



FILM REVIEW

“The Choir and Conductor”

by Emily Williams Burch

Pop-icon Billie Eilish, the Harry Potter sound designer, an Academy award-winning filmmaker, and a Grammy Award-winning children’s choir join forces for a new film: “The Choir and Conductor.” The movie begins, black screen, just speaking: “If you have any interest in music at all, being in a choir is fun.”

Suddenly, pop-sensation Billie Eilish appears on screen and continues speaking:

“It’s where I found my best friends, that’s where I found my real love for melodies, and harmonies, and chord progressions, and major minor keys—a bunch of different stuff, you know, where I found my love for that; I wouldn’t have ever found it besides that. I just feel like anybody who has even the slightest interest should get into a choir. I

just feel like choir is so fun... like it was so fun.”

In and of itself, the quote above could serve as an excellent tool for choir recruitment and advocacy. However, that’s just the introduction. The ninety minutes that follow give a detailed look into why Billie Eilish, and the many other choristers in this particular chorus, had such life-changing—and fun—choir experiences. The documentary is filled with different singer stories, from their first audition to their current tour, interviews with the director, glimpses inside rehearsal, and moving moments at concerts (both stateside and abroad).

The film “The Choir and Conductor” is the final film in a series of four documentaries by Academy Award-winning filmmaker Freida Mock with the Los Angeles Children’s Chorus. According to their website, “since 1986, Grammy

Award-winning Los Angeles Children’s Chorus has provided choral music training of the highest quality to thousands of children and teenagers ages 6-18.”

Filmed in 2018, “The Choir and Conductor” features beautiful singing, incredible singer stories, and an up-close look at how lives are positively impacted through the act of being in a choir and ultimately going on a choir tour. Additionally, through clips of rehearsals, candid shots on tour, and captivating concert scenes, the film offers insight into “LACC’s comprehensive program that addresses all learning styles and levels of experience through a sequential music literacy curriculum (based on the Kodály concept) and rehearsal schedule, in which choristers master a challenging, multi-lingual repertoire of fine choral music in the bel canto style.”

I interviewed the filmmaker, Freida Mock, and (then) conductor



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of LACC, Anne Tomlinson, in an effort to best provide you with the details behind the film, why you should watch it, and what value it brings to our choral world and beyond.

When asking Anne Tomlinson about filmmaker/director Frieda Mock, she said, “Frieda is a gifted person who gets right to the essence, and I think she’s done a great job of capturing who the LACC is as well as the importance of choral singing in our culture. She is a director who tells other people’s stories.”

I asked Mock a few questions so we could understand the purpose behind the film including where the idea came from, who was involved, and how long it took:

“As the writer, director, and producer of the film, I came up with the idea to do a story about how a world-renowned choir of children is achieved and what qualities an extraordinary conductor needs to work with choral music and children to achieve remarkable musical performances.”

At the start of Tomlinson’s career with LACC, Mock directed a short documentary film called “SING!,” which was nominated for an Oscar. Twenty-two years later, Mock explained the importance of the story in “The Choir and Conductor.”

“The film and tour offered me the chance to tell the sto-

ry about what happens if a woman is given the chance to conduct, at a time when few women were given the opportunity, and the impact she has both on young boys and girls and on LACC’s impact in its music community and the world.”

Mock filmed throughout the summer and fall of 2018, including accompanying the choir on an international tour. From there, editing and post production took more than a year and a half. The pandemic impacted the film’s release schedule, and with additional final editing, the film officially launched in spring 2022.

It took a team of about ten peo-



Image from “The Choir and Conductor.” Printed with permission.

ple to complete the project. Mock was particularly excited about the sound design personnel, saying, “I am particularly happy to say, [the team] included the final sound design and mix at Warner Bros. performed by the master, Laurent Kos-sayan of *Amelie*, *Harry Potter* sound design fame.”

When asked if she felt the goal was achieved, Mock said, “I feel I did [achieve the goal] as the film is about both the importance of music, choral singing and the arts in children’s lives and the life-long impact an extraordinary artist, musician, teacher, and woman Anne Tomlinson has had on thousands of children’s life during her 22 years with the Los Angeles Children’s Chorus.”

Specifically, Mock spoke about her favorite part of the film, which touches on the impact of the film overall:

“My favorite part and sequence in the film is at the final Oslo concert in the Cathedral when the Choir sings ‘Even When He is Silent,’ parts of which we heard sung spontaneously by the children throughout the film—in the streets of Bergen, at the Nobel Prize Peace Hall in Oslo to astonished, transfixed audiences. The choristers are visibly moved as is the audience in singing this hopeful and yet heartbreaking song, referencing the plight of children in the concentration camp at Theresienstadt. The song vividly reminds the choris-

ters and all of us that beautiful songs are like poetry with deep and lasting meaning.”

Speaking with Tomlinson about why one should watch this film, she said:


“The film captures the importance of people working together to create something beautiful, something that they couldn’t create by themselves, and something that creates a situation where we rely on one another, and it tells the fun story of crazy choir people. We are kind of like a niche, one of the kids says, we are sort of a species.

If you’re a choir person, watch this film because it helps you reconnect to that why—the sound, the experience of the kid—it reminds us of why we are here.

If you’re not a choir person, show it to your board, your community—this film captures that experience of building global understanding and unity through the power of choral music.”

Ready to grab some popcorn? “The Choir and Conductor” is a must-watch film. The singers are an inspiration. The scenes with warm-ups are a reminder of how much fun we get to have in rehearsals, along with a few new ideas to try in your next rehearsal. The storyline provides an excellent resource for board members, community members, choir families, and audiences to get

a glimpse into what it means to be a part of a choir. This film will both invigorate you and provide a tool for advocacy and connection.

Like Billie Eilish said, “I just feel like choir is so fun, like it was so fun.” This film captures that spirit on screen. 

Watch “The Choir and Conductor” trailer on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdiizmJNWt4> or by using the QR code below. Stream, rent, or buy the film on Prime Video.



“The Choir and Conductor” movie trailer

Listen to Anne Tomlinson talk about her career and the film on Episode 112 of the “Music (ed) Matters” Podcast or watch the interview on YouTube: https://youtu.be/MVCQdnJm8_E.

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