

- ♫ **Video:** Matisse making a cutout
- ♫ **Video:** Matisse cutouts (music: Milhaud, *La creation du monde*)

## E. The Director does as he pleases

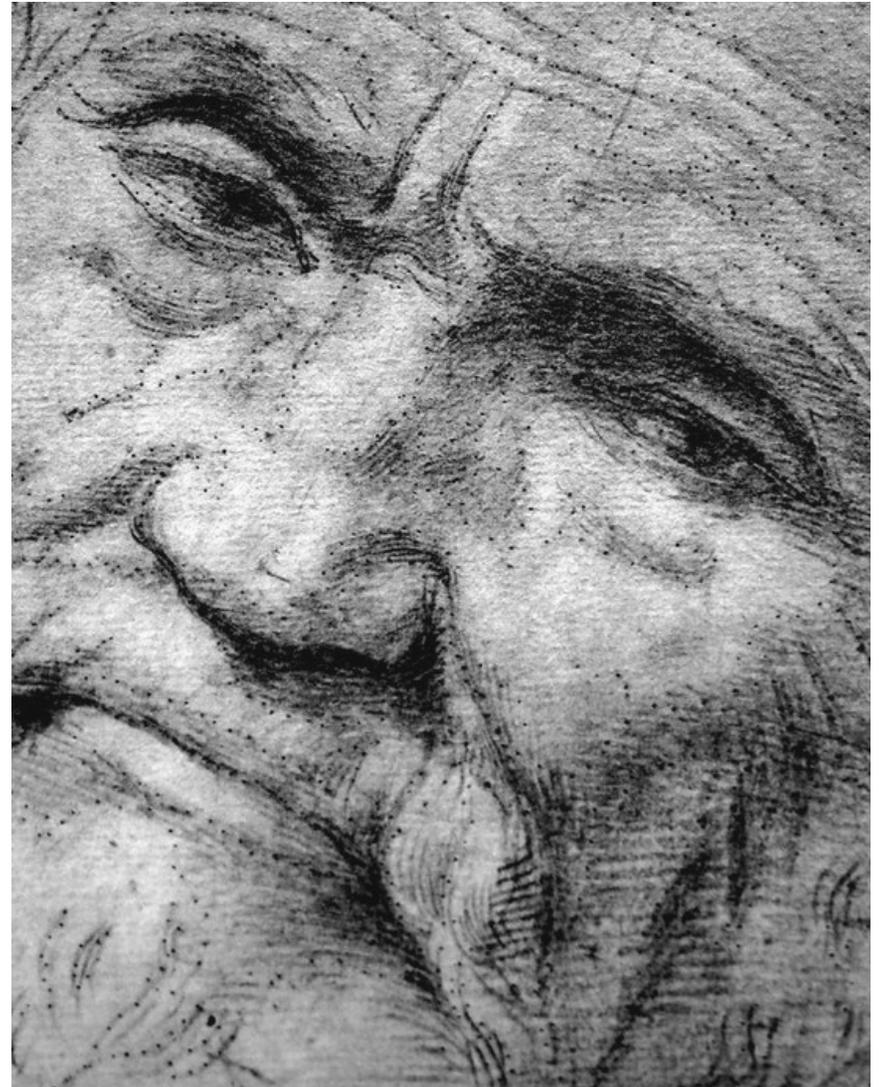
**Fellini** and **Altman** directed around 40 films each, many highly acclaimed. Yet in their late movies, they could bathe in a vision of the strangely beautiful which might not have worked on the commercial market.

- ♫ **Fellini:** *E la nave va* (1983) quasi-trailer
- ♫ **Fellini:** *E la nave va*, ending (Freddie Jones, *Orlando*)
- ♫ **Fellini:** *La voce della luna* (1990), disco/waltz sequence (Paolo Villaggio, *Gonella*)
- ♫ **Altman:** *The Company* (2003), "The World Spins" (Ryoko Kono dancing to "The Swan" by Julee Cruise)
- ♫ **Altman:** *A Prairie Home Companion* (2006), opening sequence (Kevin Kline, *Guy Noir*)
- ♫ **Altman:** *A Prairie Home Companion*, closing sequence (Garrison Keillor, Lily Tomlin, Lindsay Lohan, Meryl Streep)

Robert **Altman** (1925–2006, *American director*), Ludwig van **Beethoven** (1770–1827, *German composer*), Benjamin **Britten** (1913–76, *English composer*), Federico **Fellini** (1920–93, *Italian director*), Thomas **Mann** (1875–1955, *German novelist*), Henri **Matisse** (1869–1954, *French painter*), **Michelangelo** Buonaroti (1475–1564, *Italian painter, sculptor, and architect*), Darius **Milhaud** (1892–1974, *French composer*), Claude **Monet** (1840–1926, *French painter*), **Rembrandt** Harmenszoon van Rijn (1609–69, *Dutch painter*), William **Shakespeare** (1564–1616, *English playwright*), Giuseppe **Verdi** (1813–1901, *Italian composer*)

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# Popularity... and then?



## 9. Closing Acts

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JUST OCCASIONALLY, A LONG RECORD OF SUCCESS will enable an artist to step aside at the end of his life and produce something for himself. So we get **Shakespeare** with *The Tempest*, **Michelangelo** chipping away at a block of marble to find the truth within, **Rembrandt** seeking spiritual understanding, or **Beethoven** combining the profound with the jocular in his last *Quartets*.

Three other pairs of artists fill this picture out: **Verdi** and **Britten** ending their careers with intensely personal operas quite different from any they had written before; **Monet** and **Matisse** overcoming disabilities that would have halted lesser artists in their tracks; and **Fellini** and **Altman** coming off a string of successes to make movies that celebrate their own personal fantasies. *rb.*

### A. Final Curtain

The last play that **Shakespeare** wrote alone, other than a few very late collaborations, was *The Tempest* (1611). **Beethoven's** last work was his *String Quartet in F major*, Op.135 (1827). Both have a distinct feeling of benediction, closing the volume with a blessing.

- ♪ **Shakespeare:** *The Tempest* (RSC 2016), dance of the reapers
- ♪ **Shakespeare:** *The Tempest*, "Our revels now..." (David Threlfall)
- ♪ **Shakespeare:** **The Tempest**, "Ye elves..." (Harriet Walter)
- ♪ **Video:** themes in the last movement of Op.135 (*rb.*)
- ♪ **Beethoven:** *String Quartet Op.135*, final movement (Ariel 4tet)

## B. Spiritual Insight

Just as Shakespeare and Beethoven seem to have been seeking spiritual closure in their last works, so it is with **Michelangelo** and **Rembrandt**—but expressed in the personal terms of a parent and son: Jesus and Mary in one, the Prodigal Son and his father in the other.

♪ **Michelangelo:** *Pietà* (1499, St. Peters)

♪ **Michelangelo:** *Pietà Rondanini* (1564, Milan, Castello Sforzesco)

♪ **Michelangelo:** *Rondanini Pietà*

♪ **Rembrandt:** *Prodigal Son Tending the Swine* (1648, British Museum)

♪ **Rembrandt:** *Return of the Prodigal Son* (etching, 1636)

♪ **Rembrandt:** *Return of the Prodigal Son* (1642, Haarlem)

♪ **Rembrandt:** *Return of the Prodigal Son* (1661–69, Hermitage)

## C. Going Out in Style

By the end of their lives, **Verdi** and **Britten** were each the best-known composers in their countries. They took the opportunity to ring the curtain down with something distinctly different and, in Britten's case, utterly personal.

- ♪ **Britten:** *Death in Venice* (1973), Aschenbach sees Tadzio (film by Tony Palmer, with Robert Gard as Aschenbach)
- ♪ **Britten:** *Death in Venice*, ending (film as above)
- ♪ **Verdi:** *Falstaff*, final scene (London, 1982; Carlo Maria Giulini, conductor; Ronald Eyre, director; Renato Bruson, *Falstaff*)

## D. What Disabilities?

Beethoven was stone deaf for much of his career. Similarly, **Monet** became legally blind, and the arthritic **Matisse** was confined to a wheelchair. All three eventually triumphed over their infirmities.

♪ **Monet:** *Japanese Bridge* (1899, Washington NGA)

♪ **Monet:** *Weeping Willow* (1900, private collection)

♪ **Monet:** *Japanese Bridge* (1922, location unknown)

♪ **Video:** Monet's *Water Lilies*