



YOUNG @ HEART

2007, Rest of the World, 109 mins Director: Stephen Walker

“Age is just a state of mind”

Synopsis

As early as autumn 2006, video clips of Stephen Walker's documentary (which originally aired on the BBC) were making the rounds on YouTube and in email inboxes all over the U.S.--tantalizing, out-of-context glimpses of the Young@Heart vocal choir, composed of elderly men and women, having a go at chestnuts by Sonic Youth, the Clash, and the Ramones. It seemed that the feature film, re-released for the screen in 2008, would perhaps be an uncomfortably comic look at a bunch of geezers set up to look ridiculous for the smug delectation of hipster audiences everywhere. The reality is not so far off-base, at least on first glance, but Walker's film, tracking the progress of the chorus as they prepare for a big gig, provides enough good-natured humour, personal narrative, and intimate details to inspire respect and admiration--and some major heart-string-plucking--in filmgoers. Viewers witness the blossoming of long-buried or completely latent musical talents in the elderly folks; learning the new, unfamiliar material, under the direction of irascible 50-something conductor Bob Cilman, keeps their neurons firing and their emotions kindled, while communing with and trusting each other staves off the isolating effects of old age, even as they cope with heartbreaking losses within their ranks. It is undeniably funny to watch them struggle with the more challenging punk, classic rock, and soul songs as their leader kvetches wearily, but Walker skillfully ensures that, by the end of the film, we are laughing with the intrepid Young@Hearters, and not at them.

Review, Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian

British film-maker Stephen Walker (who once wrote a funny book about the Cannes film festival called *The King of Cannes*) has created a sweet-natured documentary about the Young@Heart Chorus, a singing ensemble from Massachusetts, whose members' ages range from 75 to 93, and who specialise in full-blooded versions of rock standards. Their showstopper is a cover of the Clash's *Should I Stay Or Should I Go?* as performed by 90-something Eileen Hall, who asks the question as if pondering whether to remain at home or head off to the garden centre. The movie is valuable in that it tackles head-on subjects that are verboten in our fastidious pop culture: old age and death. Two of the chorus die uncontroversially of old age in the course of the film and their passing is greeted sadly but without inordinate fuss by the others, who are, quite visibly, being kept alive by the thrill of touring and performing.

One man's solo version of Coldplay's *Fix You* was beautiful and frankly superior to the original, in that it wasn't sung a quarter-tone sharp. My only quarrel with Walker's movie is that it might have explained more clearly why star-turn Eileen was British - how did she come to be in the US? - and it could have quizzed the chorus director, Bob Cilman, more closely about how he came to work with old people. (Are his parents still alive? How does he feel about death?) A lovely little film, though