

## PRESS NOTES



# *My Darling Vivian*

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**WORLD PREMIERE  
SXSW 2020 FILM FESTIVAL**

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## LOGLINE

The story of Vivian Liberto, Johnny Cash's first wife and the mother of his four daughters.

## SYNOPSIS

In 1951, Catholic schoolgirl Vivian Liberto meets handsome Air Force cadet Johnny Cash at her local San Antonio, Texas skating rink. Their whirlwind summer romance lays the foundation for a feverish three-year-long correspondence while Johnny is stationed in Germany. Thousands of letters later, the two marry upon his return in 1954. Within a year, a career blossoms and a family is started. By 1961, Johnny Cash is a household name, number one on the music charts, and perpetually on tour. Meanwhile, only two weeks postpartum, Vivian settles into their custom-built home in Casitas Springs, California with their four young daughters. Plagued by bobcats, rattlesnakes, all-hours visits from fans, and a growing resentment toward her husband's absence, Vivian is pushed to a near breaking point when she and her daughters are targeted by hate groups over her perceived race. In ***My Darling Vivian***, we will meet the first Mrs. Cash as her daughters, Rosanne, Kathy, Cindy, and Tara, share with us first hand, for the first time, the entire story of love, isolation, fear, heartbreak, and survival.



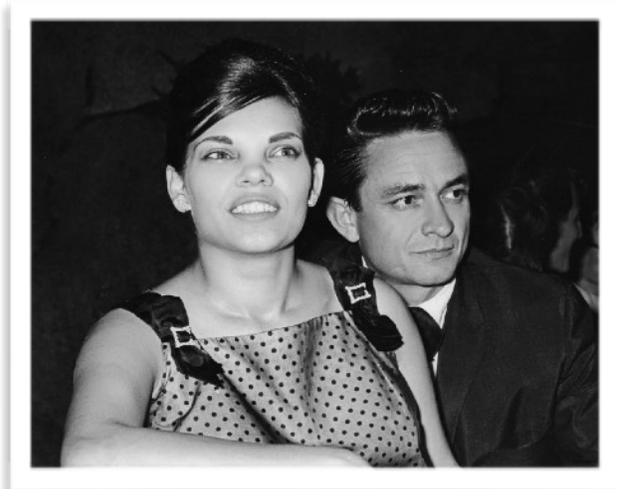
*Photos courtesy the Estate of Vivian Distin.*

## NOTES ON THE FILM

*My Darling Vivian* has the unique advantage of exclusive, unprecedented access to a wealth of never-before-seen footage and photographs of Vivian Liberto and Johnny Cash, as well as to their daughters themselves. Rosanne Cash, Kathy Cash Tittle, Cindy Cash, and Tara Cash Schwoebel chronologically trace Vivian's romantic, wrenching, and dizzying journey, shedding light on the undeniable marks that were left.

- From Vivian's childhood as the middle daughter of a strict Italian Catholic father and an alcoholic mother, to her teenage romance (and subsequent three-year-long correspondence) with Johnny Cash – in which she reveals to him an inferiority complex rooted in her appearance.
- Her new life in Memphis as a woman in love; a first-time mother who finds out she's pregnant with her second child just six weeks after the birth of her first; and the wife of a door-to-door salesman turned overnight music sensation. Eventually, the family moves to Los Angeles and Johnny almost immediately becomes absent.
- The seven-year nightmare that was living in Casitas Springs, with four young daughters, including sleepless nights waiting up for the husband who never came. In the midst of losing Johnny to June Carter, all-hours visits from fans deprived her of any semblance of safety, compounded by a frightening race scandal in 1966 which led to threatening letters from the Ku Klux Klan, eventually pushing her to a mental breaking point.
- The personal toll divorce took on her, which included being excommunicated from the Catholic church, and the “unspoken bargain” that was her second marriage.
- Trying to regain her identity, which led to a social and creative blossoming, despite her having to witness the aggressively perpetuated myth of Johnny and June's great love story.
- Raising four daughters, almost single-handedly, while watching June publicly claim her children, and the difficulty of accepting that her eldest daughter, Rosanne, chose a public life as a touring musician.

- Her unconditional and undying love for Johnny over the years, having to interact with June at family functions, the joys of becoming a grandmother, her surprising final meeting with Johnny two months before his death, and a medical error that led to her own premature passing.



*Photos courtesy the Estate of Vivian Distin.*

### **STATEMENT FROM ROSANNE CASH**

My mother's own story has often been lost or misinterpreted to serve a myth. This elegant film about her – the real Vivian Liberto, not the Hollywood version – is painful but compassionate, wrenching but true. Even though she was an intensely private woman, I think she longed to have her story told, and her place in the history of my family acknowledged with respect and love. Matt Riddlehoover and Dustin Tittle have succeeded in giving her that place. My sisters and I are deeply moved by and grateful for *My Darling Vivian*.

-Rosanne Cash

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

Vivian Liberto's story is one that has intrigued me for years. Dustin, my husband and producing partner, is the grandson of Vivian and Johnny Cash; I'd heard fragments of her experience from my mother-in-law, Kathy, and how grossly misrepresented she was in the 2005 film, *Walk the Line*. It wasn't until a close friend suggested we make this film that I even considered it a possibility – it seemed too huge a responsibility.

Now that Vivian's truth is being told at a time when our society is beginning to listen to its aggrieved women, maybe her joy and pain and reality can be fully accepted. Her life was romantic and bewildering, difficult and significant, and wholly filmic – more than a mere footnote in the biography of Johnny Cash.

The marks that were left on our four interviewees as children are undeniable, and also worth noting. These women have held an important piece of hidden history that seems more relevant today than ever before. It's time we sat down and spent an hour or so in their, and their mother's, shoes. Over these past two and a half years, I've fallen madly in love with Vivian, and my hope is that others do, too.

-Matt Riddlehoover, Director



*Photo courtesy the Estate of Vivian Distin.*

## **FEATURED INTERVIEWEE**

### **Rosanne Cash**

Rosanne is a Grammy award-winning singer-songwriter and author. Her fiction and essays have been published in *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Oxford American*, and *New York Magazine*. She is the eldest daughter of Johnny Cash and Vivian Liberto.

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

### **Director, Producer, and Editor, Matt Riddlehoover**

Matt is an award-winning, Nashville-based filmmaker. His work has appeared on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, *Out.com*, and in *Filmmaker Magazine*. Best known for directing LGBTQ-themed comedies, *My Darling Vivian* marks his documentary feature film debut.

### **Producer, Dustin Tittle**

Dustin is a Nashville-based producer and screenwriter, and is the grandson of Johnny Cash and Vivian Liberto. He and his husband, Matt Riddlehoover, have co-produced films together through their company, Element Twenty Two, since 2015.

### **Co-Producer, Tara Cash Schwoebel**

Tara is the youngest daughter of Johnny Cash and Vivian Liberto. She returns to film after having worked in costume design and wardrobe. Her archival contributions to the creative process of *My Darling Vivian* have been invaluable.

### **Director of Photography, Josh Moody**

Josh's credits include short and feature-length films, music videos, promotional material, and corporate content for NASA, Billboard, Carnegie Mellon and his alma mater, Vanderbilt University.

### **Composer, Ian A. Hughes**

Ian is a music composer based just outside of Liverpool, UK. He has scored for the Royal Shakespeare Company, as well as award-winning short and feature-length films of all genres. *My Darling Vivian* is his second collaboration with Matt Riddlehoover, following 2018's *Strategy and Pursuit*.