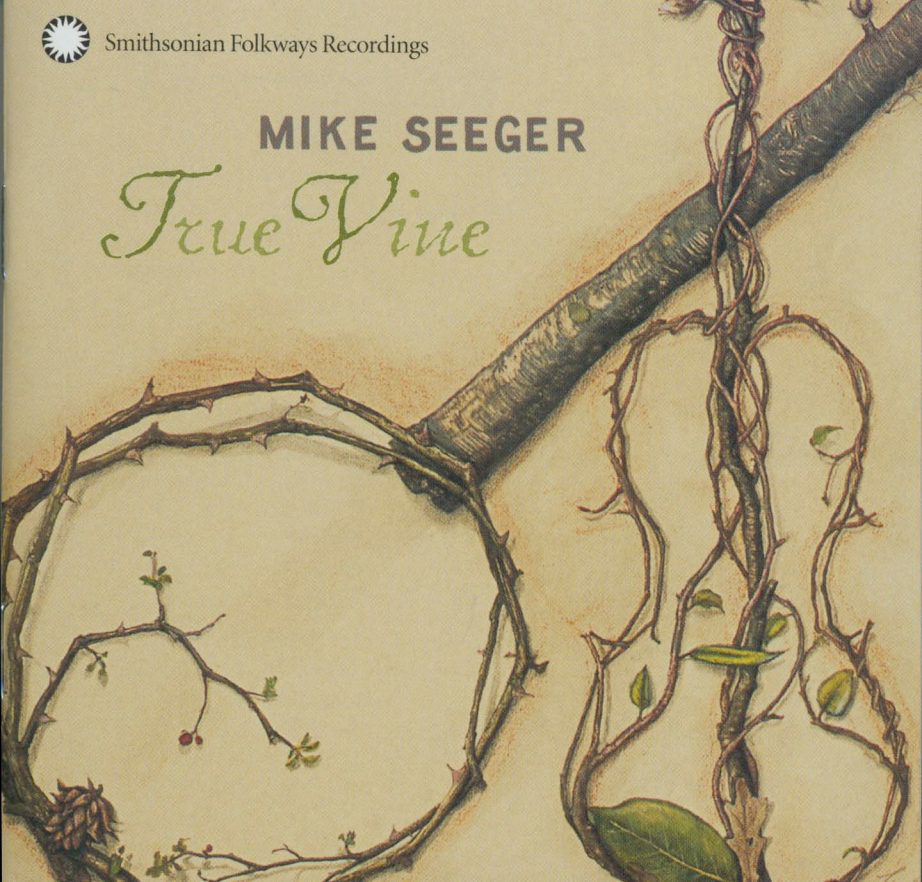




Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

**MIKE SEEGER**

*True Vine*





## MIKE SEEGER *True Vine*

Mountain music legend Ralph Stanley said of six-time Grammy nominee Mike Seeger, "He's got his own style. He's an old-timer, and he does his style just fine." From the fertile ground of American folk music, through the roots of field recordings, vintage discs, and personal encounters with traditional artists, Seeger's creative spirit finds flower again on this solo album. *True Vine* reflects his connection to deep musical roots and represents the latest blossoming of his life-long exploration of diverse traditional musical styles.

Extensive notes 63 minutes

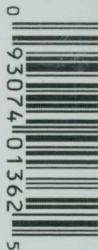
- 1 Breaking Up Ice in the Allegheny 1:47
- 2 Coo Coo Bird 2:38
- 3 Johnson Jinkson 2:52
- 4 Little Rabbit, Where's Your Mammy? 3:18
- 5 The Raftsmen's Song 1:42
- 6 Honeycutt's Holler 0:27
- 7 Did You Ever See the Devil, Uncle Joe? 2:13
- 8 Blow the Horn, Blow 2:10
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- 17 Don't Let Your Deal Go Down 4:06
- 18 I'm Gonna Go Huntin' for the Buffalo 1:39
- 19 Granddad Jim's Waltz 1:56
- 20 The Golden Willow Tree 7:02
- 21 California Cotillion 2:36
- 22 Young Johnnie 3:04
- 23 Sail Away Ladies 3:19



Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

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**True Vine**

Introduction by **Jay Orr**



*M*andolin virtuoso David Grisman tells the story of a board meeting of the Rex Foundation, the Grateful Dead's grant-giving arm. The question arose as to who should receive the foundation's annual Ralph J. Gleason Award for "outstanding contributions to culture." Grateful Dead leader—and Grisman collaborator—Jerry Garcia was in attendance. Grisman, a past winner of the award, suggested that the board consider Mike Seeger. Garcia's response was immediate and enthusiastic: "Yeah! Mike Seeger, man. He deserves it." The decision, Grisman says, was a done deal.

Both Garcia and Grisman have acknowledged the influence of Mike and his folk trio, the New Lost City Ramblers, on their music. *Not for Kids Only*, a 1993 Garcia-Grisman project, includes songs learned from the Ramblers and their 1959 release, *Old Timey Songs for Children*. Grisman recorded with Mike and the late John Hartford on the 1999 CD *Retrograss*. Mike has touched many other American artists—as a record producer, a performing partner, a festival organizer, an arts advocate, and an accompanist. The list of those affected by his work includes Elizabeth Cotten, Maybelle Carter, Tom Ashley,



Ernest V. "Pop" Stoneman, Kilby Snow, Dock Boggs, Ralph and Carter Stanley, Bill Monroe, Sam McGee, Tommy Jarrell, John Jackson, Hazel Dickens, Alice Gerrard, Paul Brown, Richie Stearns, Cousin Emmy, and others. But Mike himself is a humble, generous man. He lives now with his wife, Alexia Smith, in Lexington, Virginia, his home for more than twenty years. He has dedicated his life to preserving and performing traditional American music learned from recordings and from other musicians, and he pursues his passion just as purposefully in 2003, when he turned 70, as he did in the late 1950s, when he was beginning to perform mountain music for urban audiences across the United States. The Dead's Gleason Award came his way in 1995, but the accolade only begins to suggest the scope of his achievements.

Mike grew up in a household filled with field recordings, instruments, and family singing. His father, Charles Seeger, was a composer, conductor, and music scholar; his mother, Ruth Crawford Seeger, was a composer too. Both believed in the artistic value and cultural importance of American folk music. His father worked for a time at the Library of Congress's Archive of American Folk-Song (later the Archive of Folk Culture), giving Mike exposure to field recordings on aluminum discs gathered by John and Alan Lomax and others. Even today, Mike regularly consults "the checklist"—a catalog of those early field recordings—for information about songs he remembers from years ago. "I can't imagine what my repertoire would be without those recordings," he says. He heard Lead Belly and the Ward family of Galax, Virginia. He also listened to the commercial recordings of early country and blues artists such as Dock Boggs, Gid Tanner, Sonny Boy Williamson, and Fats Waller. His parents were on a mission, Mike says, to advance the cultural standing of America's folk music.

In 1952, Mike's younger sister Peggy discovered that their housekeeper, Elizabeth Cotten, a native of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, was an accomplished guitarist. "Libba Cotten was a very, very important musical influence to me," Mike says. "She was the first traditional musician I ever met, being right in the house as she was." He learned from her and later produced records for her and many other traditional artists, including the

Stoneman Family, the McGee Brothers and Arthur Smith, the Country Gentlemen, Dock Boggs, the Lilly Brothers and Don Stover, Roscoe Holcomb and Wade Ward, and Kilby Snow. The seminal 1958 Folkways album *Mountain Music, Bluegrass Style*, produced and annotated by Mike, was a key influence on Grisman and his music-playing friends in Passaic, New Jersey. "That was the first bluegrass I ever heard," Grisman says. "It had very extensive liner notes, a booklet with pictures, and the whole story of bluegrass at the time. I used to read those notes over and over."

Mike joined John Cohen and Tom Paley in 1958 as the New Lost City Ramblers (Tracy Schwarz replaced Paley in 1962). They performed first on a Washington, D.C., radio show. All knew prewar hillbilly tunes captured on commercial discs, including those gathered in Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*; they were familiar with the valuable field recordings at the Library of Congress's Archive of American Folk-Song; and they continued to seek out old-time and bluegrass musicians still living—some active, some not. Some, like Cousin Emmy, Maybelle Carter, Eck Robertson, Roscoe Holcomb, Dock Boggs, and Sam & Kirk McGee, joined the Ramblers on stage. "They were a big source of music and they put out a lot of recordings," Grisman says of the Ramblers in the early 1960s. "They must have made eight or nine records in five or six years, and all those records had more songs than your average records. . . . We used to try to do a lot of those songs, 'Baltimore Fire' and a lot of those Charlie Poole songs. That was like a renaissance period, looking back on it, and guys like Mike and [musician and folklorist] Ralph [Rinzler] were not only playing music, but they were rediscovering all these musicians from the twenties who were still around."

With his field recordings, in his performances with the Ramblers, and through his solo recordings and performances, Mike has been tremendously influential as a purveyor of the old-time repertoire. Nashville-based musician and songwriter Tim O'Brien, president of the International Bluegrass Music Association, has recorded with Mike in the past and credits him with introducing traditional music to later generations of musicians. "I'm always looking for repertoire," O'Brien states, "and I'd like to say that I've

always gone directly to the source, but I needed—and most people need—a compiler. Mike's one of those. Whether it's his recordings of other people singing and playing or whether it's his own recordings, I've definitely learned a thing or two from him."

Mountain music legend Ralph Stanley concedes the same point. "I'd say he educated a lot of people that way in the music, in the old-time music."

This album, *True Vine*, makes a connection with an early period in Mike's career. Briefly, in the early 1970s, he was signed to Mercury Records, the only time he has recorded for one of the major record labels. Critic Paul Nelson, a writer for *Sing Out!* and *Rolling Stone* and founder of the folk magazine *Little Sandy Review*, had taken a job as an artist and repertoire scout with Mercury. He recruited Mike for the label. "I was very low budget," Mike recalls, "and they were taking some chances." His first Mercury album, *Music from True Vine*, appeared in 1971 and drew strong, deserved praise from writer Jon Pankake in *Rolling Stone*. "He and Paul were friends," Mike reasons. "I learned that you could do that."

But Pankake, who has written frequently about Mike and the New Lost City Ramblers, praised Mike's work in a way that went beyond simply doing a favor for a friend. "He is his own music and his own best instrument," Pankake wrote of *Music from True Vine*. "We find the old songs funny or sad as we are Americans; we find the newness of their conceptions and performance as clean and crisp as any acoustic music now being played."

On this new CD, Mike turns again to his deepest musical roots for sustenance. Some of the music has been with him for years—he learned "Johnson Jinkson" from a field recording before he reached his teens. Other tunes have entered his ever-expanding repertoire more recently—the rendition of "Spoonful" comes from newly released recordings of African-American banjoist and songster Will Slayden. "Every now and then," he says, "I like to make a record of me on my own, the kinds of songs that I can perform without anybody else, because that's mostly what I do."

And he does it well. Over Labor Day Weekend, 2002, Mike played several solo sets during the Jerusalem Ridge Bluegrass Festival at Bill Monroe's home near Rosine,

Kentucky. Mike serves on the board of the Bill Monroe Foundation, producers of the festival, and takes his charge as a board member seriously. For his last set of the weekend, as is his custom, he played solo. His use of several instruments required that he make two trips from his car to the backstage area. Once settled on stage, he told the bluegrass crowd seated in the dusty, hot holler that his thirty-minute set would explore "the roots of bluegrass, you might say." As he played songs on a variety of instruments, he explained their origins and talked about the people who played them. "Coo Coo Bird," included in this album, he played with great intensity, eyes closed, head thrown back. "Girl in the Blue Velvet Band," he explained, was part of Bill Monroe's repertoire and connected him to his Scottish roots. Mike also talked about making recordings of Monroe on stage in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and about how he and his friend Ralph Rinzler would request that Monroe play "the older songs." To round out his set, Mike played the Carter Family's "Cannon Ball Blues" and spoke of Maybelle Carter, explaining that she was a banjo player before she became a guitarist. He included "John Hardy" and "You Are My Flower" before finishing the set with "Sail Away Ladies."

Mike has devoted his career to inspiring interest in the pre-media music of American Southerners. But in a very self-aware way, he understands that because he does not come from the South and from the rural, agrarian culture that produced so many of the artists he admires, he has had to make his own place in their world. "I am an urban person," he allows, "although I'm a very confused urban person. I was reared in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., but I was reared listening to all this weird, old stuff." The experience carries over into his singing. "I like blues kind of singing, but I also like [Arkansas ballad singer] Almeda Riddle. I love her singing, and if I sing an Almeda Riddle song, I might do some peculiar thing that she might do, because I learned it from her. I am influenced by people that I hear sing."

So dedicated is he to serving as an advocate for traditional music, and so passionate about the beauty of that music, that Mike seldom has written songs of his own. "I'd like to write," he allows, "but I just don't. Either it's not important enough to me to really

try, because there are so many great old songs, or I just can't. . . . A line of a song here or there, I'm satisfied with those, but about as far as I seem to want to go is a holler or a funny little thing. I have bunches of instrumentals that I've put together, but I've never recorded any of them and don't know that I ever will."

Instead, Mike has come to regard performance of American folk music as something on a par with classical performance. "I'm always amused when they talk of people doing 'covers,'" he says. "You don't hear of the Philadelphia Orchestra doing 'covers,' and I consider this to be classic music that has been played by, sung by, and performed by, usually, hundreds of thousands of people before me."

Mike has always emphasized the importance of "style" in his approach to music. His vocal style, his selection of instruments for a tune, his body language, his intensity—all are part of taking the music he so loves and claiming it for his own. He told a newspaper reporter once, "I play in a variety of styles and I've learned all of them from traditional musicians such as Dock Boggs, Libba Cotten, Maybelle Carter, and others. Quite often you can hear the style of one person predominating in a given song or tune. But I'm a creative musician and you can always tell that it's me. That's what traditional music is all about—an old tune or song that clearly belongs to one person at the present."

*True Vine* represents the latest blossoming of Mike's exploration of style. From the fertile ground of American folk music, through the roots of field recordings, vintage discs, and personal encounters with traditional artists and their families, his creative spirit finds flower again. In his own exuberant take on Sam Honeycutt's holler, in his engaging reading of the rural imagery in Lead Belly's whimsical "Old Man," in his fetching blend of fiddle and harmonica on "Don't Let Your Deal Go Down" and "Goodbye, My Little Darling," he extends the tendrils of his soul.

"There's no real concept except that it's just solo music," he says of *True Vine*, "and I think that solo music is an important aspect of old-time music. At least half, or maybe more, of old-time music in a community is just people playing for their own enjoyment, or people playing for their family or their kids. I try to skim off what I consider to be the

cream and represent the music in that way to people today."

Mike has received six Grammy nominations—three for his solo work, two with the New Lost City Ramblers, and one with Grisman and John Hartford—and has served on the boards of the Newport Folk Festival, the National Folk Festival, and the Southern Folk Cultural Revival Project. He is a trustee of the John Edwards Memorial Foundation, and his extensive field recordings have been deposited with the Library of Congress, the University of North Carolina's Southern Folklife Collection, and the Country Music Hall of Fame. He was a Guggenheim Fellow in 1984 and has received four grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2003 Mike received the prestigious Honorary Membership Award from the Society for American Music. He founded the Rockbridge Mountain Music & Dance Festival near his home in Lexington, with the goal of presenting traditional performers and revival musicians on equal footing.

No less an artist than Ralph Stanley, lately in the national spotlight for his contribution to the *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* soundtrack, regards Mike as a peer and as an original. "I've known Mike Seeger for years, and he's an old trouper," Stanley says. "He's got his own style. He's an old-timer, and he does his style fine. He's been at it so long. He's got the talent, and he's natural with it."

## Song Notes



### 1. **Breaking Up Ice in the Allegheny**

This tune comes from a home recording of Neal Collins from Boyd County, in northeastern Kentucky, sent to Mike by his grandson, Phillip Collins. Neal Collins said he "made up" the tune. Mike plays it on a Great Lakes "Special" banjo, tuned gGGBD. Collins played it in gDGBD.

### 2. **Coo Coo Bird**

Mike's friend Clarence "Tom" Ashley recorded this in 1929 for Columbia (it was subsequently included in Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*) and later played it for years on folk festival stages. Though Ashley's version is the

primary source, Mike's performance takes its final verse from a 1970 field recording by Josh Thomas of Hollins, Virginia, made by Cliff Endres: "I'm a-going to the coal fields. / I'm a-gonna dig coal. / I'll bring back more money / Than your little apron can hold." Mike posits the possibility that Thomas, who was blind and traveled extensively, might have lost his sight in a mining accident, and that time in the coal mines might have given rise to the extra verse. Mike also cites as sources versions from African-American musicians Rufus Kasey and Dink Roberts, both on Smithsonian Folkways 40079, *Black Banjo Songsters of North Carolina and Virginia*, and from Hobart Smith, on Rounder 1799,

an issue in the Alan Lomax collection. Mike plays "Coo Coo Bird" on a very large gourd banjo made for him about 1990 by banjoist and banjo maker Clark Buehling.

### 3. **Johnson Jinkson**

Mike learned this song in the 1940s while helping his parents and Duncan Emrich assemble the never-published folksong collection *American Ballad Book or 1001 American Folk Songs*. "Johnson Jinkson" comes from a field recording of Troy Cambron made by Charles Todd and Robert Sonkin in 1940 at a Farm Securities Administration camp in Visalia, California. On the recording, Cambron, who was not an accomplished guitarist, says he learned the song from his mother. Once, while he was in nearby Fresno, Mike tried to locate Cambron but could not. "When you sing these story songs," Mike explains, "you visualize them." He accompanies himself with a 1931 Martin D-1 guitar.

### 4. **Little Rabbit, Where's Your Mammy?**

Mike plays this unusual six-part fiddle tune on an arch-top, round-hole, 1930s-era Kay-Kraft guitar that he bought for \$10 in the 1950s at Ted's Music Shop, located in a basement around the corner from Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. "You could trade anything," Mike recalls, "and he'd take you to his warehouse across the street, and it was just amazing what he had." Mike tunes the guitar to an open C chord, approximately CGCGCE. "Little Rabbit" comes from a 1931 recording by Crockett's Kentucky Mountaineers—a family band led by West Virginia-born fiddle and banjo player John "Dad" Crockett. They moved to California in 1919 but recorded "Little Rabbit" in New York. The fiddle tune long has been popular among urban folk musicians, and Mike reckons he has played it for twenty-five years or more.

### 5. **The Raftsman's Song**

Mrs. Linnie Johnson from Sparta, Tennessee, sang this song for folklorist Betsy Peterson in 1981 as part of the Tennessee State Parks Folklife Project. It appears on *Historical Ballads of the Tennessee Valley*, issued by the Tennessee Folklore Society in 1982. Mrs. Johnson's family ran rafts on Tennessee's Caney Fork River to sell timber in the 19th century. She learned this song, about a particularly treacherous rafting trip, from a former raftsman, John W. Lefever.

### 6. **Honeycutt's Holler**

In the notes to *Hollerin'* (Rounder 0071), Leonard Emanuel of North Carolina says, "Along back then it weren't nothin' to hear somebody go along the road hollerin' a tune or something like that." This intricate holler—part yodel, part song—would seem to be a tune for just such a purpose. It comes from western North Carolina singer Sam Honeycutt. "Well, I went down the road, just a-singin' to myself," Mike intones, using different words from Honeycutt's original, but

clearly in the same exuberant spirit. Mike heard Honeycutt sing the holler in David Hoffman's 1964 film, *The Complete Bascom Lamar Lunsford Story*.

### 7. **Did You Ever See the Devil, Uncle Joe?**

Mike first learned this fiddle tune as "Hop Light Ladies" from a field recording made by John Lomax of singer and guitarist Fields Ward and banjo player Wade Ward. Mike sings and plays the song on an F Jew's harp made by Knut Tveit in Norway. The tune also is known as "Hop High Ladies, the Cake's All Dough" and as "Miss McLeod's Reel" or "Miss McCloud's Reel." It has been recorded numerous times, by Uncle Dave Macon, Pop Stoneman, Gid Tanner and His Skillet Lickers, and other musicians.

### 8. **Blow the Horn, Blow**

On one of the West Coast folk tours he organized, Mike brought along 1971 hollerin' champion Leonard Emanuel. Mike picked up "Blow the Horn, Blow" from Emanuel himself and from Emanuel's

recording of the holler on Rounder LP 0071, *Hollerin'*. The performance was recorded in the mid-1970s at the National Hollerin' Contest in Spivey's Corner, North Carolina, a small cross-roads near Dunn. Emanuel learned to holler when he was a child, imitating a freight train that would whistle the old hymn "In the Sweet Bye and Bye." The hollerin' tradition in Sampson County, North Carolina, includes many melodic hollers. "There's a difference in hog callin' and hollerin'," Emanuel says in the notes to *Hollerin'*. "Hollerin' is a different thing altogether. It's not yodeling; it's not calling hogs. Hollerin' is a whole lot different." Mike adds a verse or two to the holler from a printed text. He performs the song with quills (panpipes) made by Edmond Badoux and a shaker he made himself, using a wooden paddle with bottle caps and tin pieces loosely attached. His vocal whoops borrow some from the African-American tradition. The quill and shaker ideas come from Alabaman Joe Patterson and others.

### 9. **Old Man**

Lead Belly's whimsical preblues tune becomes a banjo song here. Mike first heard it from singer Hally Wood and later from Lead Belly—Huddie Ledbetter—himself. More recently, he references Lead Belly's recording, reissued on Smithsonian Folkways 40105, *Shout On: Lead Belly Legacy, Vol. 3*. The song has an especially broad melodic range. Mike's Farland banjo, ca. 1900, is tuned approximately f#ADAD.

### 10. **Spoonful**

This also comes from a Tennessee Folklore Society recording, *African-American Banjo Songs from West Tennessee* (TFS 123), by Will Slayden. Anthropology student Charles H. McNutt recorded Slayden in the summer of 1952 near Memphis. Mike reckons the song, with its sexual allusions, to be a parallel or predecessor to Mississippi John Hurt's "Lovin' Spoonful." Folklorist David Evans explains that Slayden played his banjo in "open G" tuning, a half- or full-step below concert G. The slackness of the



strings and Slayden's style of playing at the top end of the neck create a "dull, throbbing sound." Mike replicates the sound on an 1870s thin, wood-rim banjo with eight brackets, no frets, and nylon strings tuned way down.

#### 11. **Shouting in Jerusalem**

This comes from Josh Thomas of Hollins, Virginia, who was recorded in 1970 at his home by Cliff Endres. With its repeated refrain of "I want to be ready," it is Thomas's version of the traditional gospel song "Walking in Jerusalem Just Like John" recorded by Bill Monroe and many others. Mike was attracted to the song by the call-and-response interplay between Thomas's banjo and vocal, and by its down-to-earth approach to the sacred themes it explores. For Thomas, an African American from the Roanoke valley of Virginia, the last verse may have had special meaning: "When I get to heaven, gonna sing and shout / No one up there would put me out." The song represents something of a departure for Mike, who rarely includes religious or gospel songs

on his recordings. He plays the song on a copy of a late 1840s, gut-string, fretless Ashborn banjo, made in the late 1980s by Clark Prouty.

#### 12. **When Sorrows Encompass Me Round**

Tommy Jarrell of Surry County, North Carolina, would accompany himself on fiddle while singing this old Baptist hymn. Mike makes it a banjo instrumental, playing the melody on the very large gourd banjo made for him by Clark Buehling, tuned fCFBbC. Mike believes he heard the melody first at a Galax Fiddlers Convention in the 1960s, played for him by banjoist Happy Smith. The traditional song, with its haunting minor melody, mediates between the trials of this life and the happy rewards that wait beyond. One verse in Jarrell's version included these words: "My spirit to glory conveyed, / My body laid low in the ground, / Though I wish not a tear round my grave to be shed, / But all join in praising around."

#### 13. **Calico**

Though he first heard this song from Vermont-based fiddler and dance caller Lausanne Allen, Mike learned "Calico" from Bruce Greene, who picked up the tune from Cayce Russell of Lafayette, Tennessee. Mike sings and plays the tune on a three-string lap dulcimer made in 1979 by his nephew, Jeremy Seeger, of Vermont.

#### 14. **Early in the Spring**

Leroy Roberson's 78-RPM recording "Early, Early in the Morning," made for Victor in Memphis on 31 May 1930, is the primary source for this performance. Mike was attracted to Roberson's rendition because of its unique combination of the broadside ballad "Early, Early in the Spring" and Roberson's Jimmie Rodgers-style yodeling. Mike first heard the song in the 1960s, and since the 1970s has been singing it occasionally in performance. He accompanies himself on a 1920 Martin 0-18 guitar, which he plays in the style of Maybelle Carter. "The difference is that I play the melody while I sing," he

explains. "That's something the Carter Family didn't do, but a lot of old-time musicians did. Quite a few of them said, 'I don't second when I sing. I play the melody when I sing.' Dock Boggs was that way. He played the melody when he sang on just about everything."

#### 15. **Freight Train**

Guitarist and lifelong friend Elizabeth Cotten, the source for "Freight Train," had "a marvelous grace," Mike says. "The mixture of grace and soul, for her, was what made her so unique." Cotten had been a housekeeper for the Seeger family for about ten years in the 1940s and early 1950s, when they discovered that she could play guitar. Mike traveled and played with her often in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and oversaw most of her recordings. Cotten played the guitar in a unique style, upside down and left-handed, so that she picked the bass strings with the fingernail of her first finger. "I like to play as close as I can to her," Mike states, "but the dynamics are different because the sound of a thumb and a first

finger are different, and it makes her sound quite unique to be picking the bass with a fingernail of her first finger. I pick the bass strings with my thumb, which are more thumpy, because I don't use picks. I just use thumb and first finger. Her treble strings came out strong and mellow since she used her thumb." Though Cotten was the first traditional musician he ever met, and though he learned "Freight Train" in the early 1950s and has played it thousands of times over the years, this is Mike's first solo recording of the song. He plays it on a 1920 Martin 0-18 guitar.

### 16. **Goodbye, My Little Darling**

This fetching waltz comes from a recording of Louis H. Propps made by John Lomax in 1936 in Pleasanton, Texas, south of San Antonio. The original features guitar, fiddle, and vocal. Mike plays the tune as an instrumental, using an early 19th-century French fiddle (tuned GDAD) and a Hohner Marine Band mouth harp. To create a flatted seventh on the mouth harp, Mike custom-

filed the reed himself. "I didn't do [the song] until I figured out how to file a reed," he explains. Propps' original recording has never been released on LP. "I find it charming," Mike avows. The song has been in his repertoire for five or ten years, he estimates, but he seldom performs it live because to do so would require that he bring along his specially filed Hohner and, as he says, "I just hate to carry the extra harmonica, and some urban audiences are not fans of instrumental waltzes."

### 17. **Don't Let Your Deal Go Down**

Another of the few songs Mike performs on fiddle and harmonica, "Deal" comes from a commercial 78, Okeh 45096, recorded 17 March 1927, in Atlanta by Fiddlin' John Carson & His Virginia Reelers. The group included Carson's daughter Rosa Lee Carson, also known as Moonshine Kate. On his version, Mike sings and plays the song on his 19th-century French fiddle (tuned DDAD) and Lee Oskar mouth harp. This is the only song on *True Vine* that also appears on the

1972 Mercury album, *Music from True Vine*. Mike recorded the early version of the song "about two or three weeks after I started playing harmonica and fiddle together," he recalls. "I wanted to do it again, now that I've done that for thirty years. It's changed a little bit."

### 18. **I'm Gonna Go Huntin' for the Buffalo**

Though he first heard this "jerky little fiddle tune" played by Ramona Jones with a full band, Mike learned "Buffalo" from a recording by Jimmy Driftwood, who played it on solo fiddle. Mike also plays the tune as a solo fiddle piece, on a late 19th-century Bohemian fiddle (tuned approximately ADFA) with the first string so slack "it's practically flopping." An Arkansas native, Driftwood wrote the country hits "Battle of New Orleans" (to the tune of "Eighth of January") and "Tennessee Stud." "Buffalo" comes from a recording he issued himself. Mike visited Driftwood in the early 1980s. "After I heard Ramona do it, I wanted to go to the source," he says. "I think he might have

played it for me, but I learned it from his record." Driftwood played the tune on a fiddle strung with banjo strings, giving the recording a "raw, driving sound," Mike explains. Driftwood says on his recording that the tune came from his uncle, who was part Cherokee.

### 19. **Grandad Jim's Waltz**

This simple-but-lovely waltz comes from Bart Smith of Paola, Kansas, a student in one of Mike's classes at a music camp. Smith learned it from his grandfather, James Brown, who played it on harmonica, as Mike does here. Brown, in turn, learned the waltz from an old fiddler, "Ote" Loveland, when he played dances in the early 1900s. The name of the waltz has been forgotten, so Smith's family dubbed it "Grandad Jim's Waltz." Mike plays the song often in performance. He uses a Lee Oskar mouth-harp.

## 20. **The Golden Willow Tree**

This version of "Golden Willow Tree" comes from Justis Begley of Hazard, Kentucky, who recorded the song in 1937 for Alan and Elizabeth Lomax. The field recording was issued later on Library of Congress LP AFS L7, *Anglo-American Ballads*. "Golden Willow Tree" is a version of "The Golden Vanity" (Child 286), a song dating back to a late-17th-century British broadside in which Sir Walter Raleigh plays the villainous captain. Mike calls the song, in which a young diver is cheated out of his promised reward, an example of "old-time corporate malfeasance." He plays the song in vigorous style on an early 20th-century, wooden-hoop Kraske banjo.

## 21. **California Cotillion**

Mike describes this fiddle tune as "somewhere between a march and a polka." It comes from a 1940 field recording of Galax fiddler Crockett Ward and his son, guitarist Fields Ward, made by John and Ruby Lomax. Mike plays the tune on an

autoharp made in 1980 by Bob Welland. Only certain tunes work well on an autoharp, Mike feels. A good autoharp tune, he explains, "has to be a fairly simple melody." Maybelle Carter and Ernest V. "Pop" Stoneman stirred his interest in the instrument, and Mike also was influenced by Kilby Snow of Grayson County, Virginia. "Kilby dug in to the strings," he recalls. "Most people don't do that now. They don't have autoharps you can do that with."

## 22. **Young Johnnie**

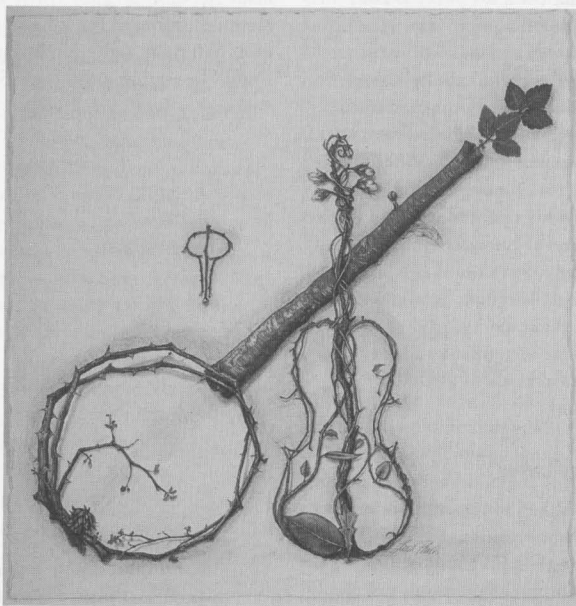
Mike learned this song from a recording of twelve-year-old Claudia Semones, who sang the song unaccompanied at the 1941 Galax Fiddlers' Convention in Galax, Virginia. Mike—all of eight years old—attended the convention but does not remember hearing the performance. The song is a version of "The Green Bed" or "Green Beds" in which Johnny, returned from the sea, goes to visit Polly. He pretends to be poor, and Polly's father tells Johnny that she is not home and would

not see him if she were. When Johnny produces gold from his pockets, Polly appears and invites him to stay. Johnny, however, has other plans. "It fits the autoharp, and it's a bit of a lighthearted ballad," Mike says of "Young Johnnie." "I like songs that deal with that very important issue of pride in the face of not having a lot of money." Musician, author, and teacher Kinney Rorrer, with help from one of his students, recently located Claudia Semones at her home in Laurel Fork, Virginia. Semones still recalled the event vividly. In this performance Mike accompanies himself on an autoharp made in 2000 by Tom Fladmark.

## 23. **Sail Away Ladies**

Another of Mike's intriguing instrumental blends, this rendition of the well-known fiddle tune finds him accompanying his vocal with autoharp and quills. He credits as primary sources recordings by Uncle Dave Macon, from 1927, and Parker & Dodd, from 1932, though neither features the autoharp or quills.

Mike plays the Bob Welland autoharp made for him in 1980. Uncle Bunt Stephens recorded the song under the title "Sail Away Lady" for Columbia in 1926. His version appears on Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Song*.



"Early in the Spring" by Laura Pharis, 2001.

## Credits

Recorded and produced by Mike Seeger

Annotated by Jay Orr

Cover art work by Laura Pharis

Cover photo by Ellen M. Martin

Back cover photo by Mandi Wright

Mixed by Pete Reiniger and Mike Seeger

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**Jay Orr** is senior museum editor at the Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum in Nashville.

**Laura Pharis**, from Roanoke, Virginia, is a professor of Studio Art at Sweet Briar College. Many of her recent images focus on the fiddle and other string instruments. Mike Seeger's music inspired her to create the artwork used on the cover of the CD. "The twining honeysuckle for the fiddle, and the star magnolia and thorns of old roses for the banjo reflect something about the qualities of Mike's spare, pure, ancient way with these instruments and the qualities of his voice."

*Additional Smithsonian Folkways staff:* Judy Barlas, manufacturing coordinator; Carla Borden, editing; Richard Burgess, marketing director; Lee Michael Demsey, fulfillment; Betty Derbyshire, financial operations manager; Mark Gustafson, marketing; Sharleen Kavetski, mail order manager; Helen Lindsay, customer service; Margot Nassau, licensing and royalties; John Passmore, fulfillment; Jeff Place, archivist; Ronnie Simpkins, audio specialist; John Smith, marketing and radio promotions; Stephanie Smith, archivist; Norman van der Sluys, audio-engineering assistant.

*Special thanks* to Alexia Smith, Jay Orr, Charles Wolfe, Cliff Endres, Laura Pharis, Mandi Wright, Ellen Martin, Roger Kasle, Phillip Collins, Elizabeth Cotten, David Grisman, Bruce Greene, Bart Smith, Ralph Stanley and many, many others.

## About the Artist

For more information about old-time music and Mike Seeger, including his tour schedule and an extensive discography, go to [www.mikeseeger.info](http://www.mikeseeger.info). For more information about his recordings on the Folkways and Smithsonian Folkways labels or for a complete list of all available recordings, go to [www.folkways.si.edu](http://www.folkways.si.edu).

## About Smithsonian Folkways

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948 to document "people's music," spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding.

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