

# Vail Daily



- Special to the Daily

## A renegade worth watching

Actor, director and writer Michael Imperioli will receive the Renegade Award at the Vail Film Festival on Saturday

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You'd think that the guy who played Christopher Moltisanti, Tony Soprano's nephew on the smash HBO series "The Sopranos," wouldn't have a problem getting one of his films screened at a film festival in North America. After all, he could break a few kneecaps or put a gun to somebody's head to get the result he wanted, right?

Not so much.

If there's one hard lesson that actor, director and writer Michael Imperioli learned in the past few years it's that even if you're an award winner and well-known in movie circles, those facts don't get you a free pass into the film festival circuit.

### If you go ....

What: Vail Film Festival Tribute Awards, with Kate Bosworth (Excellence in Acting Award), Michael Imperioli (Renegade Award) and Josh Lucas (Vanguard Award) in attendance.

Where: Vail Mountain School.

When: 6:30 p.m. Saturday.

Cost: Free with the festival pass or \$10 at the door if there are seats available.

More information: Visit [www.vailfilmfest.com](http://www.vailfilmfest.com).

"I had a film that I directed and wrote that was in festivals in 2009," Imperioli said, referring to his independent film project "The Hungry Ghosts," which screened at last year's Vail Film Festival.

While his film screened at festivals outside America, getting it introduced to American audiences proved to be quite the challenge, he said.

"It took me a really long time to get it into a festival in America," Imperioli said during a recent phone interview. "I had it rejected from festivals where I served on the jury and who I did fundraising for and I kind of found that nobody was interested for a really long time. I don't know, it was strange."

But eventually he got the film screened at a film festival in Santa Barbara, Calif., and then a distributor picked it up for a theatrical run in New York and now the film is out on video.

"As far as that film, I felt like I was on the fringes of the business," Imperioli said. "It wasn't a commercial film by any means ... but I'm still very proud of it and happy that we got it made and got it out there."

It's that determination as an independent filmmaker that led the Vail Film Festival to award Imperioli the Renegade Award this year. Imperioli is in town for the festival to receive the award.

"I did feel that because I had worked in this industry for a long time that the doors would be a little more open, I felt like part of the community and I felt like that didn't really mean anything," Imperioli said. "You're always proving yourself over and over again and a certain amount of time in the industry doesn't mean that people are going to necessarily open the doors wide to see what your next thing is, especially if you're doing something you've never done before."

'He embodies the renegade'

Imperioli has an impressive resume, both on and off screen. Besides his hefty role in "The Sopranos," he currently stars as Detective Louis Fitch in ABC's "Detroit 1-8-7," (which Imperioli said is on hiatus); he starred in ABC's "Life On Mars" as well as in blockbuster movies like "Goodfellas," and "The Lovely Bones." He wrote and executive produced "Summer of Sam" (directed by Spike Lee); and wrote some episodes of "The Sopranos." He wrote and directed his independent film "The Hungry Ghosts." And recently he starred in the indie horror movie "Foreclosure," which is scheduled for release this year. He's definitely put in his time.

"He's an accomplished writer, actor and director," said Sean Cross, Vail Film Festival co-founder. "Everything he does, he does well. He easily transitions between film and TV and we feel that he embodies the renegade."

It's that ability to move beyond acting into other aspects of the industry that Cross said made him a respectable choice for the Renegade Award and a sought-after commodity for this year's film festival.

"He's more than an actor," Cross said. "A lot of people have success as an actor and just follow that one path and we really admire him for branching out into all aspects of the craft."

'Close to the heart'

And branching out into independent filmmaking with "The Hungry Ghosts" gave Imperioli a certain satisfaction that doesn't come with mainstream success.

"If you have something that you want to say and stories that you want to tell, to have that kind of control is very personal, and the energy behind it was very personal," he said. "It's close to the heart that way."

And if it seems like the roles Imperioli chooses and the stuff he writes has a lot of built-in anger and conflict, well, that's just a byproduct.

"I think it's more about what interests me," Imperioli said. "I think what's interesting is people trying to figure out how to live the best they can and try to be the best people they can and make sense of why they're here and make the time that they're here on this planet somehow meaningful and there's a struggle to do that. It's not just a given and it's not just automatic."

Spoken like a true renegade.

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