

ON THE ROAD

Across the U.S.A.

Sharing the Stories of Six Cemeteries

The feedback to Season One of “The World’s Greatest Cemeteries” was so “embarrassingly positive” that host and producer Roberto Mighty knew there would be a Season Two. *Stan Goldstein reports*

“The first season started on Oct. 21, 2021, and immediately the fan mail came in from public television viewers around the country and overseas,” Mighty said. “People were engaged in the show and other viewers began recommending other cemeteries to visit.”

Season Two of the half-hour series for American Public Television debuted Feb. 19 with Mighty featuring Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville, Kentucky, in the first episode. He’ll once again feature six cemeteries, just as he did in Season One.

“These are massive national parks and museums,” Mighty said. “They are also multi-million-dollar operations and tourist attractions, people come from all over the world. They come to see the graves of their favorite people, are treated to these horticulture masterpieces, arboretums, architecture and landscape. We show how beautiful these cemeteries are. Plus, there’s lots of great stories.”

All six Season Two episodes will be on PBS.org for free, with no membership required until April 18.

Streaming begins on PBS Passport for station members only, starting April 19 through Feb. 18, 2026. The episodes have been released to public TV stations for unlimited broadcast use through Feb. 18, 2026.

“For local public TV stations, to find out when episodes are airing, people can



go to this webpage and look up airdates/episodes for their state, city and public tv station: www.worldsgreatestcemeteries.com/stations,” Mighty said. “There is no set nationwide schedule. Each public TV station decides if and when to broadcast the shows.”

Mighty, 68, lives in Holden, Massachusetts. In addition to being a filmmaker, he’s an educator and a multimedia artist. From 2014 to 2016, he served as the inaugural artist-in-residence at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

“I’m old enough to have been teased about my last name, with kids singing the ‘Mighty Mouse’ jingle as far back as I can remember,” he said. “My backyard faces

an 1858 historic cemetery. The neighbors are very quiet.”

In picking the cemeteries to feature, Mighty looks for certain things. “No. 1 is that they have to be spectacular. That doesn’t mean they have to be stunningly beautiful, but it helps since we are a TV show,” he said. “We look for outstanding architecture, horticulture and trees. Plus, we unearthed inspiring stories about diverse historical figures who overcame incredible odds to help make our world what it is today.”

Cave Hill is a 300-acre arboretum, birding space, gardening gem and historic burial ground. Interments include boxer and humanitarian Muhammad Ali, Col. Harland Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken fame, suffragist



OPPOSITE PAGE: “WORLD’S GREATEST CEMETERIES” PUBLIC TELEVISION SERIES HOST/PRODUCER ROBERTO MIGHTY WITH LONNIE ALI, WIDOW OF MUHAMMAD ALI, AT CAVE HILL CEMETERY IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY. ABOVE: ROBERTO MIGHTY AND JACK RABINSTEIN, TRUSTEE EMERITUS, JEWISH CEMETERIES OF GREATER CINCINNATI, IN FRONT OF THE GRAVE OF FOOD MANUFACTURER RABBI DOV BEHR MANISCHEWITZ. (PHOTOS BY CELESTIAL MEDIA LLC)

Susan Look Avery and Revolutionary War hero George Rogers Clark. A reenactor portrays sculptor Enid Yandell, who specialized in portrait busts and monuments, in the episode.

Mighty interviewed Ali’s widow, Lonnie, near his gravesite. “The memorial she designed for her husband is one of the most visited graves in the country,” he said.

“His energy and spirit is still with us,” Lonnie Ali tells Mighty. “I designed (his grave) with specifications. Because of Islam, we do not have monuments. We are all created equal when we are born and we are equal when we die.

“Muhammad and I both came here and we picked out the plot, it’s a family plot,” Ali added. “This was done some years ago, and I wanted it to reflect what Muhammad liked, which was color. He loved flowers.”

Also featured is Cave Hill’s “Temple of Love” memorial. “It’s modeled after Marie Antoinette’s ornate structure in her Petit Trianon garden at the Palace of

Versailles in Paris,” Mighty said. “In many cases we’re dealing with memorials that were constructed by people who were very wealthy.”

DIVERSITY

The series highlights different cultures. In Episode Three, Mighty discovered that cemeteries in Cincinnati have a huge Jewish population.

“The Jewish Cemeteries of Greater Cincinnati is an umbrella organization that includes over 20 separate properties in and around the city and we filmed at a handful of them,” Mighty said.

Karen Zanger, vice president of the Jewish Cemeteries of Greater Cincinnati, told Mighty about its background. “Jews came to Cincinnati 200 years ago. When they got here, they decided that they better get a cemetery established. They established the first cemetery and that is considered the ‘establishment of community’ in the Jewish religion. That was Chestnut Street Cemetery downtown.”

Danielle Minson, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Cincinnati, explained why so many Jews came to Cincinnati.

“They came here because they wanted to forge a new life for themselves since Cincinnati was a very large city at the time and there were others from Germany who were here. So many of the first Jews who came to Cincinnati were from Germany,” she said.

“We had to explain why there were so many Jewish people in Cincinnati and I had to get educated on this,” Mighty said. “We also learn the story of food manufacturer Rabbi Dov Behr Manischewitz. He was a matzah manufacturer and is buried at Covedale Cemetery.”

The episode also features a reenactor portraying Civil War Medal of Honor winner David Urbanski and there’s an interpretation of traditional Jewish funerary iconography.

The other four cemeteries featured in Season Two are St. Louis Cemetery No. 1, New Orleans; Woodlawn Cemetery,

Bronx, New York; Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Massachusetts; and Laurel Hill cemeteries in Philadelphia and Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania.

“A cemetery we feature has to have a staff that includes a historian and an archivist. We are very serious about having the facts. It’s also helpful if the cemetery has a person on the staff who has physical documents we can look at,” Mighty said. “Another thing is we want to put the shine on the horticulturalist and the arborist. I know, growing up in Queens, I had to do the crappy lawn work, and now I appreciate those who work on the grounds. They have these massive crews who keep these cemeteries looking beautiful all year round. The trees are taken care of by someone.

“Plus, we put the spotlight on the skilled craftsmen and women who do the artwork at a cemetery,” he added. “I also love it if a cemetery has an apprenticeship program for young people.”

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Episode Two features Sleepy Hollow Cemetery which boasts “Author’s Ridge” with Louisa May Alcott, Henry David Thoreau, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson and more. There’s also a side trip to Walden Pond, historical re-enactments, and a surprise for “I Love Lucy” fans.

“Two of the people behind the scenes of the ‘I Love Lucy’ show are buried at Sleepy Hollow – Marc and Emily Daniels,” Mighty said. “Marc was a director and Emily a script supervisor on the show.”

In New Orleans, Mighty enjoys telling the history of St. Louis Cemetery No. 1 in Episode Four.

“There’s really no place like it. So many stories of our country are there,” he said. “There’s Creole culture, French culture, African culture, Indigenous culture. People came to New Orleans from all over. We show the grave of Marie Leveau, the voodoo priestess and actor Nicholas Cage’s future resting place, a mysterious pyramid.”

Laurel Hill in Philadelphia and Laurel Hill West in Bala Cynwyd are highlighted in Episode Five. Mighty explores the Medallion Garden and discusses the graves of jazz saxophonist Grover Washington Jr., Civil War General George Meade, inventor Martha Coston and singer Teddy Pendergrass.

Mighty travels to Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx for Episode 6. “Here you have 400 acres right in the middle of the Bronx,” he said. “It’s the home of titans of music, literature, the arts and business.”

On the music side there’s Duke Ellington, Celia Cruz, Miles Davis and Irving Berlin. Writer Herman Melville, the author of “Moby Dick” is also featured.

“I interviewed Professor Mary K. Bercau Edwards of the University of Connecticut who is a scholar, sailor and a Melville expert,” Mighty said. “I talked to her aboard the Charles W. Morgan, an actual whaling ship built in 1841, at Mystic Seaport. That year is significant because that’s the year when Melville began whaling.

“It’s an honor and pleasure to meet people like Bercau Edwards to learn about a topic,” he added. “At each cemetery there are three to five experts on staff who I will interview.

Now that Season Two is finished, Mighty is preparing for Season Three. He already has one cemetery he knows he’s going to feature.

“Everyone has been clamoring for us to go to P re Lachaise in Paris, and we have permission to go there this summer,” he said. “We’ll have a group of experts to talk about it, it’s a real cool place and Jim Morrison is there. We’ll discuss that.

“We again will have six episodes and are hoping to have it out in January 2024,” he added. “I’m thrilled to keep meeting the cemetery guides and the people, like the taphophiles, who come out in force.” •

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