

To *Breathe* as *One*



Distributed by

Sky Films Incorporated

Running Time: 56:46

Rating: Not rated

Official Web Site and High-Res Images:

www.tobreatheasone.com

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A Group of Young American Singers Travel to Estonia to Take Part in One of the Largest Choral Festivals in the World in To Breathe As One

New Film from the Creators of the Acclaimed *The Singing Revolution*

"A beautiful documentary, *To Breathe as One* captures the power and inspiration of the festival and of voices joined en masse to be heard over past and present world events."

- Marta Yamamoto, Contra Costa Times

In 2007, filmmakers James Tusty and Maureen Castle Tusty released the acclaimed documentary *The Singing Revolution*, which explored how music played an extraordinary role in Estonia's centuries-long quest for freedom. It was a battle that was eventually won not with guns but with song. And a major part of that weapon of song was the raising of tens of thousands of voices in the unique Estonian choral festival known as Laulupidu. Begun in 1869 and held every five years, the festival draws 25,000 choral singers to the massive stage, with over 100,000 spectators, for a two-day musical celebration of freedom, joy and unity.

In Estonian, the words "soul" and "breathe" come from the same root — "to breathe as one" means more than coordinated inhaling and exhaling — it connects souls together.

To Breathe As One explores the beauty and meaning of the Festival through the eyes of the young members of the Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir in San Francisco, who were invited to take part in the most recent Laulupidu, in 2009. Learning difficult songs — all in Estonian — the youngsters prepared for months and then set off to join the many thousands from around the world who gather every five years in Tallinn. There they discovered the unique role that this music has played for Estonians for over 150 years, as an integral force in maintaining strength and identity for a people who have faced cultural genocide — more than once. They learned how this haunting music fueled the now-heralded "Singing Revolution" of the late 1980s, when Estonians played a significant role in the collapse of the Soviet Union. The film shows the power and inspiration of voices joined en masse, honoring the past and rejoicing in the future.

To Breathe As One brings together five distinguished filmmakers — James Tusty, Maureen Castle Tusty, Bestor Cram, Mike Majoros and Piret Tibbo-Hudgins — for a new collaboration following the success of their 2007 co-production, *The Singing Revolution*, which received accolades from around the world. Compared to *Casablanca* by The New York Times, *The Singing Revolution* was one of the most successful feature documentaries of 2008. Using unique web and niche marketing strategies, the film played theatrically in 125 North American markets, and was cited as one of five "maverick" films changing the independent film industry by The New York Times. The film is an Estonia – U.S. co-production involving Sky Films Incorporated (USA), Northern Light Productions (USA), and Allfilm (Estonia), again aligned to continue the tradition of excellence achieved in their earlier collaboration.

SYNOPSIS - Short

Every five years, 30,000 people gather on the same stage in the small country of Estonia to join voices at Laulupidu, the National Song Festival, to become the largest choir in the world. More than a music festival, it's a miracle that at least twice in history gave freedom to that country. *To Breathe As One* explores the beauty and meaning of the choral festival through the eyes of the young members of the California-based Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir, one of the few American choirs invited to participate. From the filmmakers of the acclaimed *The Singing Revolution*, the film reveals that for Estonians singing is not just a means of cultural expression, but a defining part of their national identity.

SYNOPSIS - Long

Every five years, 30,000 people gather on the same stage in the small country of Estonia to join voices and sing in the National Song Festival for two days, becoming the largest choir in the world. More than a music festival, it's a miracle that at least twice in history gave freedom to that country. *To Breathe As One* explores the beauty and meaning of the choral festival through the eyes of the young members of the California-based Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir, one of the few American choirs invited to participate.

Learning difficult songs — all in Estonian — the youngsters prepare for months and then set off to join the many thousands from around the world who gather every five years in Tallinn. Forming cross-cultural friendships that span the oceans, there they discover the unique role that music has played for Estonians for over 150 years, as an integral force in maintaining strength and identity for a people who have faced cultural genocide — more than once.

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To Breathe as One

To Breathe as One Credits

Narrated by

Nero Urke

Produced by

Sky Films Incorporated and Northern Lights Productions
In association with Allfilm

Executive Producer

James Tusty

Directors

Maureen Castle Tusty
Bestor Cram
Mike Majoros

Producers

Maureen Castle Tusty
James Tusty
Bestor Cram
Piret Tibbo-Hudgins

Content Consultants

David Puderbaugh
Tiia Järg
Mimi S. Daitz

Writers

Mike Majoros
James Tusty
Maureen Castle Tusty

Editors

Mike Majoros
Andrew Kukura

Production Manager

Anu Uibo



About the Filmmakers



James Tusty (Co-Producer) and **Maureen Castle Tusty (Co-Director & Producer)** are partners in Sky Films Incorporated, located in New York. They bring 25 years of worldwide production experience with award-winning documentaries, commercials and corporate branding films, and have created new models for non-fiction distribution. Maureen's work has been seen on PBS and globally in film festivals; she is an adjunct faculty member of Tallinn University in Estonia, where she teaches film production.

Jim has prior experience with Eastern European production. He produced several Russian language programs for McGraw-Hill that were shot in multiple locations in Russia in 1986 and 1988 and, immediately after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, he produced a fifteen-part series on free market economics for Hungarian television. Jim's father was born in Estonia, and came to the United States as a child in 1924. Their most recent film, *Economic Freedom in Action; Changing Lives*, will premiere on public television in Fall 2013.

Another member of the team is **Bestor Cram (Co-Director)** who leads Northern Light Productions with offices in Boston. Northern Light has been a leading documentary production company for more than 25 years exhibiting award-winning work worldwide on television and in museums. A recent theatrical release, *Johnny Cash at Folsom Prison (2008)*, which he produced and directed, continues to enjoy broadcast exhibition throughout the world.

Piret Tibbo-Hudgins (Co-Producer) worked as a Producer in the Estonian state film studio Tallinnfilm after graduating in 1985 from All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) in Moscow. In 1995 Piret co-founded Allfilm and was a Managing Director of the company until 2002 when she went back to producing. She is currently Head of Production for the Estonian Film Institute.

Mike Majoros (USA) spent more than a year editing and writing the film. Together with Jim and Maureen, Mike played a major role in shaping the structure of the story...no easy task given the complexity of the history. He shares the Director/Writer credit with the Tustys. Mike has spent the last 20 years making feature-length documentaries about a broad range of subjects: Maasai warriors from Kenya marketing their culture in the US, homeless men surviving on the streets, veterans protesting to raise awareness about the futility of the Vietnam war, and people in wheelchairs confronting an inadequate healthcare system. His work has received dozens of awards, and has been screened internationally at festivals including Sundance and Berlin, as well as on PBS. In 1985, he received his graduate degree from the MIT Media Lab, and later he taught thesis level film production at the Rhode Island School of Design for 15 years. He has recently finished a documentary about nomadic life in Mongolia.

About the Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir

Under the leadership of Artistic Director Robert Geary, the Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir of Oakland, California tours internationally every year. The keen desire to meet, collaborate with, and compete with choruses and singers of other cultures has led to high marks at prestigious festivals across the world, and wonderful friendships and collaborations with artists across the globe. The Choir has twice been to the Laulupidu and is one of the few American choirs to have been invited. They are planning to return to Estonia for Laulupidu 2014, and Estonian Songfest conductor Aarne Saluveer will be an adjudicator for the Golden Gate Festival in July 2015.



An Interview with Filmmakers James Tusty and Maureen Castle Tusty

How did you come to make To Breathe As One?

In the course of producing our previous film on Estonia's critical, though little known, role in the collapse of the Soviet Union, *The Singing Revolution*, we came to be in awe of the massive Estonian song festival Laulupidu, where as many as 30,000 singers take the stage to sing, becoming the world's largest choir. But it's not just any 30,000 singers who participate. They have to audition to participate so it's truly the best 30,000 singers on stage. The end result is stunning to see and hear. Over 100,000 people fill the beautiful outdoor venue to listen. We wanted to make a film about this little-known phenomenon, and the role singing can play in uniting and motivating a nation.

To Breathe as One was the theme of the festival we filmed for this project. We felt it captured the essence of the festival experience, and what singing means to Estonians. It just felt right to also use it as the title of the film. UNESCO has proclaimed the Laulupidu Song Festival a "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" and we think this film explains that amazing honor.

To *Breathe as One*

What were some of the challenges the production faced?

The production challenges were many. Having now been to three Laulupidu, we can tell you that no filmic record of the event can match being there. It's just too massive and empowering to fully appreciate unless you are there. But we think we came pretty close to giving a good sense of the spectacle of it all. We were able to build a good relationship with the festival organizers and Estonian Television, the TV channel that does all of the filming with sweeping cranes and something like 17 cameras so we had great access to the event to do our own filming (including rare access to film from the stage itself during performances), as well as access to many sweeping images from the cranes.



Additionally, in the film we share some of the history of the festival. That gives greater meaning to the performances through an understanding of the meaning behind key songs being performed. In that sense, the film enhances the experience of being there. The festival goes back to 1869, and once you understand the history, you can appreciate the concert on a much deeper level. But we had to create an artful balance to make sure

the focus on the film stayed on the experience of Laulupidu, using the historical background as a way to enhance that experience.

And of course, as with most documentaries, funding was one issue. But we persevered. Due to funding challenges, it took four years after shooting to finish the film. But we're finished, just in time before the next Laulupidu in July of 2014. In that sense, the production timing was perfect.

Who do you feel will be the audience for this film?

This film shows the power of music beyond just Friday night entertainment. Anyone curious about the world, anyone who enjoys learning about a major cultural phenomenon – one that they likely haven't even heard of much less seen – will enjoy this film. The festival has an extraordinary history. It has survived Czarist occupation, World Wars I and II, 50 years of Soviet occupation, and all that time it kept the Estonian nation united. United using music, for more than a century. United through an art form. It's an amazing story.

This is your second film that takes place in Estonia - is there another planned?

Estonia is a special country to us, with many more stories to tell. But at this point, we have other films in the works that have nothing to do with Estonia. But if the stars line up and we find the right story we'd love to film there again. But for now, we'll be happy to attend the festival next summer as tourists relaxing in the fields, enjoying beautiful music.

