

Heartland film follows new big-band king

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If you're looking for a big-band, high-energy, nostalgic-infused personality, then you need to meet Vince sometime.

Vince Giordano. He is the subject of Amber Edwards and Dave Davidson's documentary, "Vince Giordano — There's a Future in the Past." It's one of the premiere films for the 25th annual Heartland Film Festival this year, and it invites audiences to hop onto its vintage, syncopated bandwagon.

The 90-minute film, released through Hudson West Productions, documents Giordano and his long-running, 11-musician band The Nighthawks through their ups and downs in trying to keep the big-band spirit alive. The band is based in New York City, where they play every Monday and Tuesday night at the Iguana Club.

"Vince is kind of the standard," Edwards said.

Edwards, a Yale graduate and Kansas City, Mo., native, wanted to highlight subjects who may be unfamiliar to a wider audience, filling in "gaps in a cultural dial."

Having worked with Giordano before the film, Edwards and Giordano both become mutual friends and were featured musicians on the hit HBO series "Boardwalk Empire," for which Vince Giordano and The Nighthawks won a Grammy for Best Compilation for Visual Media.

"He is the one who kept it pure — kept it exactly as it was," Edwards explained. "A lot



CAROLHUGHES / PROVIDED BY HUDSON WEST PRODUCTIONS

Vince Giordano, the subject of a documentary, says of jazz: "This is my music. This became my calling."

SHOWTIMES

Oct. 23 – 2:15 p.m. AMC Showplace Traders Point 12, 5920 W. 86th St.

Oct. 25 – 2:45 p.m. AMC Castleton Square 14, 6020 E. 82nd St.

Oct. 27 – 8:15 p.m.* AMC Castleton Square 14.

Oct. 28 – 5:30 p.m.* AMC Castleton Square 14.

* Vince Giordano and filmmaker Amber Edwards will be present
Cost: \$9-12 each show.
<http://heartlandfilm.org/festival/tickets/>

of the newer musicians are taking it in their own direction and making it their own, and that's great. But if you want to know what it really sounded like, then Vince is the guy."

But what guy, exactly?

A guy who fell in love with his grandparent's wind-up Victrola at age 5.

Early on in the documentary, we find that Giordano's passion for jazz came from playing 78 RPM records on a classic turntable, listening to King Oliver and Louis Armstrong. His grandmother was a flapper.

"This is my music. This became my calling," Giordano says early on in the documentary.

Here are some other highlights about Giordano: Brooklyn-born. Classic cartoon and ice cream lover. Vocalist, string bass and tuba player. He studied with Bill Challis (staff arranger for Paul Whiteman) and drummer Chauncey Morehouse. He performed in Martin Scorsese's "The Aviator" and can be heard on multiple soundtracks for a number of Woody Allen films. He has been a guest on "Prairie Home Companion" and NPR.

And he has a collection of more than 60,000 jazz arrangements from the 1920s and '30s archived in his basement. Jazz legends like Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington.

The one thing about Goodman and Ellington, though, is that they left the business even after major success as band leaders. Audiences see the rough edges as we look behind the scenes into Giordano's practice and life dedication.

"One of the things we wanted to convey is how hard it is to be a working musician of any kind in this day and age," Edwards said. "Keeping alive a music that would be extinct if it were not for people like Vince."

Preserving the bygone era seems to be the mission of both Giordano and the production

team. Viewers see the struggles Giordano and band share as The Nighthawks have to give up their long run at Sophia's. The club in New York where audiences had seen them perform for years was shut down after a giant spike in rent by the city's real estate market.

One great highlight of the film is near the end when Giordano takes on a giant leap of faith in curating the 90th anniversary concert of Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue." The film captures the pandemonium and endless energy needed to keep the beat going (both literally and metaphorically) as Giordano takes the band through a three-week, heralding rehearsal process.

"They told us, 'Look, we really love you guys and we really love this idea, but we think you're a little crazy,'" Giordano shared in retrospect after the film's release. "It's three weeks. It's three weeks before the show, and we've got a lot of seats to fill here.' And I said we'll do it. We'll do it, and we did. I said if it took two weeks to write 'Rhapsody in Blue,' we'll take three."

Crazy or not, Giordano and his band played to a sold-out crowd with that famous, opening clarinet glissando trailing up the scale. More than 1,400 seats at New York City's town hall were filled.

"There's an audience there, but you have to find them," he explained. "That's the hard part — getting the word out. ... It's a real struggle. It's hard to be positive, but you have to keep punching and kicking."

Keeping American jazz alive is exactly what Giordano does. It seems to be in his blood as the movie moves like a freight train from show to show, city to city and heartache to miracle.

The film's narrative also touches on Giordano's vulnerability, a side not often seen in the presentation-mode personalities musicians have to constantly emulate.

"It's like a battle," Giordano said. "You've got bombs on all sides of you going off and on saying, 'Why don't you just play modern music and you'll have a better career and make more money,' and I said, 'I don't like that kind of music. I really love what I'm doing.'"

Another mission in this film is to make the big-band style of the '30s and '40s appeal to a broader audience. Generations alike can at least respect the preservation of classical and baroque music. There are symphonies and concert halls putting Bach, Beethoven and Mozart on every roster.

"Younger people don't really know about this music. They haven't been exposed to it," Giordano said. "Maybe their parents were too busy or didn't care about saying, 'Hey, there's other music out there.' So they don't find it, and they go on with their lives with whatever's popular and current. But there are people who are young who have explored and are just looking for alternative music. Those are the people we try to embrace."

And Indianapolis audiences will soon experience that embrace.

A fine romance, indeed.