

Woody Guthrie's Songs for Children

by Howard Bass and Anthony Seeger

“I want to see you join right in, do what your kids do. Let your kids teach you how to play and how to act these songs out... Get your whole family into the fun. You'll be healthier. You'll feel wealthier. You'll talk wiser. You'll go higher, do better, and live longer here amongst us if you'll jus...do like the kids do. I don't want kids to be grownup, I want to see the grown folks be kids.”

— Woody Guthrie, 1956
(from liner notes to SFW 45035 and SFW 45036)

Woody Guthrie (1912–67) is best known as the author of hundreds of topical songs, and for “This Land Is Your Land.” But he was also an enthusiastic father who wrote songs for children. They are singable, danceable, and memorable. Songs like “Put Your Finger in the Air,” “Car Song,” “Don't Push Me Down,” and “Why Oh Why?” touch on shared experiences in children's lives and have become part of the repertoire of children's singers everywhere. Guthrie's children's recordings were originally issued on Folkways Records, and have been reissued on Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

This concert, sponsored by the National Museum of American History and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, features contemporary performers who have for years known and sung some of Woody Guthrie's children's songs. Ella Jenkins, a leading recording artist for Folkways for over 40 years, is one of the best-known and best-loved children's performers in the country. She has been teaching and inspiring children with songs from

the world over. Tom Paxton has been an integral part of the folk music and songwriting scene since the early 1960s, with many contemporary folk classics to his credit. His adolescence in Oklahoma gives him a special affinity for Woody's songs, and like Woody he has been devoted to getting children to sing. Recently, he has written a number of books for children.

Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer have performed over 10,000 concerts in their career together since 1984. Prolific recording artists, they have also produced many albums by leading folk musicians, and this year were nominated for a Grammy Award in the Children's Recordings category for producing *Dinorock*. Magpie, the duo of Terry Leonino and Greg Artzner, is now in its 27th year and going strong. They are committed to children's and family programs and to environmental causes, which they promote in their concerts and recordings.

The concert is part of a series of events celebrating the remarkable singer, songwriter, and book author, whose life is featured in a traveling exhibition at the National Museum of American History through August 13, 2000. The exhibition was organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and the Woody Guthrie Archives in association with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, and made possible through the generous support of Nissan North America.

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