

Good Vibrations (2013)

On Video

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 43 min.

Our content ratings: Violence 3; Language 6; Sex/Nudity 3.

Our star rating (1-5): 4

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you.

Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers."

Psalms 122:6-7

This is not the story of the Beach Boys 1966 hit of the same name. It is a record store rather than a record that lends its name to this feel good film. The Irish Terri Hooley (Richard Dormer) is not your typical hero in Lisa Barros D'Sa and Glenn Leyburn's film. I doubt that he has entered a church in years, let alone visited or thought about Jerusalem, but he would heartily agree with the import of the psalmist's prayer for peace. It is the 1970s, a time when his beloved Belfast is being torn asunder by sectarian hatred and violence. Throughout the film we see news reel shots of fighting, buildings afire, and police vainly attempting to keep "security within your towers." One cannot venture down any street without seeing on the walls painted slogans attacking Catholics or Protestants.

The film actually begins with a song that Terri apparently loved as a child, Hank Williams singing "I Saw the Light." This prelude is fraught with dark, ironic humor: Terri's father was a radical leftist continually trying to win local

offices but always failing. The neighborhood kids frequently pelt the house and Terri with rocks. One of them aims his bow and arrow at the lad, putting out his eye. For the rest of his life he must wear a glass one to appear normal.

Terri might have lost an eye while a child, but he sees well enough with the remaining one to understand the folly of the hatred of the warring factions. With 40 pounds and a mortgage on his house, he sets out to establish a record store that he dubs "Good Vibrations" in the belief that the Reggae music he loves can calm the storm raging around him. The store, he makes clear to all, is not a place for politics but for music, and it is open to Catholics and Protestants alike.

Challenged by customers not interested in Reggae music, he expands his offerings and soon becomes impressed with the punk music of local bands. Indeed, so enamored that he produces a record for one of the groups, and then another. This leads him into touring and promoting them, a precarious but necessary venture if the bands are to be heard beyond the local clubs. In his exuberance he declares, "When It comes to punk: New York has the haircuts! London has the trousers! Belfast has the reason!"

During one of their excursions beyond Belfast Terri and his band, crammed into an old van, are stopped by the police, suspicious that they might be bent on a terrorist mission. When Terri is asked who are the Catholics and who are the Protestants, he replies that he doesn't know. No one has ever bothered to ask. The officer in charge is so impressed by this unexpected answer that his cold demeanor warms up and he lets them go on their way.

There are ups and downs in the fortunes of Terri's store and his bands. To save money he has his family, band members, and patrons fold the newly printed record sleeves and stuff in the records. At one point a famous DJ helps spread the word about a record by taking the unprecedented step of playing the song

a second time immediately. Unfortunately, due to some snafu Terri does not have any records available in stores to meet the demand for them. His trips to London's big time record executives bear no fruit. At times, too, his relationship with his wife Ruth (Jodie Whittaker) suffers as he risks their house on behalf of what seems too often a very risky, foolhardy venture. Indeed, money becomes so scarce that it looks like he will lose both the Good Vibrations and their house.

The climax comes when he decides to stage a concert of bands, not at one of the clubs or ordinary halls but at the large Ulster Hall. He needs to sell 2000 tickets if he is to save his record store. What follows includes a surprise visit and a revelation of what we have come to know all along, that this adult with the heart of a child is not motivated by money. The record shop closes, reopens, closes, and so on. None of the records enters the top ten, and only one of his bands, The Undertones, made it into the United Kingdom's Top 30. And yet during the 70s when Belfast echoed with written and shouted slogans of hatred, backed by violent deeds, there was a bright spot in the grey city where the city's youth could come together to share their love of music and forget their sectarian divisions.

It is ironic that it is punk music and the child-like character Terri Hooley that strove to break "down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us," rather than the church. It was Christ and the apostle Paul who set the standard for what the church should be doing, but in their obsession over doctrine rather than loving service, the churches in Northern Ireland created a toxic atmosphere that led to violence. Indeed fundamentalist Presbyterian minister [Ian Paisley](#) preached hatred of Roman Catholics and the pope (and homosexuals) and led a violent movement that resulted in thousands of deaths during The Troubles, the latter forming the background for the film.

With its music and cast of youths this is a good film to watch and discuss with teenagers. However, be sure to alert parents to the film's use of street language. None of the characters are squeaky clean, many using drugs as well as speaking foul language. I was left with a feeling similar to the one following a viewing many years ago of *Camelot*, that though the life of Terri Hooley's record store was but for a short time, it is good to remember that there was once a place called "Good Vibrations."

I saw this film at the annual Movies & Meaning Film Festival on March 17 in Albuquerque. I missed it, if it even showed, in Cincinnati during its theatrical run. This is another one of those precious foreign and indie films that make me thankful for DVDs and streaming services.

NOTE: While Googling the title I came across GenVideos which offers the whole film, apparently FREE at the address below. Has anyone had experience with GenVideo?

https://genvideos.org/watch?v=Good_Vibrations_2012#video=0Kc7o1nBoQQbMQnPPt50VgItIStIrEwbMKeskxLVl4cf9l5WusI5f-0418e64zjlnrEr00i-3IglalIEv4GomKQ

This review will be in the April 2016 issue of VP with a set of discussion questions.