

# Out of Worcester and onto the silver screen

*Roger Salloom is So Glad I Made it*

JACELYN AUGUSTINO

By Brian Goslow

**R**oger Salloom was returning to his hometown after one hell of a decade. From signing a record contract, opening for the likes of Santana and Van Morrison at the Fillmore to recording with Bob Dylan's backing band while living in a barn and playing with Guy Clark and Jerry Jeff Walker in Nashville, he had accomplished almost everything a musician could hope to. That is, except achieve commercial success. And since that didn't look like it was going to happen anytime soon, he decided to load up his family camper and make the trip back to Worcester.

The ride was smooth and uneventful 'til he hit the city's then infamous streets. One Worcester pothole managed to do what 1,117 miles of interstate highway hadn't. Thus, the inspiration for what would become his best known song, "(Got to Get) Out of Worcester" was born. It's one of many stories told in Chris Sautter's documentary *So Glad I Made It: The Saga of Roger Salloom, America's Best Unknown Songwriter*. It's the kind of film that you don't forget.

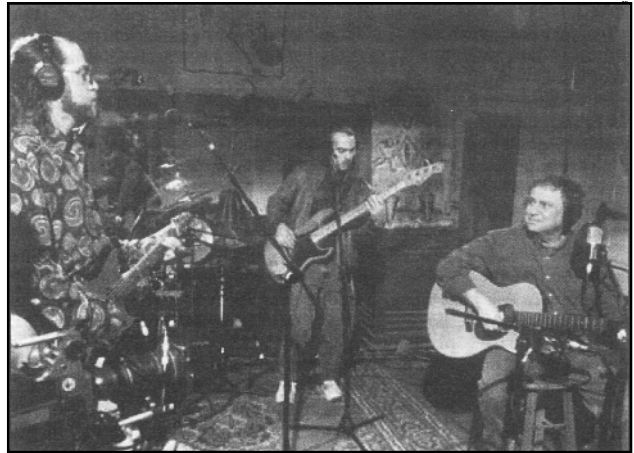
"This is an opportunity that few musicians ever have and I would like to think it could help me out," Salloom says from his home in Northampton, where he's lived for more than two decades. "I have a jaundiced view of what success is, however. I do not think it brings contentment or happiness. When I was a kid, all I wanted was more of the 'Crazies.' Then as I became older I

wanted to heal those who were hurting. Now I just want to do what I can do to contribute to the human experience."

Throughout the film, Salloom is shown recording with his band, The Stragglers, at an old cattle slaughterhouse in the middle of a Western Mass. cow pasture. His voice features a falsetto strongly reminiscent of George Harrison, Bob Dylan, and Roy Orbison — he definitely would have made a

**DETAILS**

**Who:** Roger Salloom  
**What:** Movie screening of *So Glad I Made It* with live performance  
**When:** Friday, June 18, at 7 p.m.  
**Where:** Bijou Community Cinemas  
**Cost:** \$7  
**Call:** 508-757-0900



Roger Salloom (right) in the studio with The Stragglers.

great *Traveling Willbury*. The film follows two story lines — his recent full-time return to the performance stage and his aforementioned '60s and '70s experiences. Former band mates, managers, wives and record company bosses are interviewed.

Salloom talks about falling in love with the music of Pete Seeger and the sound of the banjo as a teenager in the early 1960s, when he began playing at the Worcester YMCA. He recalls opening for Jose Feliciano in front of a large appreciative crowd at Worcester State College,

before he learned one of the toughest things about being a musician — the intense mood swing one experiences when going from the comfort of a cheering crowd to going home alone.

After attending college in Bloomington, Indiana, Salloom traveled to the West Coast with Sinclair, Salloom and the Mother Bear, which had an acidic vaudevillian sound that was more Spanky and Our Gang than The Jefferson Airplane. Their first release for Chess Records subsidiary Cadet Concept hit No. 1 on the new underground FM stations in San Francisco, Cleveland and Philadelphia and spent three years near the top of WBCN's chart in Boston. But Chess didn't have the budget to put out a single, even when members of Santana told them they had a hit in "Marie Le Peau." Cadet president Marshall Chess, son of Chess Records cofounder Leonard Chess, afraid that the craziness of the West Coast was ruining his talent, sent Salloom to Music City to work with the musicians who backed Dylan on his groundbreaking *Nashville Skyline* LP.

Fantasy Records president Saul Zaentz, who had wanted to sign the group, told Salloom he was a better songwriter than John Fogerty of Creedence Clearwater Revival. In an ironic twist, almost a decade later, Creedence bassist Stu Cook and former CCR manager Jake Rohr would financially back Salloom in his attempt to acquire another recording contract.

Now for that song — "Out of Worcester" — which is accompanied by old 8mm footage taken by Salloom's first wife Mary

Casdin, interspersed with footage producer Sautter shot during a recent Worcester pilgrimage by Salloom. The tune had two lives — first in the mid-1970s on Worcester radio, then again in the 1980s in Northampton, where radio audiences related to his common look at a common city. "It was local, it was a real place," WRSI DJ and music director Johnny Memphis says about the second coming of the tune. "Nobody sings about Worcester; it wouldn't occur to anybody but Roger."

Other highlights include Salloom reuniting with Marshall Chess, and footage of The Blind Boys of Alabama and James Cotton at the 2002 Northampton Blues, Beer and Barbecue Festival, which he produced. The shots of Roger and his son, illustrator Salem Salloom, discussing the *Leold* comic strip they both create, are also scenes of note.

Toward the end of the film, music producer Wes Talbot brings Salloom to New York City to discuss marketing his music with Artemis Records. He falls asleep due to "post-traumatic stress, being bipolar and [having] a bad back." The duo tells Artemis's president they were talking to the Liquid 8 label only to receive bad news — "Liquid 8 has liquidated." Undaunted, they leave the office saying, "Don't worry about it, we're climbing the ladder to nowhere!" □

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