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Jim Ferguson, ABC-TV

Curious George™

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A scene from *Music from the Inside Out*

MUSIC HATH CHARMS

Music from the Inside Out

review by Doug Levy



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When I was a kid, walking between home and school, I would watch men at work. I would stand for countless minutes and observe their labors for no other reason than curiosity. Daniel Anker, the producer and director of the documentary *Music from the Inside Out*, appears to have a similar curiosity about musicians and their work, although the intensity of his interest far exceeded mine, as he spent four years filming and editing this 88-minute film.

Anker states up front the question that his film is going to answer: What is music? Now, coming up with such an explanation is very much like a discussion of what is comedy: after a while one loses any sense that any of it is funny. Anker's attempt to supply a meaningful "what" involves the verbal contributions of dozens of members of the Philadelphia Orchestra, as well as the participation of all 105 of them filmed at rehearsals and performances.

Right from the start, Anker makes clear that music is human. When one musician tries to further define it—sound that is organized and intended—a colleague quickly counters by asking is a fire engine siren music? But even this objection still acknowledges the human role. Music is human in that, according to the Philadelphians, it expresses something from deep within the person and, at the same time, as the timpanist put it, "allows you to be free to experience the other world."

Anker also finds that music is passion. These people know that this is what they were meant to do, and some—the trombonist who gigs with a salsa band after a concert, or the violinist who sits in to play "Orange Blossom Special" because bluegrass simply makes him feel so good—have a seemingly unquenchable appetite to make more.

Symphony musicians, of course, are expected to perform as a team, and for some this takes some getting used to. David Kim,

the orchestra's concertmaster, gave up a faltering career as a solo concert violinist, and found the rewards of playing such great repertoire compensated for now having to suppress his soloist tendencies.

Anker chose not to interview the orchestra's conductor, a decision predicated perhaps on the plan to keep it to musicians who actually help an instrument. Stranger, however, was that in all the interviews the audience was never mentioned. In conversations I have had with Buffalo Philharmonic musicians over the years, it is clear that the audience has a significant role in the concert experience. Besides, without getting too Zen, would you have music if only the musicians heard it?

Anker, whose earlier work dealt with the Holocaust in the movies and Jim Crow laws in the South (the latter was nominated for an Oscar), warms to his subject and appears to keep an open mind about actually finding the answer to his question. I am not a fan of filmed orchestral performances, the camera cutting to a solo or section on the composer's cue; and the filmmaker thankfully keeps this to a minimum. He largely eschews showing the musician's private lives, probably in the interests of time, but if music is imbued with the musician's life, then that life doesn't stop at the stage door.

So, what is music? According to one musician in the film, you can't define it, but you know it when you hear it. If Anker's film has an answer, it may just be that if you want to define it, listen to it. Recordings are good, live concerts are better. But you will only begin to truly know what music is by learning how and making it yourself. Afford that opportunity to a child, and that person will always have a special gift.

***Music From the Inside Out* plays from Feb. 17-20 only at the Emerging Cinemas screen at the Market Arcade Film and Arts Center.**