

The weather conditions are not available. change weather location



**BRING IT HOME**  
Only 10 days left to nominate your community!

ENTER NOW

©NHL

IN THE NEWS

- Liberal senators
- Rob Ford
- Data privacy
- Stephen Hawking

# Pete Seeger dead: folk singer and activist dies at 94

Seeger became famous as a member of The Weavers quartet, formed in 1948

The Associated Press Posted: Jan 28, 2014 1:54 AM ET | Last Updated: Jan 29, 2014 6:14 PM ET



### Stay Connected with CBC News



Pete Seeger dies at 94 2:28



Peter Yarrow sings for Pete Seeger 6:14

- Facebook 10K
- Twitter 1
- 76
- Share 10K
- Email

Pete Seeger, the banjo-picking troubadour who sang for migrant workers, college students and star-struck presidents in a career that introduced generations of Americans to their folk music heritage, died Monday at the age of 94.

Seeger's grandson, Kitama Cahill-Jackson said his grandfather died at New York Presbyterian Hospital, where he'd been for six days. "He was chopping wood 10 days ago," he said.

- Concert celebrates Seeger on his 90th birthday
- Seeger earns American Academy of Arts and Letters honour

Seeger — with his lanky frame, banjo and full white beard — was an iconic figure in folk music. He performed with the great minstrel Woody Guthrie in his younger days and marched with Occupy Wall Street protesters in his 90s, leaning on two canes. He wrote or co-wrote *If I Had a Hammer*, *Turn, Turn, Turn*, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone* and *Kisses Sweeter Than Wine*. He lent his voice against Hitler and nuclear power. A cheerful warrior, he typically delivered his broadsides with an affable air and his banjo strapped on.

"Be wary of great leaders," he told The Associated Press two days after a 2011 Manhattan Occupy march. "Hope that there are many, many small leaders."

## Helped revive folk music

### Related Stories

- Q remembers Pete Seeger

### Must Watch



'They crucified me:' Ukrainian protester (graphic images)

3:25

Dmytro Bulatov says he was kidnapped on Jan. 22 and tortured



Ads for 'the drunk guy in the back of the room'

5:53

Super Bowl ad review and a primer on the theory and practice of how to construct them



'We are still on a journey to the truth,' Kercher sister

8:17

Meredith Kercher's family hold news conference after verdict upheld



China New Year exodus

2:37

All over China people have been on the move to visit relatives for the Lunar New Year

### Most Viewed

- Falling loonie means just more milking of Canadian

Web2PDF

Seeger

- **CBC MUSIC:** Folk legend and outspoken activist Pete Seeger
- Concert celebrates folk icon Pete Seeger on his 90th birthday
- Pete Seeger earns American Academy of Arts and Letters honour

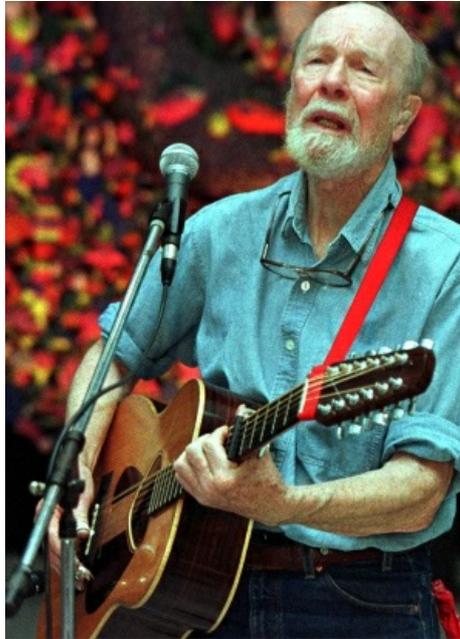
With the Weavers, a quartet organized in 1948, Seeger helped set the stage for a national folk revival. The group — Seeger, Lee Hays, Ronnie Gilbert and Fred Hellerman — churned out hit recordings of *Goodnight Irene*, *Tzena, Tzena* and *On Top of Old Smokey*.

Seeger also was credited with popularizing *We Shall Overcome*, which he printed in his publication *People's Song*, in 1948. He later said his only contribution to the anthem of the civil rights movement was changing the second word from "will" to "shall," which he said "opens up the mouth better."

"Every kid who ever sat around a campfire singing an old song is indebted in some way to Pete Seeger," Arlo Guthrie once said.

- **LISTEN: Peter Yarrow recalls Pete Seeger on As It Happens**

His musical career was always braided tightly with his political activism, in which he advocated for causes ranging from civil rights to the cleanup of his beloved Hudson River. Seeger said he left the Communist Party around 1950 and later renounced it. But the association dogged him for years.



Legendary American folk musician Pete Seeger sings the popular Cuban song *La Guantanamera*, with verses dedicated to Cuban hero Jose Marti in 1999. (Reuters)

He was kept off commercial television for more than a decade after tangling with the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1955. Repeatedly pressed by the committee to reveal whether he had sung for Communists, Seeger responded sharply: "I love my country very dearly, and I greatly resent this implication that some of the places that I have sung and some of the people that I have known, and some of my opinions, whether they are religious or philosophical, or I might be a vegetarian, make me any less of an American."

He was charged with contempt of Congress, but the sentence was overturned on appeal.

Seeger called the 1950s, years when he was denied broadcast exposure, the high point of his career. He was on the road touring college campuses, spreading the music he, Guthrie, Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter and others had created or preserved.

"The most important job I did was go from college to college to college to college, one after the other, usually small ones," he told *The Associated Press* in 2006. "And I showed the kids there's a lot of great music in this country they never played on the radio."

His scheduled return to commercial network television on the highly rated *Smothers Brothers* variety show in 1967 was hailed as a nail in the coffin of the blacklist. But CBS cut out his Vietnam protest song, *Waist Deep in the Big Muddy*, and Seeger accused the network of censorship.

He finally got to sing it five months later in a stirring return appearance, although one

#### 5 famous Pete Seeger songs

Apioneer of the modern folk music movement and an international inspiration of music as a peaceful yet effective means of protest, Pete Seeger wrote, co-wrote or popularized many songs now considered American classics. His best-known songs include:

- *If I Had a Hammer* - An activist tune co-written with the Weavers colleague Lee Hays, it is one of Seeger's most-covered songs.
- *We Shall Overcome* - Adapted from earlier gospel songs and a hymn, the tune became a key song of the Civil Rights movement.
- *Turn, Turn, Turn* - Made famous by The Byrds, the

consumers: Neil Macdonald 2130

- Amanda Knox murder conviction upheld by Italian court
- The state of the union speech Barack Obama would never give 601
- Royal Caribbean cruise leaves 600 people ill
- Michael Schumacher, former F1 champ, being brought out of coma
- Strategic Africa: Why the U.S. and Europe are sending in the troops 701
- Eric Lawson, former Marlboro Man, dies of smoking-related disease
- Sochi Mayor Anatoly Pakhomov says Olympic city has no gays 755
- Pete Seeger dead: folk singer and activist dies at 94
- Rangers hunt for crocodile that killed 12-year-old Australian boy



#### The National

Canada's destination for original journalism and stories with added depth and context.



#### The Lang & O'Leary Exchange

On the day's biggest business stories. Weeknights at 7 p.m. ET on CBC News Network

station, in Detroit, cut the song's last stanza: "Now every time I read the papers/That old feelin' comes on/We're waist deep in the Big Muddy/And the big fool says to push on."

## Inducted into Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

Seeger's output included dozens of albums and single records for adults and children.

He also was the author or co-author of *American Favourite Ballads*, *The Bells of Rhymney*, *How to Play the Five-String Banjo*, *Henscratches and Flyspecks*, *The Incomplete Folksinger*, *The Foolish Frog and Abiyoyo*, *Carry It On*, *Everybody Says Freedom* and *Where Have All the Flowers Gone*.

He appeared in the movies *To Hear My Banjo Play* in 1946 and *Tell Me That You Love Me*, *Junie Moon* in 1970. A reunion concert of the original Weavers in 1980 was filmed as a documentary titled *Wasn't That a Time*.

By the 1990s, no longer a party member but still styling himself a communist with a small C, Seeger was heaped with national honours.

Official Washington sang along — the audience must sing, was the rule at a Seeger concert — when it lionized him at the Kennedy Centre in 1994. Then president Bill Clinton hailed him as "an inconvenient artist who dared to sing things as he saw them."



Pete Seeger received a Distinguished Service award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters at the age of 92. (Joe Giblin/File/The Associated Press)

Seeger was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1996 as an early influence. Ten years later, Bruce Springsteen honoured him with *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions*, a rollicking reinterpretation of songs sung by Seeger. While pleased with the album, Seeger said he wished it was "more serious." A 2009 concert at Madison Square Garden to mark Seeger's 90th birthday featured Springsteen, Dave Matthews, Eddie Vedder and Emmylou Harris among the performers.

Seeger was a 2014 Grammy Awards nominee in the Best Spoken Word category, which was won by Stephen Colbert.

Seeger's sometimes ambivalent relationship with rock was most famously on display when Dylan "went electric" at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival.

Witnesses say Seeger became furious backstage as the amped-up band played, though just how furious is debated. Seeger dismissed the legendary tale that he looked for an axe to cut Dylan's sound cable, and said his objection was not to the type of music but only that the guitar mix was so loud you couldn't hear Dylan's words.

Seeger maintained his reedy 6-foot-2 frame into old age, though he wore a hearing aid and conceded that his voice was pretty much shot. He relied on his audiences to make up for his diminished voice, feeding his listeners the lines and letting them sing out.

"I can't sing much," he said. "I used to sing high and low. Now I have a growl somewhere in between."

Nonetheless, in 1997 he won a Grammy for best traditional folk album, *Pete*.

## A Harvard dropout

song was adapted from an excerpt from the Bible's book of Ecclesiastes.

- *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* - Inspired by a passage from the epic Russian novel *And Quiet Flows the Don*, the song was officially inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame under the folk category.
- *Kisses Sweeter Than Wine* - Working again with the Weavers bandmate Lee Hays, Seeger transformed a Lead Belly tune into this love song that also became a widely covered track.

Seeger was born in New York City on May 3, 1919, into an artistic family whose roots traced to religious dissenters of colonial America. His mother, Constance, played violin and taught; his father, Charles, a musicologist, was a consultant to the Resettlement Administration, which gave artists work during the Depression. His uncle Alan Seeger, the poet, wrote *I Have a Rendezvous With Death*.

#### ■ LISTEN: Q: Remembering Pete Seeger

Pete Seeger said he fell in love with folk music when he was 16, at a music festival in North Carolina in 1935. His half brother, Mike Seeger, and half sister, Peggy Seeger, also became noted performers.

He learned the five-string banjo, an instrument he rescued from obscurity and played the rest of his life in a long-necked version of his own design. On the skin of Seeger's banjo was the phrase, "This machine surrounds hate and forces it to surrender" — a nod to his old pal Guthrie, who emblazoned his guitar with "This machine kills fascists."

Dropping out of Harvard in 1938 after two years as a disillusioned sociology major, he hit the road, picking up folk tunes as he hitchhiked or hopped freights.

"The sociology professor said, 'Don't think that you can change the world. The only thing you can do is study it,'" Seeger said in October 2011.

## Served in the army

In 1940, with Guthrie and others, he was part of the Almanac Singers and performed benefits for disaster relief and other causes.

He and Guthrie also toured migrant camps and union halls. He sang on overseas radio broadcasts for the Office of War Information early in World War II. In the Army, he spent 3½ years in Special Services, entertaining soldiers in the South Pacific, and made corporal.

'The idea of using music to try to get the world together is now all over the place.'

- Pete Seeger, folk singer and activist

Pete and Toshi Seeger were married July 20, 1943. The couple built their cabin in Beacon after World War II and stayed on the high spot of land by the Hudson River for the rest of their lives together. The couple raised three children. Toshi Seeger died in July at age 91.

The Hudson River was a particular concern of Seeger. He took the sloop *Clearwater*, built by volunteers in 1969, up and down the Hudson, singing to raise money to clean the water and fight polluters.

#### ■ CBC MUSIC: Folk legend and outspoken activist Pete Seeger

He also offered his voice in opposition to racism and the death penalty. He got himself jailed for five days for blocking traffic in Albany in 1988 in support of Tawana Brawley, a black teenager whose claim of having been raped by white men was later discredited. He continued to take part in peace protests during the war in Iraq, and he continued to lend his name to causes.

"Can't prove a damn thing, but I look upon myself as old grandpa," Seeger told the AP in 2008 when asked to reflect on his legacy. "There's not dozens of people now doing what I try to do, not hundreds, but literally thousands ... The idea of using music to try to get the world together is now all over the place."

© The Associated Press, 2014

THE CANADIAN PRESS 

Report Typo Send Feedback



## Don't Miss



Web2PDF

converted by Web2PDFConvert.com

<a href="#">Conrad Black stripped of Order of Canada</a>	<a href="#">Keystone XL gets environmental OK from U.S. State Dept.</a>	<b>UPDATED</b> <a href="#">CSEC Snowden docs: MPs grill defence minister on spying revelation</a>	<b>VIDEO</b> <a href="#">Near crash of 2 tractor-trailers, snow plow captured on video</a>	<a href="#">Mexican consul general 'angered' by CBSA in-custody death</a>	<b>PHOTOS</b> <a href="#">Massive boulders nearly flatten Italian farmhouse</a>	<b>UPD</b> <a href="#">Naim victim escape</a>
--	---	--	---	---	--	--



## CBC.ca

- [Aboriginal](#)
- [Books](#)
- [Contests](#)
- [Digital Archives](#)
- [Documentaries](#)
- [Kids](#)
- [Kids' CBC Preschool](#)

- [Kids' CBC Wonder World](#)
- [Music](#)
- [News](#)
- [Parents](#)
- [Program Guide](#)
- [Radio](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Television](#)

- [Subscriptions](#)
- [CBC Player](#)
- [CBC Shop](#)

## CORPORATE

- [About CBC](#)
- [Transparency and Accountability](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Production Facilities](#)
- [Mobile Production Rentals](#)
- [Ombudsman](#)
- [CBC: Get the Facts](#)

- [Independent Producers](#)
- [Pitch a Radio or Audio Program](#)
- [Program and Content Sales](#)
- [Archive Sales](#)
- [Educational Sales](#)
- [Image Research Library & Still Photos](#)
- [Consumer Recordings](#)
- [Digital TV](#)

## STAY CONNECTED

[MOBILE](#) | 
 [RSS](#) | 
 [PODCASTS](#) | 
 MEMBER SERVICES: [NEWSLETTERS & ALERTS](#)

- [Terms Of Use](#)
- [Reuse & Permissions](#)
- [Advertise](#)
- [Privacy](#)
- [Site Map](#)
- [Help](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

Copyright © CBC 2014



[cbc.radio-canada.ca](http://cbc.radio-canada.ca) | 
 [cbc.ca](http://cbc.ca) | 
 [radio-canada.ca](http://radio-canada.ca)