



Contacts:

Donna Williams, WNET.ORG  
212.560.8030, [WilliamsD@wnet.org](mailto:WilliamsD@wnet.org)  
Donald Lee, WNET.ORG  
212.560.3005, [LeeD@wnet.org](mailto:LeeD@wnet.org)

***American Masters Joan Baez: How Sweet the Sound***

**JOAN BAEZ**

Joan Baez and Steve Earle

*Day After Tomorrow* now forms (or completes) a trilogy of albums—with Steve Earle as a primal link – that began with 2003’s *Dark Chords On a Big Guitar*, Joan’s first new album of studio recordings in six years (at the time) and followed-up with 2005’s *Bowery Songs*, her first live album in ten years (at the time). Both earlier albums brought Joan’s history of mutual mentoring up into the new millennium introducing new collaborations with younger artists and songwriters, a hallmark of her recordings and performances ever since she first stepped on a stage.

*Dark Chords On a Big Guitar* was a fresh collection from contemporary songwriters whose work resonates with Joan. The songs were drawn from the pens of Ryan Adams, Greg Brown (two songs including “Rexroth’s Daughter,” whose lyric gives the album its title), Caitlin Cary, Joe Henry, Natalie Merchant, Josh Ritter and Gillian Welch & David Rawlings. The album closed with Joan’s definitive version of Steve Earle’s “Christmas In Washington.”

In August 2003, just prior to the September release of *Dark Chords On a Big Guitar*, Joan was invited by Emmylou Harris (who credits Joan as a primary influence) and Steve Earle to join them in the U.K. for two Concerts For a Landmine Free World. Joan returned to the U.K. in January-February 2004 for a sold-out 16-city tour (with Ritter opening). The conclusion of that tour coincided with the fifth annual BBC2 Folk Awards where Joan presented Steve Earle with the Lifetime Achievement Award—the same honor she received when the awards were inaugurated in 2000. Joan and Steve joined together that spring for a U.S. tour.

Joan returned to New York City in November 2004 for two nights of live recording at the Bowery Ballroom on the Lower East Side the Friday and Saturday after Election Day. The resulting album, *Bowery Songs*, captured the message of that fateful week, from her opening a cappella benediction of the patriotic “Finlandia” to the prophetic and telling versions of Bob Dylan’s “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue” and Steve Earle’s “Jerusalem,” the album’s two closing tracks.

The spirits of Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan were felt throughout *Bowery Songs*—Joan has been singing Woody’s “Deportees (Plane Wreck At Los Gatos)” since the 1960s, but this was her first live release of the song. Dylan’s “Farewell, Angelina” was the title tune of Joan’s 1965 LP that contained two Guthrie songs and four by Dylan, one of which was “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue,” a *Bowery* song. Joan also sang “Seven Curses,” Dylan’s 1963 adaptation of the Child ballad “The Maid Freed From the Gallows” aka “Anathea” (and a stunning reminder of Joan’s unmatched guitar skills.)

As on previous live albums, *Bowery Songs* spanned Joan’s entire career—from “Silver Dagger” (opening song of her first solo LP, 1960), “Jackaroe” (first heard on 1963’s *In Concert Part 2*, later transmogrified by the Grateful Dead), and “Joe Hill” (sung at Woodstock), through the venerable Irish “Carrickfergus” (from 1989’s *Speaking Of Dreams*) and the songs from 2003’s *Dark Chords On a Big Guitar*. It was also noted that four of the *Bowery Songs* were previously unrecorded by Joan: “Finlandia,” “Seven Curses,” “Dink’s Song,” and “Jerusalem.”

*Bowery Songs* reminds us that at crucial moments during her long and storied career—which is to say at crucial moments in America’s history over the past five decades—Joan has recorded and released live performance albums that have served as critical barometers of our times. So *Bowery Songs* was framed in a rich tradition capturing the work of an artist whose finest moments often happen onstage.

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