face of Trujillo's secret police was the cruel Colonel Johnny Abbes Garcia, who carried out the intimidation, prison sentences, torture, and killings.

The book tells us about Trujillo, his family, his henchmen, and others who were his supporters. Another major focus is the men who planned and finally shot and killed Trujillo in a night ambush of his car on May 30, 1961, and then their efforts to hide from the authorities and not be taken alive. Much of what the author wrote about all these characters was based on the author's research into the real people behind these events. To give the story additional suspense, as if it were needed, the author added a fictional family. The elderly Agustin Cabral, the President of the country's Senate and a supporter of Trujillo; and his daughter, Urania. Urania has just returned from decades in the U.S. after decades of silence and near the book's end reveals a deep secret to her family.

The book achieves high suspense as it interweaves all these personalities, their worries, suspicions, and actions. With detailed descriptions of torture and even elaborate intimidations of some of Trujillo's supporters, the book paints a gruesome picture. The author has said that, although much of his characterizations are fictional and that the book is not history, he did not exaggerate. Nothing in the book deviates from the reality of who Trujillo was. In the early chapters, the sheer number of characters and shifts in time made it sometimes difficult to keep the characters straight, but Vargas Llosa told this complex story very skillfully. Our group liked *The Feast of the Goat* very much.

In June 2023 our book group discussed Barbara Kingsolver's *The Lacuna*, her 2009 historical political novel. The book revolves around a fictional character, Harrison Shepherd, an American who goes to Mexico City in the late 1930s to work as an aide to the trio of Leon Trotsky, Diego Rivera, and Rivera's wife Frida Kahlo.

Trotsky is hiding out to avoid assassination by agents of Stalin, and Rivera is a communist painter famous for his political murals. Kahlo is a painter and provocateur as well as a champion of women and sexual liberation. She has a strong identity as Mexican, which very much includes that country's indigenous heritage as well as that of its Spanish ancestry. Later, back in the U.S. in the 1940s, Shepherd becomes a popular writer of historical fiction about various struggles of the Aztecs. Unhappily, he then comes to the notice of the infamous HUAC, the House Un-American Activities Committee.

We particularly enjoyed the author's portrayal of Trotsky, Rivera, and Kahlo. Kingsolver did a great deal of research into the Trotsky-Rivera-Kahlo relationship in Mexico so that she provides a more personal and human story of these famous people. During our discussion we stopped to look at some of Kahlo's striking self-portraits online. The second focus of the book is the anti-Communism movement which swept the political and entertainment parts of the U.S. in the late 1940's and early 1950's. We can see the ugly head of a very similar movement in the book-banning trends of today.

We all thought *The Lacuna* was enjoyable and important even though some of us were perplexed about the relevance of the title. We are scheduling Kingsolver's recent Pulitzer Prize-winning *Demon Copperhead* for August *Jim Allen* and *Joel Zeitlin*



The Monday **ARF** Film Group met remotely on December 11, 2023 to discuss the films *Mission Impossible: Dead Reckoning Part One* and *Barbie*.

*Mission Impossible: Dead Reckoning Part One* follows the previous films in this series. This episode is based on the emergence of a threatening AI system called "The Entity" and how Ethan Hunt and the IMF team find ways to control it or contain it. Tom Cruise gives his usual solid performance as secret agent Ethan Hunt. The four female leads (Hayley Atwell, Vanessa Kirby, Rebecca Ferguson, and Pom Klementieff) gave particularly good performances. The outdoor scenery and the "impossible" stunts added much interest and excitement to the movie. For some of us, it was long and had an initially confusing storyline. However, the release of the next episode, Part Two, of the story is eagerly anticipated by many of us. The group unanimously gave this film a rating of 9.0.

*Barbie* tells the fantasy story of the travels of the Mattel Toy characters Barbie and Ken from "Barbie Land" to the "Real (human) World." Multiple actors participated in creating the Barbie characters but when the Barbie character was effectively the

classic "human-like" one, the part was well played by Margot Robbie. Similarly, Ken, one of the most amusing and interesting characters in the film, required the work of multiple actors with the key "human-like" character being played by Ryan Gosling. Robbie and Gosling gave excellent performances. We enjoyed the light and colorful (always pinkish) world of Barbie Land. The music and the costumes were especially good. The Barbie movie had a few flaws though. The film and its characters are cartoonish. The messaging (e.g., feminism, patriarchy, patriarchy, masculine toxicity, female power, existentialism) in the movie is sometimes heavy-handed. The director, Greta Gerwig, is fantastic, as usual. The group gave this film a rating of 7.2 with scores ranging from 7.0 to 8.0.

The **Film Group** met again on January 8, via Zoom, to discuss the films *Maestro* and *American Symphony*. *Maestro* is based on the life of the composer Leonard Bernstein. This film was quite interesting but was technically weak in the first half, where there were a number of instances of overlapping dialogues and the timeline was hard to follow. In the second half the timeline was clear and the depiction of the difficulties surrounding Bernstein's wife's fatal illness was portrayed with both clarity and sympathy. Throughout much of the film Bernstein was depicted, apparently accurately, as a self-involved genius with only limited understanding of the damage his behavior did to the lives of others. The excellent performance of Bradley Cooper as Leonard Bernstein, with great support by Carey Mulligan, dominated the film. Some of our members noted that they would have enjoyed hearing more of Bernstein's music in the film and seeing more detail of his creative process. Our film group gave this film an average rating of 8.6/10.0 with scores ranging from 8.0 to 9.0.

*American Symphony* tells the story of the creation of a unique musical symphony by the acclaimed musician Jon Batiste. The story is heroic in that it shows how this musical genius managed to create something substantial while still maintaining close caring attention to his wife Suleika Jaouad's serious illness. The film does a great job of knitting together both new scenes with Batiste along with historical footage of previous events. Batiste's desire to meld unique aspects from the music of different American musical sources was very impressive. Numerous musical scenes starring Batiste himself were just great fun to watch for all of us. On the whole, we all really liked this film and came away also liking Batiste himself. We gave it an average rating of 9.2/10.0 with scores ranging from 8.5 to 9.5.

For the month of February 2024, the group discussed **Oppenheimer** and **Anatomy of a Fall**. Reviews will appear in the next issue. *David and Diane Schwartz*

## ARF EXECUTIVE BOARD, 2023-2024

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## ARF NOTES

## ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED FACULTY

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