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SAG Film review

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A novelty: the first film review in SAG!

Så som i Himmelen (*As It Is in Heaven*), 2004, directed by Kay Pollak, DVD non-USA format, Swedish with English subtitles, Amazon.com \$25.99 plus shipping.

Almost unknown in the U.S., this beautiful and heartwarming film from Sweden has been described by critics as one of the best Swedish films made in recent years and has been nominated for several awards in Europe. It was recently shown at the American Swedish Historical museum in Philadelphia after our annual *Semlor* gathering. I quickly rushed to find a copy for myself to share with others. Regrettably, I will have to try and convert it to U.S. format, or find a European format DVD player, to show it other than at the Museum. So unlike the popular fare being churned out by Hollywood, the film deserves much wider acclaim in the U.S. among all moviegoers, not just Swedish Americans.

Taking place in a small village, Ljusåker, in the far northern province of Norrland, the story is about a small boy, Daniel Dareus, raised by a single mother. The boy has a talent for the violin but is bullied by local boys. He grows up to become a world-famous musician and conductor, driven by his talent and desire for perfection to ill health and exhaustion. He returns alone to his little village to recover and rest, buying the now vacant old village schoolhouse to live in. The local people do not remember him as a child but know of his reputation as a conductor. Members of the small village church choir ask him to help them with their music, and he

reluctantly agrees. His methods are unorthodox but the choir members come to love him. Others, including the pastor, question his motives and methods.

The story unfolds to reveal how he affects all those in the village, not only in their music but also to grow in their personal lives. All Daniel (played by Michael Nyqvist) ever wanted to do in life was to help people find their own voice, and he is immensely successful in doing so. The choir, the church, and the village are all transformed as a result of his presence. It is the rare film that is so moving that it can give one a lump in the throat almost from beginning to end.

Along the way, the pastor has an epiphany, a battered wife gains confidence as a star soloist, a developmentally disabled boy is discovered to have a great bass voice, and many others face up to their talents and to the issues in their lives. And they create music to stir the heart and evoke God's grace in fraternity and mutual love. Especially moving is the song that Daniel writes for Gabriela ("Gabriela's song"), in which she gains confidence over her fears to sing in a village concert. (Gabriela is played by Helen Sjöholm, who was the voice of Kristina in the opera, *Kristina från Duvemåla*). Other fine Swedish singers including Frida Hallgren, Ingela Olsson, André Sjöberg, and Lennart Jähkel, who perform as members of the choir. You will also hear other familiar songs beautifully sung, including "Amazing Grace" sung in English, and "Beauti-

ful Saviour," sung wonderfully in Swedish.

Try and find a way to see this memorable film. If you do not know Swedish, the subtitles will let you enjoy the film just as well. You will also see splendid photography of the village and the landscape in Norrland and a glimpse of village life in Sweden in modern times.

As is common in Swedish films, there are a few minor nude scenes, but not lascivious or offensive and certainly acceptable for teenagers and up. The Swedish habit of always portraying the clergy as flawed and hypocritical is also present in this film, but the overriding story of the power of love and grace in people's lives more than makes up for this pastor's human failing.

Dennis L. Johnson

