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NEW YORK FOLKLORE
129 Jay Street
Schenectady, NY 12305
518/346-7008
Fax 518/346-6617
Email: info@nyfolklore.org
<http://www.nyfolklore.org>

A Song For Pete Seeger

BY JOE STEAD

[Editor's note: Just a few weeks before Pete Seeger died, we received this email from folksinger and folklorist Joe Stead on January 10, 2014.]

Pete Seeger (God bless him) seems to go on forever. He turned me on to folk music in 1955, and he's turned on millions more both before and since. He may well have influenced you. In March 1996 when recovering in hospital from a pulmonary embolism that I managed to obtain flying to and from America, I wrote a song about his life from the thirties through to the seventies. I managed to get it into five verses, so I must have left a lot out!

I guess I've sort of kept the song hidden away since 1996, but if you are anything like me, you are probably on the lookout for songs other people are not singing. And my song about Pete might just be one of those songs!!!

If you would like to sing it, I would be most honoured. It's published here in Great Britain by Fore Lane Music, but that doesn't mean you can't make your own amendments, indeed you might like to write another verse to cover the period from the seventies through till now! I own Fore Lane Music, by the way, so feel free. There is one very strange chord tucked away in there; if you need help, contact me.

*I've enclosed the words at the bottom of this letter. You can hear the song sung in strict timing if you go to my web page (joestead.com), where it can be found on two albums *Extravagant Schemes* and *Miles* from Halifax. The song is called "Just Another Folksinger"—because that is how Pete sees himself. You can find me doing it live at a folk club in Phoenix, Arizona (complete with rambling introduction), if you visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8HdYo-CFs0>.*

Thank you for reading this thus far. Keep smiling, keep singing and keep well!!!

Just Another Folksinger

I first saw Pete Seeger at St Pancras Town Hall Theatre on October 4, 1959. I was already a folk music enthusiast, but this performance by Pete totally locked me on. Seeger the catalyst, Seeger the idealist, Seeger the friend, has surely

been the inspiration for many performers. To me, he is the Godfather of Folk Music. Perhaps the biggest thrill in my career was traveling across the Atlantic in April 1995 to do just one concert with the man. I had always intended to write a song about him, preferably before one of us died, and never quite got around to it. Then, in March 1996, I returned from another tour in the US with a deep vein thrombosis in the right leg. Apparently, I had spent 12 days humping through Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware unaware of just how ill I was. Upon my arrival back in Britain, I was rushed immediately into hospital whereupon it was discovered that the blood clot was on the move around my body. My deep vein thrombosis had turned into a pulmonary embolism. I suddenly realized that if my Pete Seeger song was ever to be written, now was the time. This is the result.

Do you remember those days in the thirties, when you wandered the country alone?

A young and self exiled traveller, searching perhaps for a home,
In your wildest of dreams, such extravagant schemes,
Must have seemed a light year away,
But banjo in hand, you travelled the land,
And you dreamt of a far better day.

And was it fun in the forties, with Woody and Millard and Lee,
As you sang for the freedom of workers,
in an Almanac fraternity,
As you made up the rhyme, "Wasn't that a time,"

To be watching those at your back,
But damn it instead, you were looking ahead,
With Toshi by your side you attacked.

As a Weaver of song in the fifties, you spread a great warmth through the land,
But equality and friendship world over was not what your government planned,
For McCarthy was there, and a chill filled the air,

As they pointed the finger of blame,
But through it all, together with Paul,
(Robeson)
You sang and you both overcame.

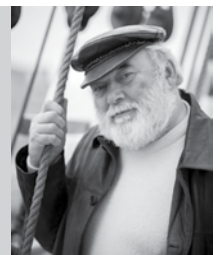
And what did you make of the sixties,
Presidents in the Muddy waste deep,
And the crimes that your country committed,
all the lives that were lost, did you weep?,
And so proudly you sang, anti-Vietnam,
Whilst the wounded came home from the war,
They called you a traitor, a red agitator,
Whilst you and a few asked "What for?"

So you spent most your life swimming upstream,
fighting odds stacked as high as a wall,
Whilst some claimed amendments around you,
you stood as you sang, straight and tall,
And whilst some people dithered, you built boats and cleaned rivers,
Spoke out when others were scared,
And your obituary, it must surely be,
Thank The Lord, thank The Lord, that he cared. ▼

© Joe Stead, *Fore Lane Music, March 1996*

Referred to as a legend by some, Joe Stead, who once met Paul Robeson, is certainly a folklorist of some repute on numerous aspects of folklore. As a disciple of Pete Seeger, he had discovered folk

music in the late 1950s, visiting the many, now infamous folk clubs that had sprung up around Soho at the time. Since those very early days, Joe has played at all the major folk festivals in Britain and has toured America more times than he can count. He has worked in concert with Pete and recorded him on three LPs to raise funds for British miners while Pete was in London. Joe is the founding member of the group "Kimber's Men," who concentrate on songs of the sea. Photo by Darren Flemming.



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