

WIDE OPEN SKY

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WIDE OPEN SKY

Australia, 2015, 87 mins. Doco, G.
Director: Lisa Nichol.

IMDB score 8.0 (From 29 voters)
FVFS panel voted 4.0 (out of 5)



See a trailer at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDILOZL56e4>

Wide Open Sky follows the heart-warming story of an outback Australian children's choir. Chronicling their journey from auditions to end-of-year concert, the trials of trying to run a children's choir in a remote and disadvantaged region are revealed. Here, sport is king and music education is non-existent. Despite this, choir mistress Michelle has high expectations. She wants to teach the children contemporary, original, demanding music. It becomes clear for the children to believe in themselves, they all need someone who believes in them. Set against a landscape of devastating beauty, Wide Open Sky is a moving portrait of the fragile world of possibility that is childhood and reminds us why no child, anywhere, should grow up without music. *Written by Anonymous (IMDB)*

<http://www.wideopenskymovie.com/>

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From www.URBANCINEFILE.com.au :

SYNOPSIS: In this remote corner of Australia (NSW), footy is king and music education is rare as rain. Determined to see the children reach their potential, Moorambilla Voices' passionate and driven choir director, Michelle Leonard, strives to open up their world through music. We look into the lives of Kyh, Mack, Opal and Taylah, four brave and hopeful primary school children who travel far from home to music camp to prepare for the choir's big concert. They have just three days to learn a demanding repertoire. (Winner, Audience Award Best Documentary, Sydney Film Festival 2015.)

Review by Louise Keller:

It's not just a choir; we're saying life is full of possibilities, says Michelle Leonard, the driving force behind the Moorambilla Voices choir, whose annual gala event is so much more than a concert. This is a heartwarming and inspiring documentary that describes the journey in which country children from remote areas of NSW are brought together to sing, learn music, learn about themselves and explore their creative talents. It is also a profile of an exceptional woman who works tirelessly to recruit and motivate the children, encouraging and pushing them as they have never been stretched before to reach the high notes and to dream equally high.

In the exacting annual selection process, for which Michelle travels over 4,000 km to recruit the choir members, she tries to select candidates who "will take positive risks and have a burning desire to express themselves". That is of course, beyond a mandatory musical tenacity. For many children, this is their only opportunity to learn music: sharps and flats, holding a note, projecting and being part of something bigger. The fact that they get a chance to meet others like them, is also a big plus. That is quite something for those living in the most remote and disadvantaged part of Australia.

We meet a selection of the 130 children selected. There is Opal (10), who lives in Grawin, where there are three pubs and a general store. She sings between the trees, her father says. She also harbours a talent for songwriting. Mack (11) from Lightning Ridge was never going to play rugby, his parents tell. He loves singing and dancing. When they took him to see Billy Elliott the musical in Sydney, he slipped on his dance shoes before watching the show. Watching him dance when no-one is watching (except for the whispering leave) is a treat.

Michelle's classes are informal and fun and it's impossible not to become involved and inspired as she teaches the children the songs. Singing is a physical activity: the use of hands indicates the tonal shifts of the notes and feet get involved for the rhythms. Michelle also ensures there is funding to enable the children to participate in the all important initiation camp where inhibitions are discarded, confidences are secured and relationships are forged. Interesting to note, young Australian composers are commissioned each year to write for the concert. They participate too in the learning process - like Alice Chance, who composed one of the songs and becomes something of a mentor. In the lead-up to the concert, when the 130 selected children take centre stage, one child confides: "When I'm singing all my worries slip away. It's a great feeling". So is this uplifting documentary that won the Audience Award at 2015 Sydney Film festival.



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