

# THAT'S MY JAZZ

## EXPLORATION GUIDE

---

# 1

The director, Ben Proudfoot, explains how the themes in this film reflect how he approaches his filmmaking choices. Jazz is known for the need to hone your creative skills and then have the ability to improvise. The end result is the convergence of creativity and improv. He argues, leadership is similar. A good leader doesn't simply have a vision and then bulldoze his/her way toward implementing that vision. You need to plan, synthesize, work hard, and then be willing to throw away that plan if you see another opportunity which might result in something more beautiful.

**How comfortable are you with improvising and changing plans? How does this approach fit with your natural leadership tendencies? Do you have other guiding principles you rely upon?**

# 2

Both Milton Abel Sr. and Milton Abel II set high standards for themselves. They both wanted to be the best at their chosen craft. The older Milt was a world-class jazz musician. So, it was important for the younger Milt to carry on that legacy to try to become part of an elite few in whatever profession he chose. The younger Milt's 'jazz' was to become a top pastry chef and he put himself in positions to learn from the best pastry chefs from around the world.

**Did you grow up with family expectations (spoken or unspoken) that propelled you down a certain career path and lifestyle? In what ways have those expectations become your own choices? Have these expectations created any challenges for you to become your own person?**

# 3

Toward the end of the film, the younger Milt recounts a story about his 61-year old father racing him to the bus stop, them both falling down, rolling around on the ground and laughing. The son recognized how he aspired to be like his father. Milt Sr. was able to be a professional and a father and do them both at the highest level. Hall of Fame musician and Hall of Fame father – top of the top. The younger Milt realized he wasn't going to be able to do both, so he had to choose what was more important to him. The film closes with a slightly colorized shot of a father gazing lovingly at his infant son.

**Were you surprised by the choice the younger Milt makes at the end of the film? How did these choices play out in your family of origin? How are you balancing decisions about your professional and personal life?**

# 4

Although this film explores a Kansas City jazz great and a world-renowned pastry chef, this is ultimately a story about fathers and sons (parents and children) and the choices we all make about priorities. At the beginning of the film, Milt reflects on the decisions he has made in his life. "If you were to put a button in front of me today where we would go back and I would say 'No' to The French Laundry and I would stay at home with my Dad, live in a split-level apartment and take care of him - I would hit that button."

**Is there a decision you look back on with regret where you might choose to make a different decision today if given a chance to decide again? How has this film changed any thoughts you might have about how to balance relationship and work priorities?**