

THE WOMEN BEHIND THE MUSIC

Morgan Neville's documentary shines light on the oft-overlooked backup singer

20 FEET FROM STARDOM: Directed by Morgan Neville. Cinematography, Nicola Marsh and Graham Willoughby. Editors, Douglas Blush, Kevin Klauber and Jason Zeldes. With Darlene Love, Merry Clayton, Lisa Fischer, Judith Hill, Claudia Lennear, Bruce Springsteen and Mick Jagger. The Weinstein Company, 2013. PG-13. 91 minutes. ★★☆☆☆



It's possible — though maybe not common — to go through your entire life not realizing that the line Merry Clayton sings in the Rolling Stones' "Gimme Shelter" begins, "Rape, murder!"

It's entirely likely, on the other hand, to go through your entire life not knowing the name Merry Clayton. The young singer got out of bed one night, decades ago, and went in to sing for the Stones while wearing pajamas, with curlers in her hair. It's impossible to imagine the resulting song without her, especially once you've heard her vocals, isolated, ringing through an empty studio.

Clayton is one of the stars of Morgan Neville's *20 Feet from Stardom*, which turns the spotlight on the women (and the occasional man) singing just to the side of the stage. Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side," which opens *20 Feet*, tells you exactly what the film is going to focus on: "And the colored girls go 'doo, do-doo, do-doo ...'" (One singer points out that that line makes people uncomfortable.) These women, many of whom grew up singing in church, sing the responses to the lead singers' calls, the harmonies and the hooks that stick in your head. With interviews and

performances, old footage and new recordings, anecdotes and memories, Neville builds a case for these singers as stars; theirs are the strongest voices, the most adaptable talents. They come in and sing perfectly, every time, backing the likes of Sting and Bruce Springsteen (both appear in the film, speaking knowledgeably and earnestly about background singers). Their job is not to have an ego, but to make stars shine even brighter.

20 Feet moves quickly through music history, from '60s girl groups to today's pop landscape, telling overlapping stories about astonishing voices while quietly insisting that we notice the recurring image on screen: powerful, talented women limited to unsung supporting roles. Some tried for the spotlight and failed. Merry Clayton never found the solo career she hoped for. The gorgeous Claudia Lennear, an "Ikette" who also sang with the Stones, now teaches Spanish. Darlene Love, whose vocals on Phil Spector-produced records were often released under other women's names, cleaned houses for a time before returning to singing.

There's no explaining the alchemy of why one person becomes a star and another doesn't, but when you listen to the

talent on display in *20 Feet*, it seems absurd that so few of these women are household names. They know what's necessary — a mix of talent, ego, ambition, timing and blind luck — but most have learned, sometimes painfully, that there are no guarantees. Some don't even want fame: Lisa Fischer won a Grammy for her solo work but then never went back to it, preferring the life of a background singer (she's the one who's been wailing "It's just a shot away" in Stones concerts since 1989). Some, like Judith Hill, are still trying, working to balance background singing with songwriting.

You could make an entire movie about any of these performers, and Neville has made it very clear in interviews that he has tons more material, more singers who didn't fit this film's narrative. If *20 Feet from Stardom* has a flaw, it's one that's impossible to fix: It could be more, bigger, longer; it could be a miniseries, a *Behind the Music* of the voices you know but don't necessarily recognize. If you can watch a movie this engrossing, triumphant and bittersweet and not fall down a Wikipedia-Spotify hole of your own research afterward, you are made of sterner stuff than I. ■

TIX \$2 TIX \$5 21 & FOOD OVER MENU
762-1700 | 100 E. 5TH AVE. DAVIDMINORTHEATER.COM

THUR JULY 25 - WED JULY 31

QUARTET 5:30	THE INCREDIBLE BURT WUNDERSTONE 5:30	42 7:20
ADMISSION 7:20	SPRING BREAKERS 9:30	ARMY OF DARKNESS 9:30

"TEXT-A-BEER" 541-913-5733
ORDER DRINKS & FOOD RIGHT FROM YOUR SEAT
"NO LONGER SNEAKING BEER INTO THE MOVIES SINCE 2008"

WANT TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS?

ADVERTISE WITH THE EUGENE WEEKLY

CALL US TODAY
541-484-0519

SHOWTIMES FOR WEEK OF FRI, JULY 26 - THURS, AUGUST 1

BIJOU ART CINEMAS 492 E. 13th Ave. Tel: 541-686-2458
bijou-cinemas.com/bijouartcinemas

20 FEET FROM STARDOM (PG-13)
FRIDAY—SUNDAY 1:50, 4:00, 6:10, 8:20
MONDAY—THURSDAY 4:00, 6:10, 8:20

I'M SO EXCITED (R)
FRIDAY—SUNDAY 2:30, 4:45, 7:00, 9:10
MONDAY—THURSDAY 4:45, 7:00, 9:10

Adults—\$7 Students w/ID—\$6 Seniors—\$5 Matinees—\$5
Ask about our New Membership Program!

BIJOU METRO 43 W. Broadway Tel: 541-686-2458
bijou-cinemas.com/bijoumetro

UNFINISHED SONG (PG-13)
12:00, 2:10, 4:15, 6:20, 8:25

HANNAH ARENDT (NR) 12:25, 5:00

FILL THE VOID (PG) 12:00, 7:30

THE BLING RING (R) 10:00p

BEFORE MIDNIGHT (R) 3:00, 7:45

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING (PG-13)
12:15, 2:45, 5:20, 10:30

MUD (PG-13) 2:10, 7:50

STORIES WE TELL (PG-13) 5:20

APARTMENT 1303 (R) Friday only 9:30

CINEMARK
Purch Adv Tix @ **cinemark.com**
800-326-3264 + Exp #

CINEMARK 17 Gateway Mall - Beltline @ Gateway • Exp Code 1131#

THE CONJURING (DIG) R 10:10, 11:15, 12:55, 2:00, 3:40, 4:50, 6:25, 7:35, 9:10, 10:15 DESPICABLE ME 2 (3D) PG SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$3.00 UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 11:00AM	R.I.P.D. (DIG) PG-13 10:20, 1:00, 3:45, 6:10, 8:40 RED 2 (DIG) PG-13 11:05, 1:55, 4:45, 7:40, 10:30 THE TO DO LIST (DIG) R 10:25, 1:05, 4:40, 7:55, 10:25 TURBO (3D) PG SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$3.00 UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 12:20, 2:50, 5:20, 7:50, 10:20 TURBO (DIG) PG 10:35, 1:35, 4:05, 6:35, 9:05 THE WAY, WAY BACK (DIG) PG-13 11:25, 2:35, 5:15, 7:45, 10:15 THE WOLVERINE (3D) PG-13 SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$3.00 UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 10:30, 12:30, 1:30, 4:30, 6:30, 7:30, 10:30 WOLVERINE (DIG) PG-13 11:30, 2:30, 3:30, 5:30, 8:30, 9:30 WORLD WAR Z (DIG) PG-13 1:30, 4:15, 10:15
--	---

PACIFIC RIM (3D) PG-13
SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$3.00
UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS
12:45, 7:05
PACIFIC RIM (DIG) PG-13
3:55, 10:10
R.I.P.D. (3D) PG-13
SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$3.00
UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS
11:20, 2:25, 4:55, 7:25, 10:00

MOVIES 12 Gateway Mall - Beltline @ Gateway • Exp Code 1428#

42 PG-13 11:15, 2:05, 4:55 AFTER EARTH PG-13 11:35, 2:00, 4:25, 6:55, 9:55 THE CROODS PG 11:40, 2:25, 5:05, 7:20, 9:50 EPIC PG 12:15, 2:45, 6:15, 8:45 EPIC (3D) PG SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$2.00 UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 11:20, 1:50, 4:20, 7:05, 9:45 FAST & FURIOUS 6 PG-13 11:50, 3:25, 7:15, 10:15 THE GREAT GATSBY (2013) PG-13 11:05, 3:30, 7:00, 10:05	THE GREAT GATSBY (2013) (3D) PG-13 SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$2.00 UPCHARGE ALL TICKETS 1:30, 5:10, 8:30 THE HANGOVER PART III R 11:30, 2:10, 4:50, 7:45, 10:30 THE ICEMAN R 7:55, 10:25 THE INTERNSHIP PG-13 11:25, 2:15, 5:00, 7:40, 10:20 OBLIVION PG-13 11:10, 1:55, 4:40, 7:25, 10:10 THE PURGE (R) 11:45, 2:20, 4:30, 7:35, 10:00
---	--

CC Assistive Listening and Captioning System Avail

REGAL CINEMAS
A REGAL ENTERTAINMENT GROUP COMPANY
Bargain Shows In () ✓ No Bargain Night Specials
★ Pass / Discount Restrictions Apply

VALLEY RIVER CENTER STADIUM 15
Delta Hwy. between I-5 & Beltline
ALL DIGITAL SOUND! 800-FANDANGO 1764#

Adv. Tix on Sale SMURFS 2
Adv. Tix on Sale 2 GUNS

THE WOLVERINE IN REALD 3D [CC,DV] (PG-13) ★
Fri. - Sat.(1030 130) 430 730 1030

THE WOLVERINE [CC,DV] (PG-13) ★
Fri. - Sat.(1200 200) 400 630 700 930 1000

THE TO DO LIST [CC] (R) Fri. - Sat.(1110 140) 410 640 920

FRUITVALE STATION [CC] (R) Fri. - Sat.(1210 230) 455 710 940

THE CONJURING [CC,DV] (R) Fri. - Sat.(1130 215) 500 745 1035

RIPD [CC,DV] (PG-13) Fri. - Sat.(1140 AM 220 PM) 945 PM

RIPD IN REALD 3D [CC,DV] (PG-13) ★
Fri. - Sat.445 PM 720 PM

RED 2 [CC,DV] (PG-13) Fri. - Sat.(1035 125) 415 715 1010

TURBO [CC,DV] (PG) Fri. - Sat.(1135 210) 435 705 935

IMAX: PACIFIC RIM IN 3D [CC,DV] (PG-13) ★
Fri. - Sat.1220 425 725 1025

PACIFIC RIM [CC,DV] (PG-13) Fri. - Sat.(1100 AM)

GROWN UPS 2 [CC,DV] (PG-13) Fri. - Sat.(1125 205) 440 740 1015

DESPICABLE ME 2 IN REAL D 3D [CC,DV] (PG) ★
Fri. - Sat.925 PM

DESPICABLE ME 2 [CC,DV] (PG) Fri. - Sat.(1115 145) 420 655

LONE RANGER [CC,DV] (PG-13) Fri. - Sat.645 PM 1005 PM

THE HEAT [CC,DV] (R) Fri. - Sat.(1105 155) 450 735 1020

MONSTERS UNIVERSITY [CC,DV] (G) Fri. - Sat.(1040 AM 120 PM) 405 PM

WORLD WAR Z [CC,DV] (PG-13) Fri. - Sat.(1215 355) 650 950

Summer Movie Express - Tues & Wed. 10 am

ALBANY 7
Next to Fred Meyer 800-FANDANGO 309#

Adv. Tix on Sale SMURFS 2
Adv. Tix on Sale 2 GUNS

THE WOLVERINE [CC,DV] (PG-13) ★ Fri. - Sat.(205 PM) 750 PM

THE WOLVERINE IN REALD 3D [CC,DV] (PG-13) ★ Fri. - Sat.(1115 AM) 500 PM 1040 PM

RED 2 [CC,DV] (PG-13) Fri. - Sat.(1230) 400 700 1000

THE CONJURING [CC,DV] (R) Fri. - Sat.(100) 400 730 1030

TURBO IN REALD 3D [CC,DV] (PG) ★ Fri. - Sat.915 PM

TURBO [CC,DV] (PG) Fri. - Sat.(1130 155) 415 650

GROWN UPS 2 [CC,DV] (PG-13) Fri. - Sat.(1215 330) 640 945

DESPICABLE ME 2 [CC,DV] (PG) Fri. - Sat.(1200 300) 630 930

THE HEAT [CC,DV] (R) Fri. - Sat.(1245 345) 715 1015

Summer Movie Express - Tues & Wed. 10 am

9TH ST. CINEMAS 4 541-928-7469
Behind Skippers 9th St 800-FANDANGO 312#

Adv. Tix on Sale 2 GUNS
Call Theatre for Showtimes

Times For 07/26 - 07/27© 2013 www.REGmovies.com