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The action-reaction rule vs. compromise solutions: About a musical movie in the context of implications for sports coaches and psychologists (review of *The Chorus* directed by Christophe Barratier)

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One of the most important cultural events of 2022 in Poland was undoubtedly the 16th Henryk Wieniawski International Violin Competition – the oldest violin competition in the world, commemorating the Polish virtuoso and composer, Henryk Wieniawski (1835–1880), taking place every five years in Poznań. Taking a perspective of the capital of Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) region, one should also appreciate a huge cultural heritage of the whole region, beginning with numerous achievements of Poznań Boys' Choir, established by Jerzy Kurczewski in 1945, which, currently under the supervision of maestro Jacek Sykulski, is flourishing all the time. Listening to world-known virtuosos and the most distinguished choir singers contributes to the development of musical interests, and what follows, to reaching for not only the canon of professional literature devoted to classical music but also for films, both documentaries and feature

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movies. One of such cinematographic works, certainly worth recommending is *The Chorus* (Fr. *Les Choristes*), released in 2004, whose script was written by Philippe Lopes-Curval and Christophe Barratier who also directed the movie.

The film commences with a depressing moment of the main protagonist's mother's death. Pierre Morhange (whose role was played by two actors – Jean-Baptiste Maunier presented Pierre in his youth, and Jacques Perrin acted Pierre in his adulthood) is a distinguished composer who grew up in *Fond de l'Étang*, a boarding school for troubled children. Fifty years after leaving the school walls, his school mate, Pépinot, knocks at his door. He hands him over a gift, namely a diary of their head teacher who was their music teacher too. It was Clément Mathieu whose role was played by Gérard Jugnot. The teacher implemented totally different educational methods, standing out from the rest of pedagogical staff led by the principal, who favoured the “action-reaction” rule aiming at immediate and merciless punishment of students' misconduct. The first crisis situation witnessed by the new teacher was a student's prank resulting in a serious eye injury of one of the teachers. In response to that, the principal gathered the whole school community and urged the guilty student to own up the prank. As no one stepped out, the new head teacher was forced by the institution's manager to pick up a random boy for symbolic punishment of the whole group. He chose Boniface, one of the best students. The following days were punctuated by other pranks, which the music teacher tried not to exercise any repercussions for, implementing compromise solutions instead. Music, the head teacher's greatest passion, turned out to play a key role in changing the students' behaviour. It made the principal give his permission to conduct an experiment consisting in selecting the best voices and creating a boys' choir practising its musical skills every day. Pépinot, an orphaned child, who waited for his parents' arrival every Saturday at the school's gate, became the head teacher-conductor's assistant as he did not know even one song. What is more, Mathieu offered him special protection against a new student who tried to bully him into paying for the possibility of sleeping in the room with other boys. He nipped that practice in the bud and ordered the culprit to change his behaviour radically. Thus, we can see that the music teacher was persistent, patient, ready to offer help in each and every situation and treated all his students with understanding.

Aforesaid Pierre Morhange, called by other staff members “the devil with an angel's face”, was the most vocally talented student. He was staying in the boarding school as his mother, who visited him as often as she could and who wanted the best possible future for him, had to work. Noticing Pierre's exquisite musical talent, the head teacher decided to educate him professionally so that he could continue his development in a musical conservatory in Lyon, where he would be taught by the most distinguished musical experts. It met with great approval of the boy's mother, yet the boy himself became jealous of the

teacher's contacts with his mum. Meanwhile, one of his schoolmates stole from the school safe all the money put aside for various bills, which made the principal doubt the efficiency of Mathieu's teaching methods and education via music. As a consequence, he decided to liquidate the choir. However, the indefatigable music teacher moved the choir's activity to the symbolic underground, teaching his students how to sing in the evening. Moreover, taking into account Morhange's earlier misconduct, he punished him by not letting him practise his solo vocal parts with the whole choir as he had used to do before.

Meanwhile, the news about the choir's activity spread and reached the school benefactresses whose representative, the countess, expressed a wish to visit the boarding school and listen to the boys' recital. Surprised by the fact that Pierre Morhange was standing aside and not participating in the performance with the others, she posed a question about the boy's punishment. The head teacher explained that it was "a special case", and in the middle of the show he allowed the student to perform his solo parts mastered beforehand. The music teacher was firm as far as separating the leader from the group was concerned, but he did it gently, for the student's good, so that he could understand the situation and was able to appreciate his opportunity to perform with the other choir singers again. Unfortunately, all the laurels for the choir's activity went from the countess to the school principal and not to its real creator – the head teacher.

During the absence of the institution's manager, when the school was under the music teacher's care, a fire which consumed a part of the building, was set by one of the most troublesome students. At that time, the other boys were outdoors playing hare and hounds. Yet, the principal reacted harshly to the whole incident, which he regarded as ignoring safety rules within the school's walls, and decided to fire the head teacher. A heated exchange between the two men is particularly worth mentioning. The head teacher is called "a poor musician and minder" and the principal does not allow him to say goodbye to his students. Yet, the boys could not let go and to thank Mathieu for his approach and his heart flew numerous paper airplanes with hearty words of farewell out of the window. Sneaking out of school, Pépinot came to say goodbye in person as he wanted to leave the place with his teacher on the same bus. Initially, Mathieu ordered the little one to come back to the building, but after a brief consideration he took Pépinot with him. Mathieu was fired on Saturday, so Pépinot's dream to leave school on that day came true.

Shortly before the end of the film we learn that after Mathieu's dismissal, Pierre Morhange left to live with his mother who was abandoned by an engineer she had met in Lyon before. The student finally got admitted to the musical conservatory. As for the school principal, he was also dismissed after a while, and

the fired head teacher continued to teach music in other institutions till the end of his career.

On the one hand, the film is pervaded by sadness, resignation and melancholy. In the light of the student-teacher relations, there is a big dose of irritation and helplessness, one can also notice ever-present indifference, vulgarity and schematic character. On the other hand, the film has a certain hidden message, and through the character of Mathieu it offers several positive aspects, beginning with equal treatment, good and humanity emanating from the bottom of one's heart in the form of empathy and willingness to help the weaker and those in a worse or more difficult life situation. The conclusion drawn from the movie is that as far as educating the young is concerned, good, hope and sensitivity shall win over methods based on violence, chaos and aggression. In case of educating children and teenagers, one should particularly remember about paying attention to instilling appropriate values, together with the feeling of acceptance and safety. Despite different behaviours and life scenarios, which, in case of the boys portrayed in the film, were often painful and exceptionally difficult to comprehend, everyone deserves a chance to change. That is why thanks to the head teacher's appropriate approach, thanks to that paragon of virtue, contrary to the school principal presented as the incarnation of evil, the students started to believe in their capacities of making even their most secret dreams come true once they had strong motivation to change.

The message coming from that almost twenty-year-old movie can be sufficiently used in the profession of a psychologist specialising in the subject matter of emotions and motivation. Due to the fact of showing many practical things, the aspects displayed can be particularly inspiring also for sports coaches. The film shows examples when it is worth letting go and when it is more beneficial to invite one's charges to cooperate or to encourage them to practise more intensely. It even shows when to be firm during the realization of particular training units. The essence of these activities should be showing sportspersons the values that should be the most important for them in the context of their training and participation in sports contests. In case of group training and spotting an exceptionally talented individual, the movie emphasized the necessity of working individually with such a person, without neglecting the other group members. Every one of them, apart from concentrating on their development, is above all a human being, who in case of negligence might drop out, squandering their talent maybe not showing yet at the school stage and thus undiscovered. On the other hand, obtaining appropriate tools and capabilities always requires consistency, sacrifice and a certain emotional attitude to the activities performed, together with self-control in the form of self-discipline maintaining one's perseverance in pursuing a goal. Thanks to consistent work, things which seem impossible may be real and achievable.