

Pete Seeger – Bio

Pete Seeger was born 3rd May 1919 in Patterson, New York. His mother Constance [de Clyver Edson] was a violinist and teacher, while his father Charles was a musicologist and conductor, and both served on the faculty at Juilliard. Charles Seeger had previously been, for a time, a music professor at the University of California at Berkeley. After divorcing Constance, Charles Seeger married folk music collector Ruth Porter Crawford. Pete has two half-siblings Mike [b. 15th August 1933] and Peggy [b. 17th June 1935] and both became musicians. Mike Seeger was a founding member of the New Lost City Ramblers, while Peggy lived and worked in the U.K. for a time and was married to the late Ewan MacColl [d. 1989].

Aged thirteen Pete began subscribing to the New Masses, a Marxist publication edited by Michael Gold. In 1935 Pete accompanied his father to a Folk Song and Dance Festival in Asheville, North Carolina, where he first heard a five string banjo. It was a case of 'love at first hearing.' With the intention of becoming a journalist, Pete enrolled at Harvard as a Sociology major, but never completed the degree course. Pete then moved to New York, and also worked for a time with Alan Lomax [whom he had met through his father Charles] at the Archives of American Folk Music in D.C. Around 1939/1940 while working as an assistant at the archive, Pete sought out performers like blues singer Leadbelly, Kentucky based banjoist Rufus Crisp, and labour militant Aunt Molly Jackson. By this stage Pete had also become an accomplished musician.

On 3rd March 1940 in New York, Pete Seeger met Woody Guthrie at a benefit concert for California's migrant-worker. Later, with Lee Hays, Pete Hawes and Millard Lampell the pair formed the Almanac Singers, a loose musical aggregation that also saw contributions from Angas "Sis" Cunningham [with her husband Gordon Friesen, they founded and edited **Broadside Magazine**], Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, Leadbelly, Josh White, Burl Ives, Richard Dyer-Bennett and others. By the time the U.S. entered WWII, the group had gained a deal of popularity via their recordings, radio broadcasts and concert appearances. In 1942 Seeger and some other Almanacs were drafted, by which time the group's left-wing political affiliations had come to light. Pete went on to serve in the Army for three years. Toshi Ohta, who had performed with Margo Meyer's American Square Dancing Group, married Seeger during 1943. Seeger, the Lomaxes and Cunningham set up the Almanac People's Music Library. Following his discharge from the army, Pete and others created the songwriter's union, People's Songs Inc. and they began publishing a magazine, but had to declare bankruptcy three years later. Pete left the American Communist Party circa 1950.

During the late 1940's, Seeger and Lee Hays composed "If I Had A Hammer," and the pair went on to form The Weavers, with Fred Hellerman and Ronnie Gilbert. In 1950 the group scored a # 1 single with Leadbelly's "Goodnight Irene" while the B Side "Tzena, Tzena, Tzena" peaked at # 2. In the ensuing years other hits followed, including "On Top Of Old Smoky," "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine," "So Long [It's Been Good To Know You]" and "Wimoweh." By 1952 The Weavers became meshed in the H.U.A.C./McCarthy investigation and Seeger and Hays were eventually blacklisted. As a reaction to his appearance before H.U.A.C., in 1956 Seeger composed "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" and the same year was indicted for contempt of Congress. Five years later Pete was sentenced to serve one year in prison but the verdict was rescinded during 1962. Although Seeger continued to perform with The Weavers – when they could get a booking, he finally departed the group in 1958 and was replaced by Erik Darling of The Tarriers.

From the ashes of People's Songs the folk music publication **Sing Out!** was founded, and continues to this day helmed by Mark Moss. Pete has been known to submit the odd contribution. Having performed in a solo capacity on a number of previous occasions, post The Weavers Seeger went on to tour on the college circuit and appear at left-wing summer camps. He recorded extensively for Folkways Records during this period. Setting a portion of the Book of Ecclesiastes to music, in 1962 Pete wrote "Turn! Turn! Turn! [To Everything There Is a Season]" and three years later it became the title of The Byrds sophomore album [U.S. # 17, and U.K. # 11 Chart Album] while the song became a # 1 U.S. Pop Chart single.

Seeger helped with the organization of the original Newport Folk Festivals, and was present when, assisted by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Bob Dylan 'went electric' during the 1965 event. During the 1960's Seeger was a committed supporter of the Civil Rights movement, befriending the Martin Luther

King [d. 1968], and “We Shall Overcome,” Pete’s version of an old spiritual, becoming the movement’s anthem. Seeger also campaigned against the Vietnam War and when he appeared on television’s Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour he pointedly performed “Waist Deep In The Big Muddy.” During the late ‘60’s, and through the 70’s and ‘80’s Seeger continued performing benefits for numerous environmental, social and political causes, including prominent involvement in the Clearwater Project to clean up the Hudson. The sloop Clearwater was launched into the Hudson River in 1969, and continues to ply its waters.

Sing Out! published Pete’s autobiography “**Where Have All The Flowers Gone?**” during 1993. In December the following year, at the Kennedy Center, Pete was awarded the National Medal of Art. In 1996 Seeger was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and he was also awarded the Harvard Arts Medal. “**Pete**” won the 1996 Grammy for Best Traditional Folk Album, and during 1999 in Cuba was awarded the Felix Varela Medal [it’s the nation’s highest honour for “*humanistic and artistic work in defense of the environment and against racism*”]. In April 2006 Bruce Springsteen release an album titled “**We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions**” which featured material popularized by Pete, but significantly, not penned by the musician. Later that year an extended version “**We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions - American Land Edition**” was released, featuring one Seeger composition. The original release went on to pick up the Grammy for Best Traditional Folk Album. A live recording, released on 2CD+DVD, titled “**Bruce Springsteen With The Sessions Band: Live in Dublin**” followed in June 2007. In 2006 old recordings by Seeger and others, were sequenced precisely in the order of the Springsteen album and released as “**Songs Covered By Bruce Springsteen.**”

In 1998 Pete began an ongoing recording relationship with Jim Musselman’s label Appleseed Recordings which has, to date, seen the release of “**Where Have All the Flowers Gone: The Songs Of Pete Seeger, Volume 1,**” “**If I Had A Song: The Songs Of Pete Seeger, Volume 2**” – which displayed the inscription around the perimeter of Pete’s banjo face “*This machine surrounds hate and forces it to surrender,*” “**Seeds: The Songs of Pete Seeger, Volume 3**” and “**At 89.**” A musician, singer, songwriter, folklorist, labour activist, environmentalist and peace advocate, Pete Seeger may truly be the last great American.

Discography [comprehensive, but in all probability incomplete - excludes recordings by the Almanac Singers and The Weavers] - “**Lonesome Train**” [1943] ; “**America’s Favorite Songs**” [1943] ; “**Songs For Victory**” [1943/44] ; “**Folksay I-VI**” [1943] ; “**Lonesome Valley**” [1946] ; “**Songs For Political Action**” [1946] ; “**Roll The Union On**” [1947] ; “**Darling Corey**” [1950] ; “**Songs To Grow On-Vol. 2**” [1951] ; “**Songs To Grow On-Vol. 3**” [1951] ; “**Folk Songs Of America And Other Lands**” [1951] ; “**We Wish You A Merry Christmas**” [1952] ; “**American Folk Songs For Children**” [1953] ; “**A Pete Seeger Concert**” [1954] ; “**Pete Seeger Sampler**” [1954] ; “**German Folk Songs**” [1954] ; “**Goofing Off Suite**” [1954] ; “**Hootenanny Tonight!**” [1954] ; “**How To Play The Five String Banjo**” [1954] ; “**Frontier Ballads Vols. I and II**” [1954] ; “**Birds, Beasts, Bugs & Fishes**” [1954] ; “**The Folksinger’s Guitar Guide**” [1955] ; “**Bantu Choral Folk Songs**” [1955] ; “**Folksongs Of Four Continents**” [1955] ; “**Camp Songs**” [1955] ; “**Country Dance Music Washboard Band**” [1956] ; “**With Voices We Sing Together**” [1956] ; “**American Industrial Ballads**” [1956] ; “**Love Songs For Friends And Foes**” [1956] ; “**Studs Terkel’s Weekly Almanac On Folk Music Blues On WFMT With Big Bill Broonzy And Pete Seeger**” [1956] ; “**Big Bill Broonzy And Pete Seeger In Concert**” [1956] ; “**Jewish Children’s Songs And Games**” [1957] ; “**American Favourite Ballads Volume 1**” [1957] ; “**Gazette, Vol. 1**” [1958] ; “**Abiyoyo And Other Story Songs For Children**” [1958] ; “**Pete Seeger And Sonny Terry**” [1958] ; “**Sleep Time**” [1958] ; “**Song And Play Time With Pete Seeger**” [1958] ; “**Sing Out! Hootenanny At Carnegie Hall**” [1959] ; “**American Playparties**” [1959] ; “**Folk Songs For Young People**” [1959] ; “**American Favourite Ballads Volume 2**” [1959] ; “**Nonesuch**” [1959] ; “**Folk Festival At Newport-Vol. 1**” [1959] ; “**American Favourite Ballads Volume 3**” [1959] ; “**Folk Music Of The Newport Folk Festival**” [1960] ; “**Indian Summer**” soundtrack [1960] ; “**The Unfortunate Rake**” [1960] ; “**Highlights Of Pete Seeger At The Village Gate With Memphis Slim & Willie Dixon-Vol. 1**” [1960] ; “**Pete Seeger At The Village Gate-Vol. 2**” [1960] ; “**Songs Of The Civil War**” [1960] ; “**Champlain Valley Songs**” [1960] ; “**Song and Play Time with Pete Seeger**” [1960] ; “**American History In Ballad And Song-Vols. 1 and 2**” [1960/61] ; “**The Rainbow Quest**” [1960] ; “**Old Time Fiddle Tunes**” [1960] ; “**Sing Out With Pete! [1956-61]**” [1961] ; “**American Favourite Ballads Volume 4**” [1961] ; “**Gazette-Vol. 2**” [1961] ; “**Pete Seeger: Story Songs**” [1961] ; “**American Favourite Ballads-Vol. 5**” [1962] ; “**The Bitter And The Sweet**” [1962] ; “**Hootenanny**” [1962] ; “**12-String Guitar as Played by Lead Belly**” [1962] ; “**American Folk, Game And Activity Songs For**

Children” [1962] ; **“The Bitter And The Sweet”** [1962] ; **“Pete! Folk Songs And Ballads”** [1963] ; **“Pete Seeger: Children’s Concert At Town Hall”** [1963] ; **“Broadside Ballads, Vol. 2”** [1963] ; **“We Shall Overcome”** [1963] ; **“Newport Broadside”** [1963] ; **“Ballads Of Sacco And Vanzetti”** [1963] ; **“Broadside Ballads-Vol. 2”** [1963] ; **“Little Boxes And Other Broadside”** [1963] ; **“The Nativity”** [1964] ; **“Strangers And Cousins”** [1964] ; **“Broadside”** [1964] ; **“Songs Of Struggle And Protest, 1930-50”** [1964] ; **“I Can See A New Day”** [1965] ; **WNEW’s Story Of Selma**” [1965] ; **“Dangerous Songs!?”** [1966] ; **“God Bless The Grass”** [1966] ; **“Waist Deep In The Big Muddy & Other Love Songs”** [1967] ; **“Pete Seeger’s Greatest Hits”** [1967] ; **“Pete Seeger Sings Woody Guthrie”** [1967] ; **“Traditional Christmas Carols”** [1967] ; **“Pete Seeger Sings Lead Belly”** [1968] ; **“Pete Seeger Sings And Answers Questions At The Ford Hall Forum In Boston”** [1968] ; **“Pete Seeger Now”** [1968] ; **“A Tribute To Woody Guthrie-Vols. 1 and 2”** [1969] ; **“Tell Me That You Love Me Junie Moon”** soundtrack [1969] ; **“Pete Seeger Young vs. Old”** [1971] ; **“Ballads Of Black America”** [1972] ; **“Rainbow Race”** [1973] ; **“The World Of Pete Seeger”** [1974] ; **“Banks Of Marble And Other Songs”** [1974] ; **“Pete Seeger And Brother Kirk Visit Sesame Street”** [1974] ; **“Clearwater [1969-74]”** [1974] ; **“Canto Obrero”** [1975] ; **“Together In Concert”** with Arlo Guthrie [1975] ; **“Fifty Sail On Newburgh Bay”** [1976] ; **“Clearwater II [1969-77]”** [1977] ; **“The Essential Pete Seeger”** [1978] ; **“Circles And Seasons”** [1979] ; **“Singalong”** [1980] ; **“Precious Friend”** with Arlo Guthrie [1982] ; **“Clearwater Classics”** [1984] ; **“Live At Royal Festival Hall”** [1985] ; **“H.A.R.P.”** with Arlo Guthrie, Holly Near and Ronnie Gilbert [1985] ; **“Can’t You See This System’s Rotten Through And Through”** [1985] ; **“Carry It On: Songs Of American Working People”** with Si Kahn and Jane Sapp [1986] ; **“Greatest Hits”** [1987] ; **“Sings Traditional Christmas Carols”** [1989] ; **“We Shall Overcome: The Complete Carnegie Hall Concert”** [1989] ; **“The Essential Pete Seeger”** [1990] ; **“Singalong: Live at Sanders Theatre, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1980”** [1992] ; **“Pete Seeger’s Family Concert”** [1992] ; **“Live At Newport”** [1993] ; **“Folk Music Of The World”** [1994] ; **“More Together Again: In Concert”** with Arlo Guthrie [1994] ; **“Pete Seeger Concert/Pete! Folk Songs and Ballads”** [1995] ; **“Songs Of The Lincoln / International Brigades And Southern Mountain Hoedown”** [1995] ; **“Pete”** [1996] ; **“A Link In The Chain”** [1996] ; **“American Favorite Ballads”** [1997] ; **“Dangerous Songs”** [1998] ; **“Birds, Beasts, Bugs and Fishes [Little and Big] ”** [1998] ; **“For Kids And Just Plain Folks”** [1998] ; **“If I Had a Hammer: Songs of Hope & Struggle”** [1998] ; **“Where Have All the Flowers Gone: The Songs of Pete Seeger, Volume 1”** [1998] ; **“Headlines and Footnotes: A Collection of Topical Songs”** [1999] ; **“Pioneer Of Folk”** [1999] ; **“Live In Lisbon”** [2000] ; **“Folk Songs For Young People”** [2000] ; **“Traditional Christmas Carols”** [2000] ; **“In Prague 1964”** [2001] ; **“Song And Play Time”** [2001] ; **“If I Had A Song: The Songs of Pete Seeger, Volume 2”** [2001] ; **“Greatest Hits”** [2002] ; **“Seeds: The Songs of Pete Seeger, Volume 3”** [2003] ; **“Stories and Songs for Little Children”** [2005] ; **“Which Side Are You On?”** [2005] ; **“Songs Covered By Bruce Springsteen”** [2006] ; **“At 89”** [2008] :

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