

The healing power of music

 By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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Song One is a remarkable film about how music can heal broken relationships and will most definitely put a song in your heart.

Anne Hathaway is superb as a woman who is forced to reconnect with her family when her musician brother (Ben Rosenfield) suffers an accident that leaves him comatose, and she returns home to face her estranged mother (Mary Steenburgen).

Home is where the heart is and it is here that she begins to understand and appreciate the importance of her brother's commitment to music, undertaking an emotional journey into his world by seeking out the performers and venues that inspired him. She not only begins to understand who her brother really is, but also meets his music idol (Johnny Flynn), which sparks a blossoming romance.

Song One is a film about people who connect through music, and a meaningful story about the triumph of the human spirit that marks the impressive debut of writer-director Kate Barker-Froyland.



Tragedy and discord

It looks tenderly upon family and romantic love, but tragedy and discord accompany love all along the way.

Barker-Froyland worked inclusively with her actors and creative team to portray those dynamics and perfectly captured the

modern folk music scene in Brooklyn with genuine appreciation and authenticity.

Barker-Froyland and her tight-knit creative team immersed themselves in the modern urban folk and indie music that serves as the romantic drama's backdrop.

"It was folk camp and so much fun," says starring actress and producer Anne Hathaway, describing the collective love of music that informed the film's development and production.

Song One's making entailed countless hours spent sharing, swapping, and discovering great sounds; seeking out onscreen performers with serious musical and acting chops; finding the songwriters to weave characters into music and lyrics; and marathon shooting days filming live performers in their natural habitat at real-life New York City venues.



A big part of my life

"Music has been such a big part of my life," says Barker-Froyland, who lives in the Williamsburg, Brooklyn neighbourhood and has enthusiastically followed the music scene's evolution, though she's not a musician herself.

"My personal connection to music-other than listening to it and going to shows-really comes from dance. I did ballet and modern dance from a young age. Dance makes you listen to music in a different way, I think. With this film, I wanted to illustrate the connective power of music, the way music can bring together people who otherwise would never have met or come to understand each other."

Barker-Froyland's vision called out a criss-crossing network of both long-time collaborators and fruitful new relationships, music lovers all. In addition to having met on The Devil Wears Prada, Barker-Froyland and Anne Hathaway have in common a shared mentor-Jonathan Demme, who has long championed women filmmakers and takes an active role in nurturing the next filmic generation.

"JD is the Grand Poobah of mentors," says Hathaway, who starred in his 2008 Rachel Getting Married; Barker-Froyland had met JD at various New York screenings and assisted on his most recent film set, Fear of Falling. Several years ago, he saw some short films she did and wanted to produce Song One when he first read the script. The interconnectedness extends to Mary Steenburgen, whose career was launched by a Best Actress Oscar for her role in Demme's 1980 Melvin and Howard.

While Demme acted as producer and all-round creative godfather to the Song One project, he brought in another close associate to spearhead critical production aspects, from securing financing to everyday nitty-gritty: producer Marc Platt, who had produced Rachel, and his Marc Platt Productions team, including executive producer Jared LeBoff.



Theatre background

Also wearing the producer hat was Hathaway's husband Adam Shulman, whose theatre background gave him valuable behind-the-scenes insight into the live-performance world. And from *Song One*'s earliest days, producer Thomas Froyland-Barker-Froyland's husband-supported every facet of the project.

While such tight bonds made for a strong foundation, plenty of new blood-and musical virtuosity-came into the picture as well.

Leading man Johnny Flynn (singer-songwriter, concert performer, recording artist, and classically trained actor with movie star charisma) plays James Forester (singer-songwriter, concert performer, and recording artist with rock idol charisma). Like Flynn, actor-musician Ben Rosenfield plays a character not unlike himself: blossoming songwriter Henry Ellis.

Songwriters Jenny Lewis and Johnathan Rice live the troubador life *Song One* depicts.

"We were after authenticity," says Barker-Froyland, "And working with Jenny and Johnathan guaranteed it."

Jenny Lewis and Johnathan Rice are a Los Angeles -based singer-songwriter duo who perform both solo and together as Jenny and Johnny (Jenny Lewis is also known for her part in the much-admired indie rock bands Rilo Kiley and The Postal Service). They created all the songs played and sung in the film by Ben Rosenfield as Henry Ellis and Johnny Flynn as James Forester, as well as the background score.

Faith in each other

Overall, as Flynn recalls: "We became quite a close family on the set. That whole ethic of faith in each other was integral to the film, just as music is integral to the story."

"The conventional wisdom is that creativity results from conflict, but I've always found the opposite to be true. It almost freaked me out on this film that everyone got along so well," says Hathaway.

"I started worrying that we were maybe not challenging each other enough, maybe not asking deep enough questions-but that was completely wrong. Our goal was to bring great new music and talent into this wonderful hybrid arena of musical cinema. The crazy thing is we've had some really amazing friendships blossom as a result. This movie has a lot of heart, and it was created with love. "

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ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit www.writingstudio.co.za

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