

### **Folk Singer Pete Seeger Dies In NY**

#### **News**

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NEW YORK (AP) - Buoyed by his characteristically soaring spirit, the surging crowd around him and a pair of canes, Pete Seeger walked through the streets of Manhattan leading an Occupy Movement protest in 2011.



Though he would later admit the attention embarrassed him, the moment brought back so many feelings and memories as he instructed yet another generation of young people how to effect change through song and determination - as he had done over the last seven decades as a history-sifting singer and ever-so-gentle rabble-rouser.

"Be wary of great leaders," he told The Associated Press two days after the march. "Hope that there are many, many small leaders."

The banjo-picking troubadour who sang for migrant workers, college students and star-struck presidents in a career that introduced generations of Americans to their folk music heritage died Monday at the age of 94. Seeger's grandson, Kitama Cahill-Jackson, said his grandfather died peacefully in his sleep around 9:30 p.m. at New York Presbyterian Hospital, where he had been for six days. Family members were with him.

"He was chopping wood 10 days ago," Cahill-Jackson recalled.

With his lanky frame, use-worn banjo and full white beard, Seeger was an iconic figure in folk music who outlived his peers. He performed with the great minstrel Woody Guthrie in his younger days and wrote or co-wrote "If I Had a Hammer," "Turn, Turn, Turn," "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" and "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine." He lent his voice against Hitler and nuclear power. A cheerful warrior, he typically delivered his broadsides with an affable air and his fingers poised over the strings of his banjo.

In 2011, the canes kept Seeger from carrying his beloved instrument while he walked nearly 2 miles with hundreds of protesters swirling around him holding signs and guitars. With a simple gesture - extending his friendship - Seeger gave the protesters and even their opponents a moment of brotherhood the short-lived movement sorely needed.

When a policeman approached, Tao Rodriguez-Seeger said at the time he feared his grandfather would be hassled.

"He reached out and shook my hand and said, 'Thank you, thank you, this is beautiful,'" Rodriguez-Seeger said. "That really did it for me. The cops recognized what we were about. They wanted to help our march. They actually wanted to protect our march because they saw something beautiful. It's very hard to be anti-something beautiful."

That was a message Seeger spread his entire life.

With The Weavers, a quartet organized in 1948, Seeger helped set the stage for a national folk

revival. The group - Seeger, Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert and Fred Hellerman - churned out hit recordings of "Goodnight Irene," "Tzena, Tzena" and "On Top of Old Smokey."

Seeger also was credited with popularizing "We Shall Overcome," which he printed in his publication "People's Song" in 1948. He later said his only contribution to the anthem of the civil rights movement was changing the second word from "will" to "shall," which he said "opens up the mouth better."

"Every kid who ever sat around a campfire singing an old song is indebted in some way to Pete Seeger," Arlo Guthrie once said.

His musical career was always braided tightly with his political activism, in which he advocated for causes ranging from civil rights to the cleanup of his beloved Hudson River. Seeger said he left the Communist Party around 1950 and later renounced it. But the association dogged him for years.

He was kept off commercial television for more than a decade after tangling with the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1955. Repeatedly pressed by the committee to reveal whether he had sung for Communists, Seeger responded sharply: "I love my country very dearly, and I greatly resent this implication that some of the places that I have sung and some of the people that I have known, and some of my opinions, whether they are religious or philosophical, or I might be a vegetarian, make me any less of an American."

He was charged with contempt of Congress, but the sentence was overturned on appeal.

Seeger called the 1950s, years when he was denied broadcast exposure, the high point of his career. He was on the road touring college campuses, spreading the music he, Guthrie, Huddie "Lead Belly" Ledbetter and others had created or preserved.

"The most important job I did was go from college to college to college to college, one after the other, usually small ones," he told The Associated Press in 2006. " ... And I showed the kids there's a lot of great music in this country they never played on the radio."

His scheduled return to commercial network television on the highly rated Smothers Brothers variety show in 1967 was hailed as a nail in the coffin of the blacklist. But CBS cut out his Vietnam protest song, "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy," and Seeger accused the network of censorship.

He finally got to sing it five months later in a stirring return appearance, although one station, in Detroit, cut the song's last stanza: "Now every time I read the papers/That old feelin' comes on/We're waist deep in the Big Muddy/And the big fool says to push on."

Seeger's output included dozens of albums and single records for adults and children.

He appeared in the movies "To Hear My Banjo Play" in 1946 and "Tell Me That You Love Me, Junie Moon" in 1970. A reunion concert of the original Weavers in 1980 was filmed as a documentary titled "Wasn't That a Time."

By the 1990s, no longer a party member but still styling himself a communist with a small C, Seeger was heaped with national honors.

Official Washington sang along - the audience must sing was the rule at a Seeger concert - when it lionized him at the Kennedy Center in 1994. President Bill Clinton hailed him as "an inconvenient artist who dared to sing things as he saw them."

Seeger was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1996 as an early influence. Ten years later, Bruce Springsteen honored him with "We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions," a rollicking

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reinterpretation of songs sung by Seeger. While pleased with the album, Seeger said he wished it was "more serious." A 2009 concert at Madison Square Garden to mark Seeger's 90th birthday featured Springsteen, Dave Matthews, Eddie Vedder and Emmylou Harris among the performers.

Seeger was a 2014 Grammy Awards nominee in the Best Spoken Word category, which Stephen Colbert won.

Seeger's sometimes ambivalent relationship with rock was most famously on display when Dylan "went electric" at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival.

Witnesses say Seeger became furious backstage as the amped-up band played, though just how furious is debated. Seeger dismissed the legendary tale that he looked for an ax to cut Dylan's sound cable, and said his objection was not to the type of music but only that the guitar mix was so loud you couldn't hear Dylan's words.

Seeger maintained his reedy 6-foot-2 frame into old age, though he wore a hearing aid and conceded that his voice was pretty much shot. He relied on his audiences to make up for his diminished voice, feeding his listeners the lines and letting them sing out.

"I can't sing much," he said. "I used to sing high and low. Now I have a growl somewhere in between."

Nonetheless, in 1997 he won a Grammy for best traditional folk album, "Pete."

Seeger was born in New York City on May 3, 1919, into an artistic family whose roots traced to religious dissenters of colonial America. His mother, Constance, played violin and taught; his father, Charles, a musicologist, was a consultant to the Resettlement Administration, which gave artists work during the Depression. His uncle Alan Seeger, the poet, wrote "I Have a Rendezvous With Death."

Pete Seeger said he fell in love with folk music when he was 16, at a music festival in North Carolina in 1935. His half-brother, Mike Seeger, and half-sister, Peggy Seeger, also became noted performers.

He learned the five-string banjo, an instrument he rescued from obscurity and played the rest of his life in a long-necked version of his own design. On the skin of Seeger's banjo was the phrase, "This machine surrounds hate and forces it to surrender" - a nod to his old pal Guthrie, who emblazoned his guitar with "This machine kills fascists."

Dropping out of Harvard in 1938 after two years as a disillusioned sociology major, he hit the road, picking up folk tunes as he hitchhiked or hopped freights.

"The sociology professor said, 'Don't think that you can change the world. The only thing you can do is study it,'" Seeger said in October 2011.

In 1940, with Guthrie and others, he was part of the Almanac Singers and performed benefits for disaster relief and other causes.

He and Guthrie also toured migrant camps and union halls. He sang on overseas radio broadcasts for the Office of War Information early in World War II. In the Army, he spent 3½ years in Special Services, entertaining soldiers in the South Pacific, and made corporal.

He married Toshi Seeger on July 20, 1943. The couple built their cabin in Beacon after World War II and stayed on the high spot of land by the Hudson River for the rest of their lives together. The couple raised three children. Toshi Seeger died in July at age 91.

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The Hudson River was a particular concern of Seeger's. He took the sloop Clearwater, built by volunteers in 1969, up and down the Hudson, singing to raise money to clean the water and fight polluters.

He also offered his voice in opposition to racism and the death penalty. He got himself jailed for five days for blocking traffic in Albany in 1988 in support of Tawana Brawley, a black teenager whose claim of having been raped by white men was later discredited. He continued to take part in peace protests during the war in Iraq, and he continued to lend his name to causes.

"Can't prove a damn thing, but I look upon myself as old grandpa," Seeger told the AP in 2008 when asked to reflect on his legacy. "There's not dozens of people now doing what I try to do, not hundreds, but literally thousands. ... The idea of using music to try to get the world together is now all over the place."