



Guitar legend from S.C. focus of festival movie

By Bill Thompson
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"Crazy" director Rick Bieber

Film festival debuts

The inaugural Charleston International Film Festival unspools today through Sunday at the Terrace Theatre on James Island with several East Coast premieres of new feature films and a flock of shorts and documentaries. Goal: "to bring audiences together through the art and science of film."

Tonight's showcase is the "red-carpet sneak preview" of "Camille," starring Sienna Miller. It will be screened following the 7 p.m. debut of the film short "Pivot."

The screening schedule is broken into blocks, with a ticket price of \$8 per block. Festival passes and tickets are available at the Terrace Theatre box office, 1956 Maybank Highway, or online at www.charlestoniff.com. The Web site also has a complete day-by-day schedule.

Hank Garland was a legend, not only among the guitarists who revered his work but to musicians of every stripe.

Born in Cowpens in 1930, he made his first acquaintance with the guitar at age 6. Ten years later, he was in Nashville, flopping in Ma Upchurch's boarding house and setting the stage

for a breakthrough. It came not long after his 19th birthday, when Garland recorded his million-selling hit "Sugar Foot Rag."

Though best known as a studio musician who riffed on Elvis Presley recordings from 1958 to 1961, Garland also played alongside many of the top country music stars of the late '50s and early '60s — Patsy Cline, Brenda Lee, Hank Williams Sr. and Marty Robbins, among them. He rocked with the Everly Brothers and Roy Orbison, and branched into jazz with artists of the caliber of Charlie

"Bird" Parker and George Shearing.

Quite a resume.

And it's a career rivaled in his own sphere by Garland's chronicler, filmmaker Rick Bieber, writer-producer-director of the indie biopic "Crazy." The film screens Friday at the Terrace Theatre following a 4 p.m. showing of the film short "Jitterbug."

They're part of the inaugural Charleston International Film Festival, which runs today through Sunday at the Terrace.

To call the film a labor of love for Bieber, former chief executive of HBO Pictures, doesn't quite say it.

"The story originally was brought to me by the fellow who became executive producer of the movie, Ray Scherr," said Bieber, a long-time writer and producer who is making his directing debut. "Ray had been introduced to the Garland family 10 years ago. He felt this was a classic story. And the more Ray told me the more intrigued I became. It's a compelling story on several levels.

"True stories appeal to me because they resonate so much more. It's really about something: not only a slice of life of Nashville and the culture of the time, but a film about artists' rights, an issue that's as relevant today as ever. Hank was very protective of the rights of other artists, as well as his own, which rubbed some people the wrong way."

"Crazy" also is a very personal drama about the tempestuous relationship Hank (played in the film by newcomer Waylon Payne) had with his wife, Evelyn (Ali Larter).

A car crash in 1961 left Garland in a coma. Emerging from its grip several months later, he had to relearn how to walk, talk, and play the guitar. He was never quite the same, but his legacy already had been secured. Walter Louis Garland died on Dec. 27, 2004 in Jacksonville, Fla., two weeks before Bieber began principal photography.

"Hank remains a fascinating, rebellious character, a brilliant musician who moved effortlessly from country to rock to jazz," said Bieber, currently in Winston-Salem in pre-production for his second directorial effort, "The 5th Quarter," a "Rudy"-esque true story focusing on Wake Forest University's milestone 2006 football season.

Bieber has produced or been executive producer on several notable feature films, has produced or been responsible for the production of more than 30 telefilms and cable movies, has owned and operated his own independent company — Stonebridge Entertainment, with then-partner Michael Douglas — and run an affiliated record label. Directing was a natural progression.

"I've been writing for years, but directing was something I'd only considered. Doing it was

a function of finding the right time and the right project. And this was it — a joyous experience."

Reach **Bill Thompson** at bthompson@postandcourier.com or 937-5707.

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