



THE NOE VALLEY VOICE

Noe Filmmaker Has *Secret Song* In SF Doc Fest

Director's Debut Inspired by Music Teacher

By Matthew S. Bajko

Both of Samantha Campbell's children attended the private San Francisco School in the city's Portola District. It is how the Hoffman Avenue resident came to know the school's longtime music teacher Doug Goodkin.

When she learned that Goodkin planned to retire in 2020 after 45 years at the school, Campbell decided tracking Goodkin's last year of teaching would make a compelling subject for her first documentary. Goodkin agreed to be filmed, as did his music instructor colleagues James Harding and Sofia Lopez-Ibor. They all follow the Orff Schulwerk approach to music education, which combines lessons on music, movement, speech, math, and drama in



All in the Mix: Making a documentary often presents challenges, like a pandemic shutdown, say. Still, Noe Valley director Samantha Campbell was able to keep the music playing in *The Secret Song*, her film about popular teacher Doug Goodkin (center). Photo courtesy Lansia Wann

a manner similar to how children play.

"It is a really amazing amount of organization and technique that the children have to engage in. I thought

everyone should see this because it seemed so transformational for the

Somewhere Over The Rainbow in Noe Valley

There Are June Pride Events, Including a 'Sistory' Tour

By Kit Cameron

Noe Valley, on the quieter side of Castro hill, nevertheless has a robust set of events for June Pride Month. To start, you are not going to want to miss the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence when they share their "Sistory" Wednesday, June 7, at 7 p.m., at Bethany Methodist Church.

The self-proclaimed "order of queer and trans nuns" has used humor and wit to fight against bigotry, complacency, and guilt for over 40 years. From their response to the AIDS crisis to the more recent dust-up with a major league baseball team, the Sisters have been out in front of just about every major political or social change in San Francisco since their founding in 1979.

Sister Morticia Mourningwood, who

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children,” Campbell told the *Voice* during a phone interview in May.

Campbell enlisted as her co-producers Rachel Benson and Todd Dayton, who both had documentary filmmaking experience. They also were parents of children enrolled at the San Francisco School and knew of Goodkin.

“He is a very well-known educator around the world and has written nine books. He teaches adult workshops to other teachers. He is an insatiable learner, a lifelong learner, and just a guy who has a lot to be recognized for,” said Campbell, whose daughter is now in high school while her son a fifth-grader at a different school. “He did feel it would be a wonderful feather in the cap of a long career. It wasn’t a problem convincing him.”

Due to their connections to the school community, they were able to gain fly-on-the-wall access to the campus. The crew was granted permission to bring their cameras into the classrooms and film all but a handful of the school’s 250 preschool-through-eighth-grade students.

Filming began that fall and the crew traveled to Salt Lake City to film the teachers and students performing at an

annual Orff Schulwerk conference. Preparations were well under way for filming Goodkin’s final months and school ceremonies during the spring semester when the Covid pandemic upended those plans and shuttered the campus in March of 2020.

“Here he is the master of ceremonies and is going to retire without any ceremonies. At the time, I was so disappointed for him and sad at the irony of his sort of disruption. He had a good attitude about it; I admired him for that,” said Campbell, who has lived in Noe Valley since 2015.

A Full-Length Feature

The health crisis added another dimension to the story Campbell was trying to capture on celluloid, in addition to creating logistical challenges for the first-time filmmaker. With her subjects quarantining at home, she resorted to using recordings of the teachers’ virtual classes and enlisted the help of several parents to film their children.

“I was doing this film at the time and thinking about the themes I cared about—art education and music education and how those things are valuable to kids and communities—and suddenly we are in a situation where nobody is in person. I think everybody started to examine what does community mean and what do I derive from it in terms of happiness,” said Campbell, who earned a bachelor of fine arts from Syracuse



In her debut film, Samantha Campbell uses archival photos such as this one, showing Doug Goodkin playing banjo for students in his early years as a teacher. Photos courtesy Lansia Wann

University and is president of the Campbell Foundation, focused on protecting natural resources.

Campbell turned the hours of film she and her crew captured, including one-on-one interviews with the music instructors, their pupils, and their school colleagues, into a 90-minute film, *The Secret Song*. The title comes from a term Goodkin used to refer to the hidden song waiting for his students to find in the wood xylophones he would give them.

As he explains in the film, in order to ferret out the song, each student must “explore with their hands, listen with their ears, and remember with their minds.”

Dorsey & Brinker Also in Spotlight

The film is part of this year’s San Francisco Documentary Festival taking place at the Roxie Theater in the Mission over the first 11 days of June. It is one of several selections with ties to Noe Valley.

The subject of director Lindsay Gauthier’s 10-minute short *Sean Dorsey Dance: Dreaming Trans and Queer Futures* is a resident of the neighborhood. Dorsey, who was traveling out of state on tour and unavailable for an interview, is a trailblazing transgender choreographer and activist. He produces the Fresh Meat Festival, now in its 21st season, that showcases trans and queer performance.

Another subject of a short film who had called Noe Valley home is Ruth Brinker, who in the mid-1980s began delivering meals to San Franciscans living with AIDS and unable to cook for themselves. It led Brinker to found the nonprofit Project Open Hand, which to this day provides food to those in need in the city.

Director Apo W. Bazidi’s 23-minute

film *The Ruth Brinker Story* shines a light on Brinker, who died in 2011 at the age of 89. A native of South Dakota, Brinker had moved to San Francisco in the mid-1950s and had a career in food services.

A World of Music

Campbell told the *Voice* she expected a sell-out crowd for the June 2 screening of her film at the Roxie. (It can also be viewed via the festival online through June 11.)

It won the Marion Herrman Excellence in Filmmaking Award at this year’s Sedona International Film Festival in Arizona. In September, Campbell will be in Spain for the film’s screening at the Madrid International Film Festival. “Sophia [Lopez-Ibor] is from Madrid, so that will be fun,” said Campbell.

Around that time, she also hopes to have a limited theatrical run for the film in the Bay Area at various independent movie houses.

Campbell is also mapping out her next film, which will again focus on music but from a global perspective and feature people from different cultures.

Later this summer she will travel with the trio of San Francisco School teachers to Ghana, where they will teach a music workshop. While there, she plans to film the brothers who co-founded the Nunya Music Academy and capture the school’s inauguration ceremony.

“I am very fascinated by the idea of music as a language, as an international language,” said Campbell.

A full lineup for the 2023 documentary film festival, taking place at the Roxie Theater and online, can be found at SFdocfest2023.eventive.org/welcome.



Samantha Campbell says *The Secret Song* is about the value of music and art education, not only for students but for the entire community.