

# VINCE GIORDANO

THERE'S A FUTURE IN THE PAST

A FILM BY DAVE DAVIDSON & AMBER EDWARDS

90 min / English / 2016



## FIRST RUN FEATURES

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## SHORT SYNOPSIS

What does it take to keep Jazz Age music going strong in the 21st century? Two words: Vince Giordano -- a bandleader, musician, historian, scholar, collector, and NYC institution. For nearly 40 years, Vince Giordano and The Nighthawks have brought the joyful syncopation of the 1920s and '30s to life with their virtuosity, vintage musical instruments, and more than 60,000 period band arrangements. This beautifully crafted documentary offers an intimate and energetic portrait of a truly devoted musician and preservationist, taking us behind the scenes of the recording of HBO's Grammy award-winning *Boardwalk Empire* soundtrack, and alongside Giordano as he shares his passion for hot jazz with a new generation of music and swing-dance fans. – Jacob Burns Film Center

## LONG SYNOPSIS

Bandleader, historian, and collector Vince Giordano has devoted his life to music created before he was born: the early jazz of the 1920s and '30s. His 11-piece band The Nighthawks is known as the hottest band in New York, if not the world; and Vince is Hollywood's go-to source for authentic period soundtracks, with his collection of vintage musical instruments and 60,000 original band arrangements. Vince is responsible for the period music in Todd Haynes' "Carol", Martin Scorsese's *The Aviator*, Robert DeNiro's *The Good Shepherd*, Francis Ford Coppola's *The Cotton Club*, Gus Van Sant's *Finding Forrester*, Sam Mendes' *Revolutionary Road*, Terry Zwigoff's *Ghost World*, half-a-dozen Woody Allen films, and HBO's Grammy winning *Boardwalk Empire*.

But between the moments of glory is the daily struggle to find work, manage his independent-minded musicians, and schlep a van full of equipment and 400 pounds of music to every gig, with no road crew.

Vince, along with a handful of others, has managed to keep this joyful, energetic music alive long enough for a new generation of young hipsters to discover it and claim it as their own. If you weren't lucky enough to be alive when Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Fletcher Henderson, Paul Whiteman, and Bix Beiderbecke were revolutionizing popular music, Vince Giordano's Nighthawks are the next best thing. *There's a Future in the Past* captures the hard work, endurance, and mania of an artist determined to do the impossible, and the sheer euphoria of the music that changed the 20th century.

## VINCE GIORDANO BIO

Grammy-winner Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks have played in New York nightclubs, appeared in films (*The Cotton Club*, *The Aviator*, *Finding Forrester*, *Revolutionary Road*, and HBO's *Boardwalk Empire*) and for concerts at the Town Hall, Jazz At Lincoln Center and the Newport Jazz Festival. Other recording projects include soundtracks for Terry Zwigoff's *Ghost World*, Tamara Jenkins' *The Savages*, Robert De Niro's *The Good Shepherd*, Sam Mendes' *Away We Go*, Michael Mann's film *Public Enemies*, and John Krokidas' feature, *Kill Your Darlings*, along with HBO's *Grey Gardens* and Todd Haynes' HBO miniseries *Mildred Pierce* and his latest film, *Carol*. The Nighthawks are also seen and heard in the USA Network series *Royal Pains* and in the PBS series Michael Feinstein's *American Songbook*.

Born in Brooklyn, Giordano's passion for this music and the people that made it began at the age of five. He has amassed an amazing collection of over 60,000 band arrangements, 1920's and 30's films, 78 rpm recordings and jazz-age memorabilia. Giordano sought out and studied with important survivors from the period; Whiteman's hot arranger Bill Challis and drummer Chauncey Morehouse, and bassist Joe Tarto. Giordano's passion, commitment to authenticity, and knowledge led him to create a sensational band of like-minded players, the Nighthawks. Vince Giordano has single-handedly kept alive an amazing genre of American music that continues to spread the joy and pathos of an era that shaped our nation. Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks can be heard every Monday and Tuesday at Iguana NYC.

## HUDSON WEST PRODUCTIONS

**Dave Davidson** (Director/Producer) and **Amber Edwards** (Director/Producer) are the principal partners at Hudson West Productions, a not-for-profit independent production company that has, for nearly 30 years, created documentaries about history, culture, music, art, and education. Founded in 1985, Hudson West's mission is to fill in the cultural and historical gaps left by commercial media by preserving, interpreting, and presenting unique but overlooked narratives to a wide audience. Collectively Dave and Amber have created more than seventeen hours of national PBS programming, including nine episodes of the award-winning series Michael Feinstein's *American Songbook* (2010-2013;) *A Place Out of Time: The Bordentown School* (2010, Christopher Award;) *Words and Music by Jerry Herman* (2008;) *George Segal: American Still Life* (2001;) *Against the Odds: Artists of the Harlem Renaissance* (1994;) *Vladimir Feltsman—Journey from Home* (1993;) *The Dancing Man—Peg Leg Bates* (1992;) and *Cissy Houston: Sweet Inspiration* (1988.)

# The New York Times

## Review: 'Vince Giordano,' a Nostalgist With Fresh Takes on Jazz

*VINCE GIORDANO: THERE'S A FUTURE IN THE PAST*

By **STEPHEN HOLDEN**

JAN. 12, 2017

**NYT Critics' Pick**



Vince Giordano leads the Nighthawks band, and his music has been featured in Woody Allen's movies and the series "Boardwalk Empire." Credit Charlie Gross/First Run Features

As you absorb the buoyant '20s and '30s jazz bubbling through the documentary "[Vince Giordano: There's a Future in the Past](#)," you may well wonder if this is the happiest American music ever created. It's a peppy, carefree sound that conveys a frantic energy but is rendered with a light touch.

Born and based in Brooklyn, Mr. Giordano, 64, has been leading the Nighthawks, his 11-piece band specializing in the pre-swing era, for nearly four decades. He plays several instruments, including tuba, string bass and bass saxophone, and sings in a voice that evokes a less rambunctious Fats Waller. His popularity playing hotels has spawned a subculture of young fans who flock to his performances in period dress.

You probably know the music of this passionate preservationist, which has been featured in Woody Allen's movies and the HBO series "Boardwalk Empire." His devotion to stylistic authenticity infuses his band's performances to the degree that, to quote a '70s pop song title, "everything old is new again." Played with such vigor and attention to detail, it sounds utterly fresh.

Much of the space in Mr. Giordano's Brooklyn apartment is devoted to his ever-growing, meticulously annotated collection of 60,000 big-band arrangements. They are culled from his extensive search for original manuscripts and radio transcriptions of music that the film calls hot jazz. What the singer, pianist and cabaret performer Michael Feinstein is to vintage popular songs, Mr. Giordano is to hot jazz.

"There's a Future in the Past" is a ground-level exploration of this historian at work, leading the Nighthawks or one of their satellite ensembles and traveling the country to examine and rescue old arrangements that have turned up in radio station archives and musicians' basements. What others would dismiss as trash is the equivalent of discovering gold to Mr. Giordano.

This movie, directed and produced by Dave Davidson and Amber Edwards, digs deeply enough into [Mr. Giordano's world](#) to convey the drudgery and headaches of being a bandleader: juggling personnel, scheduling, dealing with a musicians' union and lugging around instruments. But for all the players' expertise and devotion, their profession won't make them rich and famous.

They do it for love. The most memorable performances are carried by a mysterious lilt that makes them the next best thing to dancing on air.

A version of this review appears in print on January 13, 2017, on Page C4 of the New York edition with the headline: A Life Set to Vintage Jazz. [Order Reprints](#) | [Today's Paper](#) | [Subscribe](#)

# Film Review: Vince Giordano: There's a Future in the Past

*Lovers of big-band music especially—but everyone, really—will enjoy this loving look at a man and his nostalgic mission.*

By [David Noh](#) Jan 12, 2017



Just as much as the Statue of Liberty or the Chrysler Building, there are human treasures in New York as well. You know, people like Kitty Carlisle Hart, Bobby Short or Skitch Henderson, who may no longer be with us, while columnist Cindy Adams and singers Judy Collins, Barbara Cook and Marilyn Maye endure. And there's that other essential breathing landmark of Gotham: genial, complex bandleader/musician Vince Giordano, who is celebrated in this Tin Pan Alley hosanna, directed by Dave Davidson and Amber Edwards.

For a remarkable three decades (longevity rivaled only by the Duke Ellington Orchestra), Giordano has headed up his band, The Nighthawks, and it is a joyful fact that on usually more than one night a week in New York City you can catch this awe-inspiring jack of all vintage jazz trades and his terrifically seasoned instrument-wielding cohorts vividly playing the music of his beloved 1920s to 30s.

Giordano was considered to be “weird” as a child growing up in Brooklyn, for his obsession with what schoolmates derided as “cartoon music,” familiar to them, as it was, from TV kiddie programming. Unbowed, Giordano, entranced by this sound from the age of two, when he first heard it on his grandma's Victrola, learned to play different instruments (taught by legends like Giordano idol Paul Whiteman's arranger Bill Challis, drummer Chauncey Morehouse and bassist Joe Tarto) and simply continued on his quest to unearth everything he could from that period, focusing on printed band arrangements which now fill his two adjacent houses in Brooklyn, stuffed to the attic with jazz memorabilia and file cabinets, chock-a-block with over 60,000 scrupulously collected alphabetized music scores for each instrument in the band.

And it's these very arrangements that Giordano distributes to his band members before every gypsy gig, from private weddings to Lincoln Center (he's a star of their popular “Midsummer Swing” dance series) to the set of “Boardwalk Empire,” where Martin Scorsese had the good sense to hire him for projects such as that and *The Aviator*, their first collaboration.

Many of these impressively versatile and devoted players, some of the greatest jazz instrumentalists of our time, are interviewed in *Vince Giordano: There's a Future in the Past*, and their humorously honest words, whether in rapt admiration for the music they play or detailing Giordano's sometimes spiky personality, help to make this lovingly assembled tribute, wholly revealing of the actual life of a hired player, one of the best music docs ever.

Spiky? Small wonder. As more than one observer notes, being a bandleader can be a thankless load of nonstop drudgery, having to be responsible for each and every band member, as well as the myriad concerns regarding transporting them all over the world to bookings, setting up concert venues, publicizing the gigs and trying to stay financially afloat. The band's longtime home was a restaurant, Sofia's, in the Edison Hotel, before a \$2 million rent increase shuttered them forever, but happily, they have found an even better new home at the Cafe Iguana. We see Giordano and his ever-game partner, Carol Hughes (who mentions his craziness when she met him, which only increased with the passing years), stoically lugging instruments onto buses, and the truth is brought home once again that there's actually very little real glamour in show business.

But when the lights hit this band, making such joyful, irresistible and deeply nostalgic noises—which form one of the deepest strains of our collected history—and Giordano seems to almost swoon with pure pleasure as he sings “Gee Baby, Ain’t I Good to You,” in his thin but charmingly authentic voice, there cannot be a doubt as to whether all the endless sweat and worry is worth it.

# Out-of-Time Hot-Jazz Leader Vince Giordano Swings and Schleps Through a Rousing New Doc

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017 AT 6:30 A.M.  
BY ALAN SCHERSTUHL



**“Yes, you're recreating something,” says Jim Fryer, a trombonist in Vince Giordano's fiery throwback jazz orchestra the Nighthawks.** “But you're trying to recreate something so vividly that it's alive now.” Dave Davidson and Amber Edwards' doc *Vince Giordano: There's a Future in the Past* showcases both the recreations — persuasive revivals of tunes and arrangements and solos from the 1920s and '30 — and the great present-tense effort it takes to pull them off. Besides playing his bass, his tuba and his joyously flatulent bass sax, bandleader Giordano tracks down vintage arrangements from the days of Fletcher Henderson and Paul Whiteman, handles bookings and all the stage-patter, checks that all his Nighthawks and their instruments have gotten onto the bus and never seems without something to schlep. Your heart may break when, thanks to some miscommunication between a venue and the talent, Giordano has to break down his band's setup before he's finished hauling it to the stage — another act is going on first. The past weighs heavily and literally.

Sadder still was when the band lost its Monday/Tuesday night residency at Sofia's in Manhattan after the restaurant and theater lost its lease. Giordano and his band members attest in the film to how regular gigs, even for small crowds, are invaluable to their sharpness. Early on, *There's a*

*Future in the Past* cuts between frustrating engagements for Giordano's A and B bands, his top Nighthawks and his subs/sides: At Sofia's, Nighthawks toodle winningly through their repertoire for what looks like a dozen people; meanwhile, at an outdoor soirée at Lincoln Center, Giordano's main band swings through a rainstorm even after the dance floor has been closed. But it's not all hardship: Giordano's crew also gets to guest on *A Prairie Home Companion* and cut vintage tracks for *Boardwalk Empire*. When the Nighthawks find a new perch at Iguana, on West 54th, their first show is welcomed by a sizable and enthusiastic audience.

Curiously, 15 years on from the battles over Ken Burns' *Jazz*, and two decades into Wynton Marsalis' reign at Jazz at Lincoln Center, the film never considers the question of the value of such painstaking recreations, of what it means to master the improvised solos of almost a century ago. Some of Giordano's Nighthawks look uncomfortable before their debut at the Newport Jazz Festival in 2012, as for all their raucous zeal they're not playing improvised music. Perhaps time has sanded the sharpest edges off many jazz fans' concerns about the conflict between preservationists and forward-thinking artists. When the Nighthawks light into an arrangement, they're not aping a record you could spin or download at home — they're attempting to discover what it might have been like to hear those bands of back then blowing the doors off a joint. Is that possible? Who knows — but does it hurt to try?

***Vince Giordano: There's a Future in the Past***

Directed by Dave Davidson and Amber Edwards

First Run Features

Opens January 13, Cinema Village

# The Spirit of Vintage Jazz Is Living in Brooklyn

Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks fuel films from Woody Allen to Laurel & Hardy

By WILL FRIEDWALD

Fans who came to hear big-band music at Iguana New York on a recent Monday night were treated to some unexpected pie in the face.

As Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks were winding down their twice-weekly gig upstairs at the Midtown Tex-Mex joint, the bandleader—also a bass player, arranger and passionate authority on 1920s and '30s jazz—took out a laptop and began playing film clips of the classic comedy team Laurel & Hardy. He then led the band in synchronization with the silent slapstick high jinks, from pie fights to pratfalls.

Now, Mr. Giordano appears to be ready for his own close-up—several times over.

This Sunday, “Vince Giordano: There’s a Future in the Past,” a documentary about the man and his obsessive dedication to Jazz Age music,



FILED ALAN NAHIGIAN; CAROL HUGHES/HUDSON WEST PRODUCTIONS

has its New York premiere at the 92nd St Y. He also features prominently in Woody Allen’s latest film, “Cafe Society,” opening July 15. That same night, at the Museum of Modern Art, he and the Nighthawks will provide live accompaniment for classic silent comedies, including the recently rediscovered Laurel & Hardy film “The Battle of the Century.”

In the music world, Mr. Giordano is known as the go-to encyclopedic resource for all things Jazz Age. In his Brooklyn home, he houses some 60 vintage instruments and has archived more than 60,000 historic dance band orchestrations—not recreations, but the actual music played by big bands in the 1920s and '30s.

As Amber Edwards, co-director with Dave Davidson of “There’s a Future in the Past” discovered, Mr. Giordano’s historical exactitude can be extreme.

“It’s one thing to watch Vince bear the philosophical burden of carrying this music into the next generation,” she said. “It’s something else to watch him bear the physical burden of carrying a van full of instruments and gear from gig to gig.”

He is known, she said, to carry a 100-pound celesta [similar to an upright piano] to every show—even if he only plans to use it for one song.

“Everything has to sound exactly right,” Ms. Edwards said. “It’s like a spiritual calling to him.”

The film spotlights the history of the band, focusing on a time when its regular gigging spot was about to close and Mr. Giordano had to find a new home. He settled on the Iguana, where they keep the ‘20s roaring on Monday and Tuesday nights.

“The Nighthawks play with complete historical authenticity,” said Bill Charlap, artistic director of 92Y’s Jazz in July series, who will host a discussion with Mr. Giordano at Sunday’s premiere. “And yet they have a vitality that makes everything they perform feel totally au courant.”

The program will also feature a brief concert by the band.

Mr. Giordano wanted to be part of the MoMA program, he said, because it includes the restoration of one of the most sought-after lost films in history, “The Battle of the Century.”

The legendary 1927 Laurel & Hardy short features arguably the most spectacular custard-pie fight ever filmed—several thousand of the confections were flung—but audiences haven’t seen the complete 19-minute film in 90 years.

“Scoring a silent film in live performance is very challenging,” said Mr. Giordano. “You have to constantly count off the beats correctly and make sure that the music for the chase doesn’t spill over into the love scene. Your timing has to be perfect.”

Instead of focusing on producing recordings, as most musicians do, Mr. Giordano has made a career of supplying vintage jazz for feature films and TV series set in the ‘20s and ‘30s, from “The Aviator” and “The Good Shepherd” to last year’s “Carol.” He won a Grammy Award for his work on “Boardwalk Empire.”



Vince Giordano, from ‘Vince Giordano: There’s A Future in the Past’ with sheet music recovered from Shea’s Movie Palace in Buffalo, N.Y.

He has worked with Woody Allen on roughly a half-dozen of his movies, going back to “Zelig” in 1983, playing on the soundtrack, onscreen, or both.

“He always gives me the period sound I’m looking for,” said Mr. Allen via email.

“Cafe Society,” which stars Jesse Eisenberg and Kristen Stewart, was filmed partly in Brooklyn, where Mr. Giordano has lived his whole life. The bandleader is prominent throughout the second half as the bassist and band-leader in the nightclub at the center of the story.

“Vince is a walking museum of vintage jazz...a real time traveler,” said Stewart Lerman, music supervisor on the film. “That’s why he’s the Holy Grail for any filmmaker needing to take an audience back in time.”



A still from ‘Vince Giordano: There’s A Future in the Past’

# DOWNBEAT

Jazz, Blues & Beyond

## Giordano's Future in the Past

**IN ADDITION TO CONDUCTING HIS 11-PIECE** Nighthawks orchestra two nights a week at The Iguana Club in New York, Vince Giordano has been busy building an amazing resume. Giordano and members of Nighthawks have appeared on the soundtrack of *Boardwalk Empire* and films such as *The Aviator*, *Finding Forrester* and *Revolutionary Road*. The multi-instrumentalist and smooth-crooning jazz historian has snagged a Grammy, scored silent films and recorded dozens of albums. His versions of tunes from the Rodgers and Hart songbook are featured in director Woody Allen's latest nostalgia epic, *Café Society*.

For serious fun, Giordano plays an aluminum upright bass and bass saxophone and owns perhaps the largest collection of '20s-to-'40s jazz sheet music in the world. But first and foremost, Giordano is a bandleader. That life is chronicled in the Hudson West Productions documentary *Vince Giordano—There's a Future in the Past*.

"We never close," Giordano says when contacted by phone. "I go from 8 in the morning till 2 in the morning. Every day. Seven days a week. Occasionally peace breaks out in my life. Some people say I play an instrument, but I really play the telephone."

### Was recording the *Café Society* soundtrack a typical session for you?

Not typical. I've been working for Woody Allen since *Zelig*; we broke out on *Sweet & Lowdown*. Woody's production team wanted 16 tunes from the '30s, all Rodgers and Hart. They said, "The setting is a posh nightclub, so you can't play crazy jazz." It's supper-club jazz. Our wonderful pianist, Mark Shane, was able to get that Fats Waller/Count Basie/Earl Hines feel of the 1930s. And we had our two guitarists, Vinny Raniolo and Chris Flory, with Chris Gelb on drums. I played upright bass. Basically we were scoring without seeing the film.

### How did *There's a Future in the Past* come about?

It was filmed over three years, and it shows the trials of trying to keep an 11-piece 1920s and '30s band going in the 21st Century. We've been doing it for 40 years, and it's a lot of hard work: schlepping, dealing with equipment breakdowns, club owners, clubs closing, musicians retiring. But there's the good stuff: *Boardwalk Empire*, a Grammy for *Finding Forrester*. Some of it pays off. Somebody called me Sisyphus, the cat who rolls a boulder up a mountain every day. The next morning he wakes up and the boulder is at the bottom of the mountain. Again. It's something like that.

### What keeps you going?

What we do is near impossible. It's a unique thing to have an 11-piece band playing the music of the '20s, '30s and '40s twice a week in Manhattan. We play Fletcher Henderson, Bix Beiderbecke, Jelly Roll Morton, McKinney's Cotton Pickers, Benny Goodman.

### You've collected more than 60,000 charts, all stored in your home.

The idea of collecting this music is rescuing it. I've been on a mission since the 1970s to buy collections. I've cleared out three movie theaters, raided basements and attics full of charts. To have the music is a wonderful thing. You can transcribe some of this stuff off the record, but if you have the actual charts it makes it a lot easier. The publishers no longer have the music, though they own it. I'm often called to reproduce the "original sound," so charts help.



Multi-instrumentalist and bandleader Vince Giordano is the subject of a new documentary.

### How do you play the old arrangements?

I key them into Sibelius [notation] software. Often the old arrangements need some seasoning: We syncopate them, insert hot solos. For *Boardwalk Empire* they had me transcribing Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet solos. And we have no problem interpreting those original solos.

### You play so many instruments: upright bass, tuba, banjo, bass saxophone. What's your main instrument?

I wish the bass saxophone was my main instrument. Like I said, my main instrument is the telephone, lining up work. Being a bandleader is like herding cats and putting out little brush fires.

—Ken Micallef

# Heartland film follows new big-band king

Ross Reagan  
IndyStar correspondent

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



CAROL HUGHES / 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.

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

## Vince Giordano: The Movie

07/09/2016 11:47 pm ET

Once upon a time, a very long time ago (31 years this month, to be exact, July 1985), I attended a concert at the 92nd Street Y celebrating the orchestral giants of 1920s jazz, King Oliver, Fletcher Henderson, Duke Ellington and, especially, the Jean Goldkette and Paul Whiteman bands which had featured Bix Beiderbecke, the great and doomed cornet genius of the age. The Y's lead music maker that night was a bandleader named Vince Giordano, and his Nighthawks, whom I'd never heard of, with the Nighthawks' trumpeter, Randy Sandke, brilliantly standing in for Bix.

The concert blew my mind. Like most lovers of Jazz Age music, I'd only listened to this stuff on old vinyl records compiled from even older shellac records; which is to say, through the megaphone of history — tinny and muffled and distant. Vince and his Nighthawks stripped that distance away. The vividness of this music, live, played by virtuosos of vintage with perfect period veracity was absolutely astonishing.

After the show, I introduced myself to Vince Giordano and told him how overwhelmed I was by what I'd just heard. Vince smiled, ducked his head humbly and said, "Thanks. This was our last gig. I just broke up the band."

And there you have the essence captured by a new documentary (long overdue) about my friend Vince Giordano and the against-all-odds musical enterprise he has kept afloat (and occasionally dry-docked, himself) for more than thirty tempestuous years now. [Vince Giordano - There's a Future in the Past](#), is the title of this 90-minute film; a labor of love directed and produced by Dave Davidson and Amber Edwards of Hudson West Productions, whose credits encompass many hours of national PBS programming, including nine episodes of the award-winning series, *Michael Feinstein's American Songbook*.

[Vince Giordano - There's a Future in the Past](#) will receive its New York premiere tonight, Sunday evening, July 10, at 6:00 pm (with perfect symmetry) at the 92nd Street Y. I've seen an advance of the film and it has set me to reflecting upon my own years in Vince Giordano's orbit, a galaxy teeming with period jazz music that would have vanished into the cosmos were it not for Vince's intrepid fortitude.

What the film captures with no little awe and great affection is how hard it is to pull off Vince's resuscitation act again and again. Never mind the intricacies of replicating the music itself live - a monumental task - and booking the band himself into any conceivable venue. Keeping this music alive is unbelievably labor intensive. For every gig, Vince personally hoists a veritable tonnage of implements into his van, including a string bass, a bass saxophone and a tuba, a celesta, stacks of thick leather binders containing roughly 3000 instrumental charts each for 11 musicians, 11 lighted music stands with dangling felt banners, an elaborate, aged drum kit, megaphones, a hefty period microphone, and more.

No wonder Vince has thrown it all in on several occasions. The documentary vividly shows you why. I was so crestfallen by Vince's announcement that he was done thirty-one years ago, I determined to try and talk him out of it. I pitched my landlords at the Park Avenue Plaza building, where my bookstore [Chartwell Booksellers](#) resides, the wacky proposition that we throw swing dances in the lobby at Christmas time. When they agreed (to my amazement), I went back to Vince and challenged him point blank to restart the Nighthawks for my month's-worth of guaranteed bookings in December. Warily, Vince said yes.

I have no doubt that he would have done so on his own, sooner or later; I take no credit for in any way saving Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks. My gig did, however, nudge Vince back on track quicker. "Holiday Tea at Three," as we called our lobby bash, every Saturday in December, from 3:00-6:00 P.M., became a musical fixture for the band and for my store over the next decade or so. A very fine documentary film was even made about it: [Tea Dance](#), directed by Daniel Jenkins. You can watch that [HERE](#).

Today, Vince Giordano is something of a fixture, though nothing has gotten easier. He has made a lot of cinematic vintage music for movies by Woody Allen, Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese, among

others. He has won a Grammy Award for the period-defining hot jazz soundtrack he provided to the acclaimed HBO series, *Boardwalk Empire*. He has played a lot of weddings.

By now, Vince has influenced and inspired so many young jazz musicians as they have passed through the Nighthawks, and so many Nighthawks admirers, who have simply listened (and sometimes danced), it is easy to feel that the “world of Vince” is populated by an army of acolytes. One among the besotted is filmmaker Amber Edwards herself, who told me that Vince and the Nighthawks not only played “her first wedding,” but that Amber even sang with the band subsequently, including on Vince’s CD Grammy-winner, *Boardwalk Empire Volume 1*. (“I was a bonus track,” Amber hastens to add. “Alice Blue Gown.”)

“We decided we’d better make a film about Vince before he got too famous to work with us,” Amber laughs. “Our first shoot was in August 2012 at the Newport Jazz Festival, which was an amazing scene. I thought I knew Vince, but seeing up close the fragility of what he has put together, how it’s really one guy carrying this whole heavy load, stunned me. One misstep and there’s no-one to pick up the pieces. Except for Carol.”

Carol Hughes is the unsung heroine of this documentary and of Vince’s life and career, which are indivisible. Onscreen and off, Carol is everywhere, managing everything that Vince himself is not handling. I’m quietly pleased to say that Vince first met Carol while waiting for me one night at the Monkey Bar in the Hotel Elysée on East 54th Street to celebrate my 40th Birthday. Thus, I know exactly how long Carol and Vince have been together - and Vince, by subtracting 40 from my age, always laughingly reminds Carol that he knows too.

I was going to include a few direct quotes from Vince himself in this piece but he has more than enough to say in *Vince Giordano - There’s a Future in the Past*, so we will let the film speak for him. Vince and the Nighthawks will play a short set at the Y screening Sunday, and Vince did delightedly point out to me that two of the Nighthawks who were onstage with him at the Y that long ago 1985 evening when I heard them all for the first time — Andy Stein, on violin and baritone sax, and Chuck Wilson on all kinds of reeds — will be onstage this Sunday too. I think that says it all.