

‘The Pardon’ Chronicles Salvation of Notorious Murderess

The Pardon, a movie based on a sensational murder case that attracted national headlines, tells a timeless story of love, forgiveness and redemption that is just as relevant today as it was when a Louisiana jury convicted Toni Jo Henry and sentenced her to death in the early 1940s.

The film, shot in the Shreveport, La. area with most of the action set there and in Lake Charles, will hold a special premiere in New Orleans on March 13 before debuting in theaters in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Shreveport, Lafayette and Lake Charles on March 22.

“Because Toni Jo was beautiful, she instantly became a notorious celebrity, drawing almost unparalleled media attention,” said Tom Anton, who directed the film and co-wrote the script with his wife, Sandi Russell. “Only the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and America’s entry into World War II grabbed more headlines.”

Newspaper articles and transcripts from Henry’s trials formed the basis of the script.

After being abused as a child, Henry left home and turned to a life of drugs and prostitution. While working in a brothel in Shreveport, she met the love of her life, Claude “Cowboy” Henry, a handsome boxer. With his help, she kicked her drug habit and quit working as a prostitute. Soon after they married, and just as his boxing career started to take off, he was arrested during a trip to Texas for killing a police officer years earlier and sentenced to life in prison.

In desperate need of money for her husband’s appeal, Henry and

an accomplice, Finnon "Arkie" Burks, conceived an ill-fated plan to rob a bank. Needing a car, they abducted, shot and killed J.P. Calloway, who had picked them up hitchhiking, on Valentine's Day 1940. Who actually fired the shot remains a mystery.

Against the backdrop of this action at the start of the film, the real drama begins to unfold during Henry's trial as she is transformed from a hardened criminal into a woman who accepts God's love and forgiveness.

"*The Pardon* is a story about love and forgiveness and compassion ... about a woman who has never loved or been loved. When she is loved, it changes her life," said Jaime King (*Pearl Harbor* and *Hart of Dixie*), who plays Henry. "This woman's life actually became better after she was put in jail where she was finally surrounded by people who cared for her and truly loved her. God works in strange ways."

Featuring a dynamic performance from King, *The Pardon* also includes Academy Award nominee John Hawkes (*Winter's Bone* and *The Sessions*) as Henry's murder accomplice, Jason Lewis (*Sex and the City* and *Mr. Brooks*) as her husband, M.C. Gainey (*Lost*, *Wild Hogs*, *Sideways* and *Con Air*) as the jailer and T. J. Thyne (*Bones*) as the priest.

"I hope that audiences will see this movie and have compassion for those less fortunate in their upbringing—be not so quick to judge what they don't understand," Anton said.

Russell added, "My dream for this movie is that the audience will leave a little more forgiving and grateful for a forgiving God."