

New Kenny G doc explores his massive success and criticism

Gary Gerard Hamilton
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK – Kenny Gorelick, known to millions as Kenny G, has been one of the most beloved – and hated – figures in music throughout the last three decades. But the music superstar, synonymous for his long, curly brown hair as much as for his soprano saxophone, has ignored his critics and remained largely unbothered, well before the term was a popular social media hashtag.

“If you’re going to criticize me, I’m just not going to go with that because I already know that I’m doing my very, very best. So, there’s where the confidence comes from,” said the Grammy winner. “Did it ever really hurt me? Honestly, no. Because I’ve got my armor of knowing I’m doing my very, very best. That’s why I practice every day... I’m never a little rusty – ever.”

Kenny G’s unconventional journey to the top – and the jazz purists’ feathers he’s ruffled along the way – is explored in the new documentary “Listening to Kenny G” directed by Penny Lane, which premiered Friday on HBO. In addition to the criticism, the film details his Seattle upbringing, being discovered by legendary music executive Clive Davis, and the massive success of hit songs like “Silhouette,” “Songbird” and “Sentimental.”

The Associated Press spoke with Kenny G, who also released a new album called “New Standards” on Friday, about his participation in the film, his legacy, and working with current megastar artists like Kanye West and The Weeknd. Answers have been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: The film opens up with some very harsh criticism of you, but you seem to have tough skin. Was there ever a time it bothered you?

Kenny G: Since the ‘80s, I’ve always thought of it kind of this way: They don’t particularly like my style of music. So the songs I put out, especially once they got popular – of course, once they got popular – they hated it more... They’re just thinking that maybe I’m just creating these melodies because I know somehow it’s going to sell records and I’m going to be rich and famous because of this, which I had no idea of. I’m just playing songs the way that I hear them. I love a melody that’s played properly.

AP: What convinced you to partici-



Kenny G in a scene from the HBO documentary, “Listening to Kenny G.”
HBO

pate in a documentary with Penny Lane?

Kenny G: She was not necessarily a fan of my music, which I thought was cool that she said that right off the bat. But not that she didn’t like it, she just wasn’t this big fan that wanted to make a movie about me. She just said that there’s a story to tell about how “there’s a group of people that really have a problem with your success. And I’d like to tell that story.” I said, “I’ve been hearing that since the ‘80s.”

AP: Because you’ve faced so much criticism from jazz purists, do you think you’ve influenced up-and-coming jazz artists?

Kenny G: I think so in some ways. You know, first: the fact that the saxophone is out there so much – that people are hearing the sax. I know the soprano sax has definitely gotten a resurgence because of me and the fact that I’ve been out there so much with the soprano, mostly.

AP: You’ve connected with Kanye West and the Weeknd. Is that how you’ve stayed current?

Kenny G: I’m really flattered when I get those phone calls from Kanye and then The Weeknd, of course. It makes me feel great that somehow they want my sound to be part of their music. And they’re so popular now – they don’t need me. I’m not doing them a big favor. They’re not reaching out to me so I can help them sell records. They’re just doing it purely because creatively, they think, “Oh, wow, (we love) your sound.”

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Homelessness, Hunger, & Health: Here’s the Connection

By Kara O’Dempsey

Health and homelessness are naturally intertwined. Without a stable home, various factors, such as lack of access to adequate food, medical care and hygiene products, protection from the elements, and limited resources to social services, can contribute to the decline in one’s physical and mental health.

According to the Health Care for Homeless Council, “people who are homeless have a higher rate of illness and die on average 12 years sooner than the general U.S. population.”

Generally speaking, it seems intuitive that lack of housing would lead to a decline in overall wellness. However, the link between health and homelessness can often be overlooked. Health conditions including increased exposure to communicable diseases, malnutrition and stress are prevalent on the street and in crowded homeless shelters. Behavioral health issues such as, depression, alcoholism, or other substance use disorders can develop or exasperate in difficult and unstable living conditions as well.

Simply put, being without a home is a dangerous health condition. And like most counties in the United States, Collier County is not immune to homelessness.

In fact, recent data collected by The Hunger & Homeless Coalition (HHC) of Collier County identified 568 persons living without a stable home and an additional 805 children registered in Collier County Public Schools who are experiencing homelessness. HHC Executive Director Michael Overway, notes, “this count is a snapshot of those experiencing homelessness in the community. It generally accounts for about 30% of those actually experiencing homelessness.”

In Collier County, the combination of fixed incomes and rising rent costs is also contributing to an increased rate of homeless seniors. According to the HHC, the rate of seniors requesting emergency prevention services is up 35% compared to 2020. One HHC Outreach Coordinator states, “newly homeless seniors are coming out of the woodwork.”

Having organizations like The Hunger and Homeless Coalition and the support of their community partnerships is vital to helping these community members find their way home. Whether someone is newly homeless, situational homeless or chronically homeless, the HHC can provide individual and personalized plans, resulting in better and more sustainable outcomes for those in need.

“The Homeless Coalition works with our homeless populations to better understand their needs. Yes, housing ends homelessness, but sometimes that’s not the first step. Solving their immediate crisis of hunger may be that first step,” says Overway.

Communities that invest in rehousing and permanent supportive housing, especially for the chronically homeless, incur lower public costs, achieve better health outcomes, and work to prevent and end homelessness. According to a 2017 report by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, a chronically homeless person costs the taxpayer an average of \$35,578. When these individuals are placed in supportive housing, the average cost is reduced by 49.5% with an investment average of \$12,800, making the net savings roughly \$4,800 a year.

Beyond financial investments, it takes a network of passionate individuals, organizations, and ideas to drive lasting change. The HHC considers themselves

privileged to have a community of partners to team up with and support their cause.

“Today, we have two fronts. We help to coordinate services for hunger and homelessness. Hunger we work with Harry Chapin Food Bank, Meals of Hope, MidWest Food Bank and a plethora of food pantries in the county to identify and resolve ‘food deserts’ by helping to bring resources into those areas. Homeless partnerships have grown by leaps and bounds the past few years to include, David Lawrence Center, Collier County Sheriff’s Department, Collier County Jail Re-entry program, Catholic Charities, St. Vincent de Paul, and Wounded Warriors to name just a few,” says Overway.

The work and dedication of organizations like the HHC and their community partners not only help to get individuals back on their feet, they create an overall healthier community – physically, mentally and economically. With the continued support of community members, volunteers, and donors the HHC aims to end the risks that vulnerable residents face.

The Hunger & Homeless Coalition of Collier County supports the planning, delivery and coordination of high-quality services to the hungry, homeless, and those at risk of homelessness in the community. Since October of 2020, they have helped over 1,000 community members. For more information, visit collierhomelesscoalition.org.

Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc., Blue Zones Project is part of Southwest Florida’s well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information, visit southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com.