

New documentary looks at songwriter's life

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Bob Dylan's first film title told the world, "Don't Look Back." But fans of songwriter Roger Salloom will be glad a filmmaker ignored that advice.

Salloom, a longtime musical fixture in Western Massachusetts, is the subject of a new film playing at Northampton's Academy of Music tonight at 7 p.m.

The film, titled "So Glad I Made It: The Saga of Roger Salloom, America's best Unknown Songwriter" is a documentary tracing Salloom's storied career over the past three decades. Presented by AcademyArts, the proceeds from the film will be split between the Northampton Arts Council and the Academy of Music Theater.

The film was produced by award-winning filmmaker Eric Sautter. Sautter, who is also a lawyer, won "Best Political Documentary" honors at the New York International Independent Film Festival in 2001 for his first film, "The King of Steeltown." Sautter also heads up the Washington, D.C. political media firm Sautter Communications.

Although Salloom now haunts Starbucks in Northampton more than any music halls, the singer-songwriter fronted a psychedelic rock band that once shared the stage with classic rock acts like Santana, Van Morrison and Love.



Republican file photo by **BOB STERN**

Roger Salloom, a musical fixture in Western Massachusetts, is the subject of "So Glad I Made It: The Saga of Roger Salloom, America's best Unknown Songwriter" playing at Northampton's Academy of Music tonight at 7 p.m.

Starting out as a folk singer in Worcester, Salloom later donned the trappings of rock 'n' roll while attending Indiana University. It was there where Sautter, who also attended college at the university, first became interested in Salloom's music. Then, years later, Sautter rediscovered the songwriter and decided to make the film.

"He had been a fan of mine, unbeknownst to me," Salloom said. "A few years ago, he found

me on the Internet and called me up and asked me if he could do the film."

Salloom, who won't see the film until tonight, said the experience was "fun, but jarring."

"It's intense because you have this whole film crew looking at everything you do," he said. "And it's nerve-wracking now, waiting to see it, but Chris didn't want me to see it until I could see it on the big screen."

The film features footage

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Roger Salloom

from all parts of Salloom's life and interviews with both old friends and new ones.

"Chris is very thorough. He even went looking for my ex-wife," Salloom said. "He spent two years on this. There are shots from Indiana, Hawaii, Worcester and a lot of Northampton, of course."

The film also reportedly includes a reunion scene with Salloom and Marshall Chess of the legendary Chess Records label at Chess' home outside Woodstock, N.Y. Chess signed Salloom and his band to a recording contract in the 1960s, and this reunion was their first meeting in more than 30 years.

For Salloom, the film is somewhat of a vindication of a promising career that somehow never caught the commercial wave.

"Vindication is a good word. The music business is horrible. It's losing money partly because of Internet theft, but also because a lot of artists can't sing or play or write, but they look good on TV," he said. "I'm happy with

where I am."

That "where I am" he refers to is a place as a well-known local booking agent who still has a loyal following for his music. After his band broke up, Salloom spent part of the 1970s as a songwriter in Nashville and with the remnants of Creedence Clearwater Revival. He then mostly abandoned his music career and returned to Western Massachusetts to raise his family. Salloom is a major player in many local musical careers now and is known for his annual free concert at Look Park each summer.

But more recently Salloom recorded a CD, which will be available in the next few weeks, he said.

"The film should help with the CD. We'll sell it on my Web site, but we're talking to a few labels," he said. "But I'm not a young girl in skin-tight pants. I'm an older guy - too old, really - I only play music because I want to."