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America's Last True Folk Hero

BY MICHAEL D'ANTUONO

In this day and age of self-aggrandizing pop stars, it is hard for today's generation to imagine that there ever existed a selfless singer of song who was only concerned with the causes he sang about and not his celebrity.

Well, there was a man of such integrity. I'm talking about our last American folk hero, Pete Seeger. A champion of the disenfranchised since the 1940s, Pete railed against war, pollution, racism, greed, and social injustice for eight decades. He bravely risked a 10-year prison sentence for defying Senator Joe McCarthy's witch hunt in the 1950s and popularized the civil rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome," for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s historic march in the 1960s. His anti-war song, "Knee Deep in the Big Muddy," became a force in ending the Vietnam War. He founded the Clearwater organization, which continues to clean up the Hudson River. Right up until the very end, the 94-year-old icon was fighting the good fight. At 94, he performed at the Farm Aid concert, leading Willie Nelson, Dave Matthews, and Neil Young in song against fracking. I spoke and exhibited my art at a gun control rally that Pete had organized and planned to perform at this past January 2014. The only reason he wasn't there was because it coincided with his wake that was taking place about a half a mile down the road.

It's because he sang for things like justice and the environment, and not for record sales, that he is so admired. Besides being in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and



Michael D'Antuono and Pete Seeger at Pete's house. Photo by David Bernz.

winning a Grammy at 90, he was awarded the National Medal of Arts and a Kennedy Center Honor. He was chosen to sing at President Obama's historic first inauguration. Bruce Springsteen devoted an entire album to Pete's songs.

As an artist who's known for creating work

that challenges people to think more deeply about many of the same issues that Pete sang about, I have been personally inspired by Pete Seeger. That's why I recently took time off from my sociopolitical paintings to create the portrait of Pete titled, "Beacon Of Hope" that hangs in Pete's (and my)



"Beacon of Hope." ©2013 Michael D'Antuono. 48" x 72", oil on canvas. Michael says, "I have been very fortunate to get to know Pete personally and receive his input in creating a poster of this piece to raise money for his Clearwater organizations. I can only aspire to have even a fraction of the positive influence with my art that Pete has had with his, as he is an inspiration to me and many, many others."

hometown of Beacon, NY, where the locals cherish their own national treasure.

There is currently a greatly deserved petition to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize. Somehow, I doubt Kanye West will ever get nominated for a Nobel Prize, un-

less of course he nominates himself. What made Pete so special is that he never cared about accolades—in fact, he disdained them. He only cared about the making the world a fairer place for generations and trying to preserve it for future ones. ▼

Michael D'Antuono is known for making art that challenges people to think more deeply about sociopolitical issues. He perpetuates the historic role of the artist to speak truth to power and spark social change. For more information, visit his website, www.ArtandResponse.com.



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