WOKING FILM CLUB

The Choral

Season 46 – 5th Film – **Screening 12th November 2026**

UK	2025
UK Release Date	7th November 2025
UK Box Office	$5.697m
113 mins	Certificate 12A
Director	Nicolas Hytner
Written by	Alan Bennett and Stephen Beresford
Cinematography	Mike Eley
Costume Designer	Jenny Beavan
Music	George Fenton
Ralph Fiennes	Dr Henry Guthrie
Roger Allam	Alderman Duxbury
Mark Addy	Mr Fyton (Photographer)
Alun Armstrong	Mr Trickett (Undertaker)
Simon Russell Beale	Edward Elgar
Amara Okereke	Mary (Salvationist)
Emily Fairn	Bella
Lyndsey Marshal	Mrs Bishop
Robert Emms	Robert Horner (Pianist)
Oliver Briscombe	Lofty (Telegram Boy)
Jacob Dudman	Clyde (Veteran)
Taylor Uttley	Ellis
Shaun Thomas	Mitch



Our presentation this evening marks Remembrance Sunday. The Choral is a bittersweet drama set in 1916 in the fictional Yorkshire town of Ramsden. As usual with an Alan Bennett screenplay, there is warm (sometimes wry and salty) dialogue, a number of subplots and a pervading (if sympathetic) melancholy. Everyone has secrets.

The local Choral society has been laid low by menfolk volunteering for service, to the distress of the local mill owner, benefactor and lead tenor Alderman Duxbury. He reluctantly turns to Dr Guthrie to organise their annual concert. Guthrie has a long association with Germany (with an unfiltered tendency to eulogise Teutonic art), and has neither wife nor religion (which hardly endears him to townsfolk). He runs auditions and visits the local infirmary to seek out new male voices. The committee declines to perform an English translation of the *St Matthew Passion* (as it's by the German composer Bach) but alights on Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, despite misgivings about the English composer's Catholicism and the need for complicated staging. The younger men members awaiting their call-ups are keen to woo the local girls, and attachments form during and around rehearsals. Guthrie makes sweeping amendments to the work, to match the limited, somewhat rag-tag resources at his disposal, and turns the oratorio into a work of grieving for the millions of young men being sacrificed. The composer swans in to offer encouragement but is not impressed by the changes.

This is the 4th collaboration between director and writer (following The Lady in the Van, The History Boys and The Madness of King George) and quite possibly the last – Bennett turned 92 last May. Interviewed in the Times, the director Nicolas Hytner commented

> This is a community reacting to what is still mercifully an unimaginable catastrophe to us…We show them turning to two things for consolation. For the young people, who know their time is limited, they have an urgent need to make a connection with each other. And for everyone else, the other consolation is music — and specifically singing together to give some purpose and meaning to their lives. Those two needs — making human connections and being involved in the performing arts — are also the things that have meant most to me in my life.

The Times commended a "sensitive exploration of the national character;" The Telegraph noted that Hytner "marshals his multi-generational ensemble with ease; pleasing vignettes blossom everywhere, with none drowning the overall arrangement" and the Guardian praised a "quiet and consistent pleasure." The tonal shifts did not please everyone. Mark Kermode's view was that "the narrative bit off more than it could chew" and The Daily Beast rather witheringly compared it to a "glass of warm milk." (I guess that critic is lactose intolerant?)



The Choral is not a perfect film but the cast is exceptional. Fiennes expertly plays a reserved and sombre closeted man, frustrated at his inability to mourn his lost German lover. Mark Addy (the town photographer) laments the young lives he captures in pre-action sepia and Roger Allam (Alderman Duxbury) moves from entitled to sympathetic as we learn of his own loss. Simon Russell Beale's cameo as a bumptious Elgar fills the screen and the younger players' yearnings feel authentic.

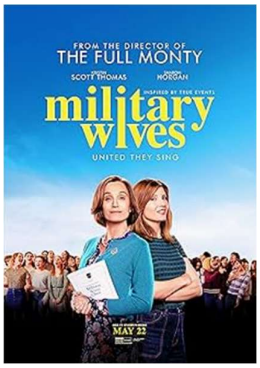
Eugene Smith

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Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by close Tuesday 17th November.
DVDs and Blu-Rays from most of our previous presentations are available to borrow!

Six Films Featuring Choirs

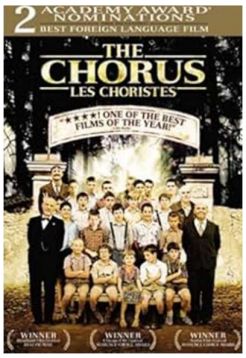
Military Wives (2019/UK/Dir Peter Cattaneo/112 mins/12A/IMDb rating 6.5)
Inspired by a BBC documentary when Gareth Malone visited military bases to form choirs, bringing together the wives and partners of serving personnel. Stars Kirstin Scott Thomas and Sharon Horgan. The film was released just before COVID in the UK and never made it to US cinemas. The director described it as a celebration of "the emotional power of music and the catharsis of singing together."



Sister Act (1992/US/E Ardolino/100 mins/PG/6.6)
Whoopi Goldberg plays a nightclub singer who has to hide out from the mob in a convent. She injects the choir with soul and sass, butting heads with the traditional Mother Superior (Maggie Smith). An enormous box office hit that begat a sequel and a stage musical. "It's a movie that just (pardon me) makes you feel damn good" – Associated Press.

Pitch Perfect (2012/US/J Moore/112 mins/12/7.1)
Anna Kenrick, Bethany Snow and Rebel Wilson are part of an all-girl a cappella singing group ("Barden Bellas") who enter an international competition. Do they win? Well… A lightweight comedy, nominated for 8 Teen Choice Awards (it won 4). Two sequels and a TV series followed. "The Spinal Tap of unaccompanied singing" – FT.

The Chorus [Les choristes] (2004/Fr/Christophe Barratier/97 mins/12/7.9)
A teacher and failed musician (Gérard Jugnot) working at a boarding school for troubled boys in 1949 starts a choir and transforms the atmosphere. A low-key heart warmer that proved a huge hit in France ($48m at the box office), nominated for 8 César Awards, winning 2 (sound, music). "A well-nigh irresistible film celebrating the redemptive power of music" – LA Times.



Fisherman's Friends (2019/UK/Chris Foggin/112 mins/12A/7.0)
True story about a group of Cornish fishermen (led by James Purefoy) who achieved a top 10 hit with their debut album of traditional sea shanties. Charming and gentle, it plays up the Cornish clichés to great effect. "Embraces you like a warm sweater" – Mark Kermode. A sequel followed in 2022.

Unfinished Song (2012/UK/Paul Andrew Williams/90 mins/PG/6.9)
Also known as Song for Marion. An ageing curmudgeon (Terence Stamp) honours his recently deceased wife's passion by joining her unconventional local choir, helping him re-build bridges with his son (Christopher Eccleston). Also stars Vanessa Redgrave and Gemma Arterton. "Your tear ducts will be powerless to resist" – Time Out.

Eugene Smith

Comments & reactions to **The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie** - shown on 22nd Oct 2026
No of reaction slips received = **28** Average score = **7.43**

Rating	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number	0	0	1	0	2	2	7	11	4	1

Position	Film	Score	Reactions	Audience
1	I Swear	8.45	31	47
2	The Marching Band (En Fanfare)	7.93	27	38
3	**The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie**	**7.43**	**28**	**42**
4	Hamnet	7.36	25	46

Maggie Smith in her prime!
First time viewing for me having missed it all these years – which I regret as it was excellent
What an education in an era of conservatism…were the girls prepared for what was to come?

Shame about sound quality. Would have been better with subtitles
Maggie Smith is excellent. Not sure teaching could be like that these days! Difficult to understand at times without subtitles! The poor diction spoilt the film for me
Struggled with accents! Great film to see on the Big Screen
[Our remaining films should all be subtitled – sorry, but the only DVD available had no subtitles! Eugene]

Over-acting – but I never went to a girls' school. Conservative education preferred to detriment of Brody's gals Saw this film years ago! Seeing it for the second time!
Great choice. Remember seeing it many years ago, but better this time round
Oh, what a different age! I saw so much more in the film now that I did when it first came out. Marvellous! Really enjoyed this film. A bit dated – but still relevant today
Maggie Smith deserved every inch of the Oscar. Every performance was 5 stars
Thank you for another entertaining film and tribute to the late Dame Maggie Smith. Whilst the acting was good, I thought the story was a bit weak
Maggie Smith was a tour de force, and the supporting cast was excellent. Celia Johnson played the headmistress perfectly, what a change from her role in Brief Encounter I have wanted to see this film for a long time. Maggie Smith deserved her Oscar, an amazing performance

Our Next Film – Thursday 26th November – Rental Family



As sweet and tender as spring lamb – **New York Times**

Fake, puke-inducing emotional dishonesty of the most absurd kind. Nothing here makes sense – **The (London) Times**

A dramedy that proves a charming surprise balancing poignancy and humour with rare delicacy – **The Hollywood Reporter**

It's a part made for Fraser with his lovely big, sad eyes – **Evening Standard**