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Wisconsin Film Festival: 'Anvil!' brings obscure metal band back to life

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With national buzz growing as loudly as feedback from a concert speaker, the hilarious and endearing "Anvil! The Story of Anvil" comes to the Wisconsin Film Festival Thursday, April 2, still just a bit under the radar. But that changes once audiences get wind of a film that's like "This is Spinal Tap," but true. And Canadian.

"Anvil!" follows a once-fledgling heavy metal band (called, naturally, Anvil) who peaked briefly in the 1980s, but whose two original members have toiled in Canadian obscurity ever since. As the film chronicles the ups and downs of a pair of aging headbangers, there's more than a whiff of the 1984 mockumentary "Spinal Tap" to "Anvil!" Moviegoers are excused if they think this documentary is fiction, especially when the drummer's name is Robb Reiner, the same name of "Tap's" on-screen host and director Rob Reiner.

But it's true. All of it.

"It's real, man," said "Anvil!" director Sacha Gervasi. "It's quite surreal, I know. People expect these guys to whip off their wigs in person and reveal themselves as a performance art troupe or something because they're so crazy."

"Anvil!" -- already a hit in England -- is expected to become an American underdog sensation this spring. It won't be only music fans who rush to theaters. "Anvil!" manages to capture two never-give-up Everymen in singer/guitarist Lips and drummer Reiner. After an opening in which everyone from Guns N' Roses' Slash to Motorhead's Lemmy lavish praise on Anvil, "Anvil!" cuts to Lips' current job delivering lunches to schools. Lips rattles off each dish and how the order is changed to keep kids interested; he's not complaining, he's making a living.

The moment is funny and sad. The same can be said for the band Anvil, a thrash metal originator. There are botched European tours and endless humiliation. (As a result of the film, Anvil is gaining popularity it never had.)

"It's about friendship, perseverance and love," Gervasi said. "The message of the movie is if you just don't quit, a miracle is possible. It doesn't mean it will happen, but it is possible."

Watch the trailer:

If you go

What: "Anvil! The Story of Anvil"

When: 8:45 p.m. Thursday, April 2

Where: Orpheum Theatre, 216 State St.

Tickets: \$7, \$4 students, available at the door