

## Film Review: Background Singers Get Up Front in ‘20 Feet from Stardom’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 11, 2013 - 6:39pm

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CHICAGO – One the great points in “20 Feet from Stardom” is that often in our favorite hit songs, we sing along to the background singers rather than the lead vocal (“Sweet home Alabama, Where the skies are so blue...”). These classic songsters come front and center in “20 Feet from Stardom.”



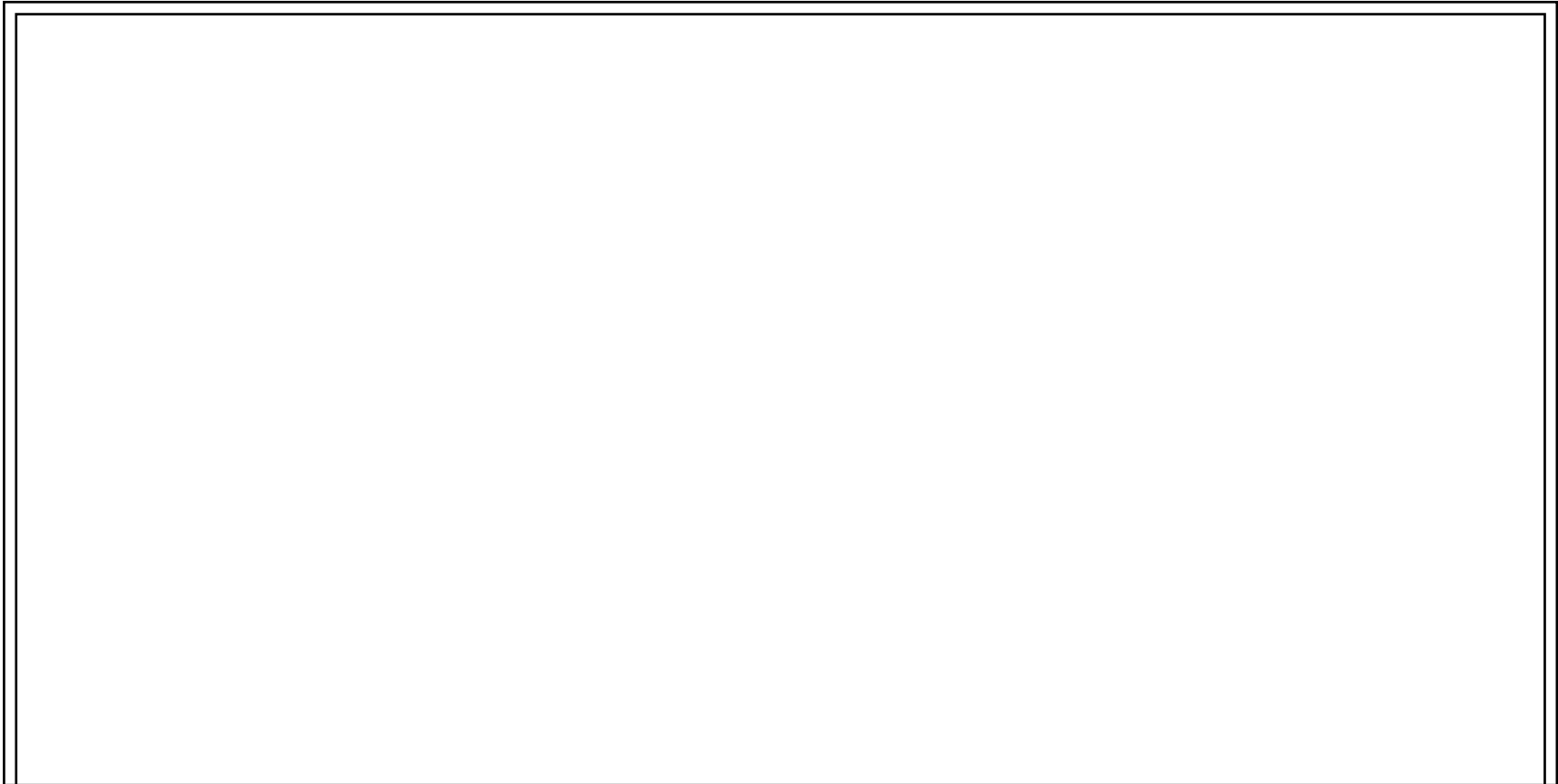
The title is an irony, of course, in the so-close-but-yet-so-far nature of hit record fame. By spotlighting the background singers of those familiar songs, it also highlights the struggles when the backgrounders weren’t needed anymore, and their sometimes harsh attempts at trying to come out front and have their own identity. This is a life lesson, as we see the titans of rock – Bruce Springsteen and Mick Jagger – extolling the virtues of their backup help, but also being kind of forlorn about the frustrations of those colleagues not making it to the big time. The documentary is both a history lesson and a morality tale.

Bruce Springsteen leads off the proceedings, which talks at first about the history of background singers in classic rock songs, including the Phil Spector produced ‘Wall of Sound” hit “He’s a Rebel” and the Rolling Stones iconic “Gimme Shelter.” Without the contributions of Darlene Love (Rebel) and Merry Clayton (Shelter) the songs would not be the same.

Besides those more familiar background singer names, the film focuses on and interviews Lisa Fischer, Táta Vega, Judith Hill and Claudia Lennear. They have sung backup for legends like Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, David Bowie, Ike & Tina Turner, Madonna and Bette Midler (Stevie Wonder and Midler are also interviewed for the film).

*“20 Feet from Stardom” continues its limited release in Chicago on July 12th. See local listings for show times and theaters. Featuring interviews with Bruce Springsteen, Mick Jagger, Bette Midler, Stevie Wonder, Lisa Fischer, Táta Vega, Judith Hill, Claudia Lennear, Merry Clayton and Darlene Love. Directed by Morgan Neville. Rated “PG-13”*

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In the Spotlight: Darlene Love in '20 Feet from Stardom'  
*Photo credit: The Weinstein Company*



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