



*Crystallette Emily Fitzgerald prepares behind the scenes.*

# FILM HAS A LIFE OF ITS OWN

Life in Synchro a tribute to the athleticism, community of sport

**BY BARB REICHERT, U.S. FIGURE SKATING**

The first time Angela Pinaglia watched synchronized skating she was gobsmacked.

“There’s a wall of wind, a rush of sound. It’s visceral. You can feel it,” Pinaglia said.

The Baltimore-based filmmaker was so astounded that she immediately knew she had to bring this experience to those outside of skating. The result? *Life in Synchro*, a 54-minute documentary that already has been screened at five prestigious film festivals and at this month’s ISU World Synchronized Skating Championships 2020 in Lake Placid, New York.

To say Nicole Davies planted the seed for the film would be an understatement. Davies — a World Team member with the Dearborn Crystallettes, a DC EDGE coach and the CEO of GetItCalled.com — met Pinaglia while both were working in a summer program at American University in Washington, D.C.

Davies repeatedly invited Pinaglia to

synchronized skating events. Eventually, she broke the filmmaker down.

“Nicole took me to the 2017 DC EDGE show,” Pinaglia said. “Immediately, I was like, ‘This is the coolest thing ever.’”

They formed a partnership, with Pinaglia as director/producer/cinematographer and Davies as executive producer. With a plan in hand and more than 130 individual donors behind the project, Pinaglia and her camera hit the road for two years. She traveled to Oregon, New York, Maryland, Virginia, Connecticut, Maine and, of course, the birthplace of the now-international sport, Michigan.

The documentary focuses on the everyday life, competitions and special moments of the tightknit synchro community.

“I was a little nervous not covering the Haydenettes, [coach] Lynn Benson and the like,” Davies said of the American juggernaut. “But I’m glad Angela had this vision, because it’s such a broad subject and this really shows

the human side.”

That human side is palpable as unique individuals bond into unified teams.

“Synchronized skating is the opposite of [the Netflix series] ‘Spinning Out,’” Pinaglia said. “It’s the collective nature of the sport. Individualism stops and the mentality is all about the greater good.”

The filmmakers put down roots in southeastern Michigan, where four teams are within an hour’s drive of each other: Fraser Eclipse (pre-juvenile), Ann Arbor’s Hockettes (junior), Dearborn Crystallettes (senior) and Rochester’s Infinity-Onyx (open masters). As an extended storyline, they added one more team: the DownEasters, an independent open masters team from Auburn, Maine.

While all the teams have their moments, *Life in Synchro* draws its heart from three stories:

- Team USA’s Emily Fitzgerald, at the time a 21-year-old member of the Crystal-

## WANT TO SEE THE FILM?

*Life in Synchro* will be shown at 11 film festivals across the nation, including the Richmond International Film Festival (Virginia), April 21–26. Additional screenings will be announced at [www.LifeInSynchro.com](http://www.LifeInSynchro.com).



The junior Hockettes of Ann Arbor, Michigan, perform their “Wonder Woman” program.

ettes training for the 2018 U.S. Synchronized Championships and hopefully beyond. “Going forward,” she says in the film, “I don’t think there’s anything I can’t do.”

- Heidi Coffin, 65, a member of the DownEasters, training for the Empire State Games in Lake Placid, New York. She and other women of diverse ages and backgrounds came together looking for a new pastime. Instead, they find family. “This is what fills me up. It’s my passion,” Coffin says.

- Peggy MacDonald, an original member of the 1956 Hockettes and former coach of the Fraserettes. MacDonald and 1956 teammate Edie Paterson make a pilgrimage

to where it all began. “We thought we were athletic, but not compared to what they do now,” MacDonald says.

At its core, *Life in Synchro* is about the strength and passion of girls and women.

- “I want people to watch this movie and see how passion affects life,” Pinaglia said. “Take Emily; she says she can do anything. She’s had all these women behind her since she was [9 years old], and now she’s out in the world as an adult with such confidence.”

Davies wants people to see the film and be inspired to skate or follow the sport.

- “This has been rewarding,” she said. “It gives me hope that it will bring others outside

of the synchro community to come into the sport.”

After spending nearly three years on the project, it’s fair to say the self-described “queer Latina from the tropics” is hooked.

- “I’m not an athlete. I’m a chubby girl from Miami,” Pinaglia said.

This spring, Davies will take Pinaglia out on the ice for the first time.

- “I’m dying to get on the ice,” Pinaglia said. “I couldn’t afford to get hurt while making this film. But if I can learn to skate and get better, I want to join a synchro team.”

- “I have become a synchronized skating evangelist.”

Members of Infinity Onyx (l-r) Lisa Preston, Jennifer Smith Malik, Michelle Hauser, Robin Mayer, Angelina DiPiazza-Ferris, Krista Brejla

