

Our critics' picks for the best of the week. **E3**

Top 10 Features section in the nation

"Hairspray" can't stop the beat. **E8**

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# VARIETY

## One Voice, one legacy of equality

Artistic director Jane Ramseyer Miller is moving on after 27 years.

By ROB HUBBARD  
Special to the Star Tribune

"Singing in places where we are uncomfortable."

That's become a motto for One Voice Mixed Chorus over the course of Jane Ramseyer Miller's 27 years as artistic director of the St. Paul-based group made up of LGBTQ singers and allies.

Whether they're performing in schools and receiving parental pushback or encountering uneasiness from some greater Minnesota residents, One Voice has been unabashedly harmonizing on music about equality, acceptance and social justice under Ramseyer

See **ONE VOICE** on E2 ▶



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Artistic director Jane Ramseyer Miller conducted a rehearsal of One Voice Mixed Chorus on Jan. 2 at Unity Church in St. Paul.

## 'Talking' is thoughtful, complicated gem

By CHRIS HEWITT  
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There is a lot of injustice in the world, "Women Talking" admits, but there are small, hopeful things we can do to make it a better place.

Based on Miriam Toews' electrifying novel, my favorite movie of 2022 (which played at the Twin Cities Film Festival) is set in the hayloft of a barn. A bunch of women — who recently learned the men in their patriarchal community drugged and assaulted them while they slept — are deciding between three possibilities: Do nothing, stay and fight, or leave (a chart represents their options with pictograms because their religion forbids women to read or write, lest they dare to interpret the Bible).

"Women Talking" is a micro-

### Women Talking

★★★★ out of 4 stars

**Rated:** PG-13 for language and disturbing themes.

**Where:** Alamo Drafthouse Woodbury, expanding on Jan. 20.

cosm — a very small one, since we never see the women leave their patch of land — but it stands for larger problems, including injustice inflicted on women by men. It's tough stuff and even though the brutality is not shown, it's not easy to hear what has been done to the women and their female children. But with plentiful references to the lives of butterflies and with a trans boy who is trying to do what's right, "Women Talking" is metaphorically and literally about the possibility of transforming despair into love.

See **"WOMEN"** on E2 ▶

# One Voice, one 27-year legacy of equality

## ◀ ONE VOICE from El

Miller's leadership.

Now, One Voice's conductor is moving on after three final concerts at Minneapolis' South High School and St. Paul's Ordway Concert Hall this month, with the program focusing on intergenerational relationships within the LGBTQ community.

"Twenty-seven years is a long time, and I'm very grateful for the various staff people I've gotten to work with. And the volunteers," Ramseyer Miller said.

Born in 1988 amid the AIDS pandemic, One Voice was the rare mixed chorus made up of both lesbians and gay men. Over time, its membership, now 125 members strong, grew to include those of other identities.

"We did a chorus survey in 2013, and 29% of our chorus identified as straight," Ramseyer Miller said. "I was shocked. But many of the allies are parents who have gay kids. And we have some straight kids of gay parents. It's just this real mix of people."

At a group retreat in 2000, a majority of members said that they thought the group needed to start singing in schools. That's something they've now been doing for more than 20 years.

"Even back then, it wasn't so radical for the students," Ramseyer Miller said. "It was the parents who had trouble with it and who were uncomfortable.... There was one situation in Bemidji where there were parents who kept their kids home from school and tried to get the music teacher fired because she was the one who hired us."

Treks to greater Minnesota also involved evening concerts for the community.

"I remember parents who had a son with AIDS who died five, six years before," she said. "And the people in their community still wouldn't talk to them. They were so ostracized. They said they drove three hours in the dark to come to our concert."



At top, Dean Olson, left, and Collin O'Brien sang a duet on "Naked in the Leaves." Above left, Jay Kurvers took his turn at a solo. Jane Ramseyer Miller says it's "time to turn over One Voice to some new, young, amazing person."

Ramseyer Miller said such tours weren't the only new development for One Voice in the early '00s.

"I had two singers who came to me and said, 'I'm taking testosterone. What's going to happen to my voice?' I had no clue."

With the help of some cli-

nicians more experienced in working with transgender singers, One Voice put together a Trans Voices festival in 2004 that attracted singers from around the country for workshops, presentations and performances. It hosted another in 2018.

One Voice members spoke

glowingly of their leader.

"I cannot tell you the number of times when I've looked at the music at the beginning of the season, wondering how this disparate group of songs could make a program," said John Whalen, a member of the chorus since its founding.

But, he said, they always

did.

Alto Claire Psarouthakis agreed.

"From immigration story music tied in with Indigenous water chants, to songs from the civil rights movement joining hands with queer liberation pieces, Jane is always able to find the common thread."

## One Voice Mixed Chorus

**When and where:** 7:30 p.m. Sat., 3:30 p.m. Sun., South High School, 3131 19th Av. S., Mpls.; 3:30 p.m. Jan. 22, Ordway Concert Hall, 345 Washington St., St. Paul

**Tickets:** Free-\$100, available at [onevoicemn.org](http://onevoicemn.org).

Commissioning new works has been a staple of Ramseyer Miller's tenure. Among her favorites are "The Man Behind the Dream," Steve Milloy's multi-movement work about gay civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, and a piece that will be revived at her final concerts: Mari Esabel Valverde's "When Thunder Comes," which combines a choir with Japanese taiko drums.

"It's been performed by over 100 choirs around the world," Ramseyer Miller said. "And that's what you want when you commission something."

Composer and conductor J. David Moore will serve as interim artistic director until a permanent replacement is found.

But leaving One Voice doesn't mean retirement for the 60-year-old Ramseyer Miller. Since 2013, she's been artistic director of GALA Choruses, the North American organization of LGBTQ choirs, and will oversee its quadrennial festival in Minneapolis in 2024. It's been described as the world's largest LGBTQ performing arts event.

"It gets harder and harder to balance these two passions, working for GALA Choruses and working for One Voice," she said. "It just felt like it was time to turn over One Voice to some new, young, amazing person. ... I'm excited to just have some space and rest and see where One Voice goes with the next person."

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