

MOVIE REVIEWS

20 FEET FROM STARDOM



Jo Lawry, Judith Hill and Lisa Fischer in “20 Feet from Stardom.”

Courtesy of RADiUS-TWC

Stepping into the well-deserved spotlight

By Kirsten Coachman

We hear their voices on some of the most recognizable records in music, yet none of these singers are considered to be household names. Directed by Morgan Neville, “Twenty Feet From Stardom” puts a spotlight on some of the most talented background singers as they share their experiences — for better or for worse — about working in the music industry.

The Blossom’s Darlene Love candidly discussed her working relationship with producer Phil Spector, who at one point went as

far to buy the singer’s contract with another label, to keep her voice on his records. Love’s voice was used fuel the success of The Crystals, including their number one hit, “She’s a Rebel.”

Preacher’s daughter, Merry Clayton, who sang backup for Ray Charles, as one of The Raelettes, spoke about being woken up in the middle of the night to record vocals on the Rolling Stones’ huge hit, “Gimme Shelter.” Listening to Clayton recall the story about showing up to the studio with curlers in hair and in her pajamas to record the song’s controversial lyrics, “Rape! Murder!

It’s just a shot away,” was one of the most engaging moments of the film.

One of the film’s most compelling singers is Lisa Fischer. While her contemporaries believe she should be one of the biggest stars in music, the Grammy Award-winning singer represents a unique perspective of being content with being out of the spotlight and simply singing alongside her peers in the business. Currently on tour with the Rolling Stones and Sting, Fischer finds the beauty in blending sounds to boost the overall performance.

There’s one singer in the film, whose voice many might recognize from this past season of NBC’s “The Voice.” Judith Hill had the opportunity of a lifetime, being able to work with Michael Jackson while he prepared for his “This Is It” tour. His untimely death put Hill in the spotlight during his memorial service, as she sang “Heal The World,” from Jackson’s album, “Dangerous.”

Hill recognizes that her career is at a musical crossroads. While she embraces opportunities to sing back up for some of the greatest singers around, like Stevie Wonder, she also recognizes that must continue to move forward if she wants

20 Feet from Stardom

Documentary. Starring Darlene Love, Merry Clayton, Lisa Fischer, Táta Vega and Judith Hill. Directed by Morgan Neville. (PG-13. 90 minutes.)



to seriously pursue her solo career.

What’s great about this film is that the subject of background singers in the music industry is one that hadn’t been talked about in the past. To hear the singers in this film be praised by Bruce Springsteen, Mick Jagger and Sting really shows the appreciation that the industry’s stars have for their background singers’ craft. Plus, as a music fan, getting to learn about this community of singers and the experiences they’ve been through is nothing short of awe-inspiring.

Darlene Love in “20 Feet from Stardom.”



Courtesy of RADiUS-TWC

Kirsten Coachman is the Assignment Editor for the Academy of Art University newspaper. Tweet her at @AAUPaperGirl1.