

Coming home for Cain's

Oklahoma native returns to Tulsa for documentary about concert venue

BY D. RAY TUTTLE
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TULSA – Tate Wittenberg's passion for live music is fueling the filmmaker's effort to create a two-hour documentary about the legendary Cain's Ballroom.

Raisin' Cain is about the impact Cain's Ballroom has had on the national music industry for more than 80 years – from launching legends to creating musical styles. The documentary will examine the connection between Cain's and the musical genres such as blues, country, honky-tonk, rock 'n' roll and Western swing. The film will take an in-depth look at the history of Cain's – one of the oldest still-operating popular music venues in the U.S. – with a nod to modern music from Willie Nelson to punk.

Ultimately, the goal is to share the film nationwide and even worldwide, which would be great publicity for Tulsa and its continuing efforts to bring new life to the Brady District, said Lindley Welch, the project's event and fundraising manager.

"We want to raise the money by the end of the year and show the premiere next March at the Bob Wills Birthday Bash (at Cain's Ballroom)," said Welch. "We want this to be a top-quality documentary. We want to do it the right way."

Wittenberg will look at the diverse music genres through the eyes of the notable and famous entertainers who have performed at Cain's.

Wittenberg, a Claremore native, is working to raise \$1 million to complete the full-length documentary, titled *Raisin' Cain: A History of Cain's Ballroom*. Working through the nonprofit Arts & Humanities Council of Tulsa, Wittenberg plans to use part of the proceeds from the documentary to benefit music education in Tulsa schools. Proceeds will also benefit the Cain's Ballroom museum.

So far, Wittenberg has spent \$70,000 on the project.

"Mainly my own money, plus friends' money, family, whomever I could get," Wittenberg said with a chuckle. "We want to raise the money as soon as possible."

More than half the budget is to cover the costs of film and music rights, Wittenberg said.

"We do not want to just use cover songs; we want the original songs and real footage from past events," Wittenberg said.

As a teen, Wittenberg fell in love with live music featured at Cain's.

"I first came here when I was 14 or 15. My love of live music started here," Wittenberg said. A few years later, he moved to the area north of Cherry Street.

"Cain's was, like, in my backyard," he said.

Wittenberg went to Los Angeles and



Tate Wittenberg is filming a documentary on Tulsa's Cain's ballroom. PHOTO BY RIP STELL

graduated from University of California, Los Angeles and the American Film Institute. For the past decade he's worked in L.A. on feature films, commercials and music videos.

Wittenberg was inspired to launch *Raisin' Cain* when he learned about a documentary on a Texas concert hall.

"It was like, 'Oh my!' Cain's is much more legendary," Wittenberg said. "I knew I had to do this project because of

my love of this place and its rich history."

Welch echoed Wittenberg's opinion.

"We have this legendary, iconic landmark," Welch said. "We just returned from South by Southwest and the (trailer from the) film received a tremendous response," Welch said, referring to the annual music, film and interactive conference and festival in Austin, Texas.

Wittenberg wants to pay homage to not only the music, but also the rowdy

past of Cain's Ballroom, which was built in 1924 and acquired the name Cain's in 1930.

"This has been a rip-roaring place through the years," Wittenberg said. "This has been a dream project of mine to turn my love of live music into a film that will draw attention to this place and attract people here from around the world."