

# American MASTERS

**thirteen**  
WNET NEW YORK

450 West 33rd Street  
New York, NY 10001-2605  
thirteen.org

## press information



**PBS**

AMERICAN MASTERS  
is produced for PBS  
by Thirteen/WNET  
New York

### Timeline

#### AMERICAN MASTERS Pete Seeger: The Power of Song

*He modestly refers to himself as a “traveling, performing singer and songwriter,” but to his many fans, Pete Seeger is an American icon. For more than six decades, Seeger has used music as a rallying cry and inspired generations of activists and performers. To this day, he pushes on. **AMERICAN MASTERS Pete Seeger: The Power of Song**, which premieres Wednesday, February 27 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings), explores Seeger’s numerous contributions. Below is a timeline of selected highlights from his life and career:*

#### 1919

Born May 3 to Charles and Constance Seeger, music professors whose families traced their ancestry back to the Mayflower.

#### 1927

Parents divorce while fighting over Seeger’s musical education; he experiments with the ukulele and rejects the violin.

#### 1936

Attends Harvard and joins the American Student Union.

#### 1938

Leaves Harvard.

#### 1939

Befriends legendary folk music figures such as the blues singer Leadbelly and labor militant Aunt Molly Jackson; serves as assistant to Alan Lomax at the Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress.

#### 1940

Hitchhikes and rides rails all over the United States, immersing himself in music; gives his first concert performance at a Grapes of Wrath benefit; meets Woody Guthrie; meets Lee Hays and, along with Guthrie and Millard Lampell, forms The Almanac Singers and builds a repertoire of peace and union songs, replacing them with pro-war songs when America enters the second World War.

#### 1942

Drafted into the army.

#### 1943

Before shipping out, marries Toshi-Aline Ohta, the daughter of a Japanese exile of noble descent and an American woman from an old Virginia family, who is interested in photography and progressive

- more -

politics.

**1944**

Stationed in Saipan, where he is put in charge of hospital entertainment; gets idea for *People's Songs*, envisioning a "singing labor movement."

**1945**

Discharged a corporal and leaves the army.

**1948**

Forms The Weavers with Ronnie Gilbert, Lee Hays and Fred Hellerman. The group goes on to popularize "Kisses Sweeter than Wine," "Wimoweh" (a.k.a. "The Lion Sleeps Tonight"), "On Top of Old Smoky" and "Goodnight, Irene"; joins Henry Wallace's presidential campaign as a principal entertainer; writes the first version of *How to Play the Five-String Banjo*.

**1949**

Writes "If I Had a Hammer" with Lee Hays for a benefit for Communist Party leaders being tried under the Smith Act; his car is attacked and his wife and three-year-old son are slightly injured by shattered glass at a Peekskill, New York riot; The Weavers perform at the Greenwich Village nightclub The Village Vanguard; buys a few acres with his wife on a wooded mountainside overlooking the Hudson and begins to build a home.

**Early 1950s**

Meets Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the Highlander Folk School; goes underground and travels around singing.

**1952**

The Weavers go on sabbatical.

**1955**

Subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee and becomes one of the few witnesses called that year who doesn't invoke the Fifth Amendment; writes "Where Have all the Flowers Gone"; The Weavers reunite, defy the blacklist and put on a series of concerts.

**1958**

Begins a solo career.

**1959**

Along with his wife, George and Joyce Wein and others, starts the Newport Folk Festival to celebrate traditional folk musicians and new topical songwriters.

**1961**

Found guilty of contempt of Congress and sentenced to one year in prison for each of 10 charges.

**1962**

The case against him is dismissed on a technicality; meets Bernice Reagon in Albany, Georgia and urges her to form The Freedom Singers.

**1963**

Records live *We Shall Overcome* album at Carnegie Hall; performs at Newport Folk Festival where Bob Dylan goes electric to a jeering crowd.

**1964**

Hits the pop charts with his version of Malvina Reynolds' "Little Boxes."

**1965**

Participates in the Selma to Montgomery March, singing old and collecting new Freedom Songs.

**1965-66**

Hosts a regional folk music show on public television called *Rainbow Quest*, whose guests include Johnny Cash, June Carter, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Doc Watson, and Judy Collins. Thirty-eight hour-long programs are recorded at Newark, N.J. studios, produced by Seeger and his wife with Sholom Rubinstein.

**1966**

Founds environmental group Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Inc., which works to highlight and clean up pollution in the Hudson River; becomes a critic of the Vietnam War and writes "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy."

**1967**

In his first appearance on American commercial television in 17 years, "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy" is censored by CBS when Seeger tries to perform it on the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour (the performance finally airs in 1968).

**1969**

Launches the *Clearwater*, a 106-foot wooden sailing sloop that serves as a moveable classroom, laboratory, stage, and forum.

**1972**

Publication of his book, *The Incomplete Folksinger*, with Jo Metcalf Schwartz.

**1973**

Releases the album *My Rainbow Race*.

**1975**

Releases *Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie Together in Concert*.

**1980**

The Weavers reunite for a pair of shows at Carnegie Hall and later release the performance album *Together Again*.

**1982**

Release of *The Weavers: Wasn't That a Time!* documentary film about the folk group and the events leading up to their reunion concert at Carnegie Hall.

**1992**

Releases *Pete Seeger's Family Concert*.

**1993**

Given the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.

**1994**

Named a Kennedy Center Honoree for being “arguably the most influential folk artist in the United States.”

**1996**

Inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

**1997**

Wins Grammy Award for Best Traditional Folk Album of 1996 for *Pete*.

**2000**

Named a Living Legend by the Library of Congress.

**2001**

In celebration of the 24th Kennedy Center Honors, the Millennium Stage pays tribute to Seeger. The program of film, words and music features Seeger’s friends and family, including grandson Tao Rodriguez-Seeger and Sarah Lee Guthrie, granddaughter of Woody Guthrie.

**2003**

Performs at the annual School of the Americas protest rally; donates The Pete and Toshi Seeger Film Collection to the American Folklife Center. The collection’s 530 reels contain films from 1957-64, including footage from the Seeger family’s 10-month performing tour during 1963-64 that included stops in Japan, Indonesia, India, East and West Africa, Israel, the USSR, and Ireland.

**2007**

Given the Schneider Family Book Award for his children’s picture book *The Deaf Musicians* with poet Paul DuBois Jacobs.

**2008**

Spring release of *Where Have All the Flowers Gone: A Singalong Memoir*.

.....

Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Secrets of the Dead*, *NOW With David Brancaccio*, and *Cyberchase* – as well as the work of Bill Moyers – to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as *The Ethnic Heritage Specials*, *The Thirteen Walking Tours*, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. Thirteen extends the impact of its television productions through educational and community outreach projects – including the Teaching and Learning Celebration – as well as Web sites and other digital media platforms. More information can be found at: [www.thirteen.org](http://www.thirteen.org).

.....

Press Contacts:

**Lisa Batchelder**

Thirteen/WNET New York

212.560.2074

batcheld@thirteen.org

**Caroline Oman**

Thirteen/WNET New York

212.560.3057

oman@thirteen.org