

Sixth Annual Ralph Rinzler Memorial Concert

Ralph Rinzler (1934–94), founding director of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, worked over the years with many gifted musicians and folk artists, doing fieldwork, issuing recordings, and producing concerts. This concert series honors the work of Ralph and his colleagues in conserving, and extending the audience for, traditional expressive culture.

This year's concert is curated by Peggy Seeger. In the essay that follows, Peggy offers a brief autobiographical sketch and a description of how she conceives of the concert.

Ralph first met Peggy at the Swarthmore College Folk Festival in 1954 when he was a freshman at the college. Simultaneously, he heard Peggy's older brother Pete in concert. Ralph was electrified by Pete's banjo playing and by his spirited editorializing. But his imagination was truly captivated by Peggy and her older brother Mike, who played at informal hootenannies. Here were peers, one year his junior and one year his senior, whose vocal and instrumental artistry greatly impressed him. Peggy soon sent Ralph Pete's banjo manual, and he was launched, learning songs and copying banjo styling from Harry Smith's recently released *Anthology of American Folk Music*. In the ensuing years, Ralph and Peggy were frequent companions, and Ralph was profoundly influenced by her, by the people he met



Mike, Peggy, and Pete Seeger, 1993. Photo by Dave Gahr

through her — Peggy's father Charles Seeger, A.L. (Burt) Lloyd, Ewan MacColl, Alan Lomax, and others — and by the British folk revival. Peggy's work as a singer-songwriter was distinctively different from Ralph's work. Ralph never wrote a single song and gravitated from the life of a professional musician towards one in which he built a wider intellectual base for traditional music. And yet I believe much of his practice was inspired by the passion of the folk revivals.

— Kate Rinzler

Kate Rinzler is a Research Associate at the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and coordinates the annual concerts held in honor of her late husband.