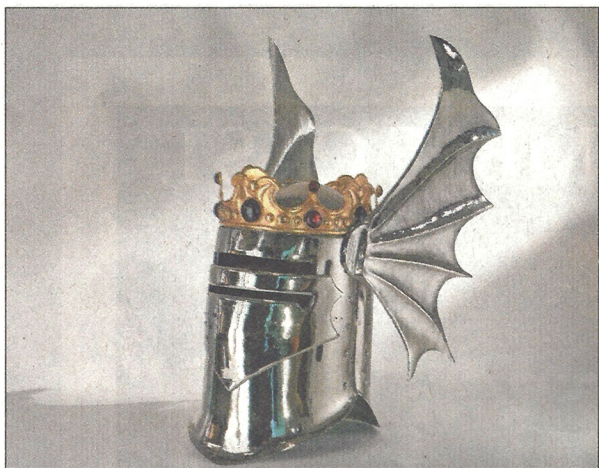


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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2014 :: LATIMES.COM/CALENDAR



MARK A. VIEIRA DeMille Foundation/Running Press

THE HELMET created for Richard the Lionheart, played by Henry Wilcoxon, in the 1935 movie "The Crusades."

Artistic vision of DeMille gets a loving tribute

Director's granddaughter collaborates on a new book documenting many of the epic works of his career.

BY SUSAN KING

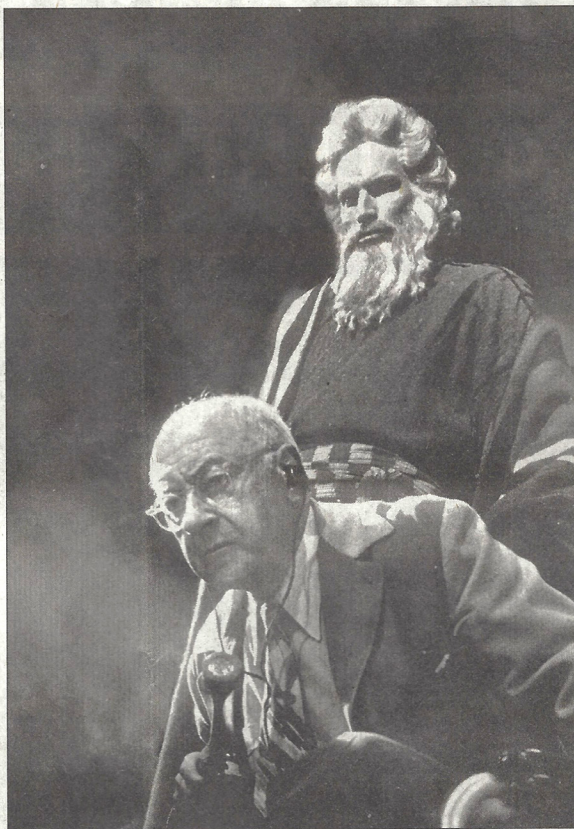
The only time Cecil B. DeMille's granddaughter saw the pioneering film director annoyed was when his body began to fail him. "He was a bull," said Cecilia DeMille Presley. "He exercised every day."

So even a heart attack didn't stop him during production in Egypt of what would be his final

movie as a director, the lavish 1956 biblical epic "The Ten Commandments," starring Charlton Heston as Moses, a film that has become an Easter mainstay on ABC.

Presley, who grew up in her grandfather's mansion in Los Feliz, said the heart attack was more serious than thought. But DeMille and his family kept it under wraps. "He knew if word got out, it would be an absolute publicity nightmare. Mother took over," Presley noted, referring to Cecil's daughter, also named Cecilia. "She directed the film until he got better."

Presley and photographer-film historian Mark A. Vieira have collaborated on a lavish new coffee ta-



Cecil B. DeMille Archives/Running Press

A COMMANDING Charlton Heston looms over director Cecil B. DeMille on the set of "The Ten Commandments" from 1956.

ble book, "Cecil B. DeMille: The Art of the Hollywood Epic," which features a treasure trove from the filmmaker's archives of concept paintings, images of costumes, props and breathtakingly beautiful still photographs from his first film, the 1914 western "The Squaw Man," to "The Ten Commandments."

"What I really wanted to get across here was the amazing vision he had for art and making movies," said Presley, vice chairman of the National Film Preservation Foundation. "He was the most successful film director and producer in silents and then again in sound."

DeMille is probably best known

for his religious epics, including both the '56 and the 1923 silent version of "The Ten Commandments," 1927's "The King of Kings," and 1932's "The Sign of the Cross."

The filmmaker "really did believe in the religious values that were in his films," said Vieira. "It was not the attitude of someone trying to say, 'Well, if you mix religion with sex, that is a formula that will work, and we'll squeeze some money out of the Bible.' He sincerely believed in God and spiritual values. But he didn't sanction particular religions. His work is ecumenical."

There's an example of that in DeMille's 1944 World War II drama

"The Story of Dr. Wassell," according to Vieira. "You have Gary Cooper in the jungle desperate to save his men from the Japanese advance, and he passes a statue of Buddha. He stops and says, 'Can you help me?' And you see the other troops arriving that are going to save his men, and he says 'thank you' to the statue. That's such an unusual thing in a Hollywood film."

But DeMille, said Presley, didn't preach, unlike another great early filmmaker, D.W. Griffith.

"He said that the most brilliant gift that Griffith gave us was he taught us how to photograph thought, and then he started to lecture and you can't lecture an audience," Presley said.

DeMille was interested in advancing cinema as an art form. "What DeMille was doing in Hollywood on an almost weekly basis between December 1913 and 1917 was finding some new effect, often in tandem or ahead of Griffith. Every picture was a discovery," Vieira noted.

Vieira pointed out that DeMille was the first filmmaker to have an art director. "That is extremely important. He was the first director to have concept art done. Both in terms of style and content, he was a vanguard and didn't get stuck in one genre."

Her grandfather, said Presley, liked to work with the same crew over and over. "People who worked for him loved him almost to a man. They knew him to be fair. He was Republican, but he was a social liberal. He championed women's rights, and he hated bigotry."

DeMille also traveled the world to get "artists and historians to make these films," said Presley. "He was an avid reader and expected everyone in the family to be an avid reader too."

Presley and her grandfather, who died in 1959 at age 77, were close. "We would sit up until 12 or 1 at night," she recalled. "We never stopped talking about philosophy, history, *everything*. When I was 12, he gave me 'Mein Kampf' to read so I would understand what evil was."

"He took me everywhere. He wouldn't take a trip without me."

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