

Enchanted Labyrinth of Sights and Sound: Deep Cinema review of *IN SEARCH OF THE GREAT SONG*

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Michael Stillwater's new documentary is an exquisite compendium ~ involving Fifty Voices, Twelve Countries, One Question ~ of cultural creatives pondering a profound and sometimes elusive sub-strata of life: what is The Great Song?

There are musicians, of course, of varied ilk, but the litany of participants also includes examples of visual artists, poets, shamans and other spiritual and religious leaders, philosophers, psychologists, activists, anthropologists, professors, and even a businessman. At the end of the day, this Search beseeches, informs and compels them all, providing viewers with a multi-faceted, prismatic invitation to take a soul-sounding of the Great Song in each of our own lives. While this may not be the first time you are made conscious of its chords at your Core, experiencing this film will leave you with a deeper resonant awareness of its necessity in your life, as well as the necessity of your participation in its Cosmic unfurlment.

The best metaphor I can share for my experience of watching *IN SEARCH OF THE GREAT SONG* is that of a Labyrinth. Not just an earthy spiraling maze of tall, thick hedges leading discretely to the Center and out again ~ but an enchanted labyrinth with alcoves carved into the hedges where a pilgrim can stop to sit on benches and be shown a myriad of riches: Swiss Alps, African panoramas, Pacific Northwest islands, Australian Aboriginal caves, cliffs and Songlines. There is thaumaturgy afoot, the working of marvels along the path. In

each locale we meet individuals whose apperception of this archetypal Song is unique. And this DNA braid of the Universal and the personal is both intoxicating and profoundly re-orienting.

The threshold guardian welcoming us on the journey is an ideal choice, in that Swiss native Muriel Kuoppala strikes so many of the chords that will be amplified throughout: She is a visual artist with quasi~mystical sensibilities who sings a traditional song of poignancy, controversy, romance and tribulation. Her own music of choice to accompany her creative endeavors is Mozart's Requiem, providing herself a Platonic ideal as artistic standard.

At one phase of her segment, Muriel is shown in her studio sitting in front of a backdrop comprised of a single, large, elemental circle. It is a compelling composition. Later in the documentary we hear from cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrien, but she came to mind at this point because of the study she's done on what she calls "the Signs of Life," the "Five Universal Shapes," one of which is the Circle. She's discovered that in every culture it symbolizes Wholeness and an urge for Individuation, whether in the form of Mandalas, Medicine Wheels, or Hawaiian Menehune Rings. And it is through the elegantly simple Circle in this Swiss artist's studio that the rest of the film begins to flow. As she speaks of the silence of the Void "where all potential dwells," and her own choice of the Great Song being Whale-song, you can sense a tidal swell building to carry you along the engaging spiral to the Center of the Labyrinth, to Source.

A strong dimension of this film is the realm of Deep Mystery made manifest initially in Nature ~ ocean, cosmos, mountain ranges, vast skylscapes. Weaving the natural into human consciousness we have shamans, medicine men, tribal elders. They supply the ritually-accessed frequency where the timeless ancient world interplays with the mortal, temporal one where humans seek fulfillment via expression of their personal & collective songs.

Angaangaq Angakkorsuaq of Greenland, a most loving story-teller, healer and

shaman, whose vocation it is "to melt the ice around the heart of man," here supplies a note of gravitas. Closing his eyes and engaging intimately with his drum, he demonstrates how Depth calls out to Depth. And he instructs us to listen to the Great Song of Nature, whether in volcanoes or icebergs, as part of ongoing evolution and burgeoning expressions never heard before, to take nothing for granted. Galvanizing.

Ocean, whale-song and shamans, petroglyphs and elders. After sounding these depths we crawl out of them like elemental creatures gaining purchase on land, then traverse a dizzying variety of cultural expressions, from the simplicity of two sticks clapping to the complexity of a full orchestra. And everything in between!

A wise film-maker knows that the mid-point of their composition is at best a fulcrum, a turning point, a site of revelation. And every audience member pricks up their ears when they hear a player speak the title of the film. In this case, it issues from the lips of Br. David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk, who quotes the poet Rilke's *Widening Circles* :

*"I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.*

I may not complete this last one but I give myself to it.

I circle around God, around the primordial tower.

I've been circling for thousands of years

and I still don't know: am I a falcon, a storm, or a great song?"

Here is the Circle again, and evidence of a deep rhizome of inter-connectiveness throughout this film. Even as this references back to Muriel Kuoppala, her husband's portrait paintings (not emphasized) have tribal, totemic face-paint which blends into the documentary's indigenous dimension. And a Jewish man, avidly working with a Muslim for peace, echoes Angaangaq Angakkorsuaq's work by wishing to melt the anger surrounding wounded hearts.

Also repeated throughout is the concept that each one of us comes to life with an

individual song to share, something that director Michael Stillwater himself has sung about in another venue. Here we are told that Jews may have their unique song revealed on Mt. Sinai. And I know of African cultures where the unborn soul, in utero, can disclose its song to its mother, who in turn shares it with the village. Then whenever an individual finds themselves lost, in trouble, at odds, they have a tribal support system available to sing to them, reminding them of their true potential.

What I highly recommend is that you watch this film with family and/or friends, with the remote control at hand as a modern-day techno walking stick. Because you WILL want to pause, to allow your Soul to catch up with you, to discuss the way many of the participants have already influenced you. For example, you may have seen Pacific Northwest island-dwellers Morten Lauridsen and Alex Shapiro, who almost book-end this work, in Michael Stillwater's homage, *"SHINING NIGHT: A PORTRAIT OF COMPOSER MORTEN LAURIDSEN."*

And you'll want to pause and jot down names so that you can in future learn more about, say, that one woman who reverences the way music opens her to supernal worlds, another for whom the Great Song is a mother's lullaby, the man who so sweetly sings one to his granddaughter, and that elder whose smile is so heart-achingly tender on behalf of Creation and humanity alike.

I watched it with my husband and a friend, both of whom play music, and enjoyed experiencing how each one of us tuned into different dimensions. Our friend was most taken with the choral elements, the contrast between the individual in focus and the individual losing themselves in order to blend into the harmony of the collective. My husband was grateful for the invitation to make one's creative gift central to one's life, even as this triggered remorse that the majority of artists aren't celebrities or even successful enough to compete in an increasingly difficult marketplace.

I agree with him that, while it feels utterly absurd to complain about too much

beauty, this exquisite film lacks acknowledgement of the shadowy, edgy, struggling dimensions of accessing our Song. We hold to the Old Hawaiian understanding of Creativity, that it requires a dive into the darkness of Great Mystery, including our individual darkness which demands address before we can emerge with any worthy manifestation.

Poet David Whyte did satisfy our need for a dappled expression with his indelible recitation of a Shakespearean work that arcs from the venom of self-loathing to the transcendence of ineffable fulfillment ~ Ahhhh! This reminds us that we find the kernel of humanity not only in glorious diurnal moments, but in disorienting, pitiable, nocturnal passages. He shares his wise understanding that the mere naming of our suffering, for example as an exile, is the beginning of the end of it. And so the labyrinthine walk continues, less encumbered.

All told, IN SEARCH OF THE GREAT SONG is a treasure trove to which you can return repeatedly ~ as the soul-print it makes one time may very well differ upon future viewings, depending upon your orientation. But it will always, always surround you with inspiration and solace via the assurance that 50 beautiful people worldwide are engaging with you on this essential, timeless and timely quest.

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