



9.

Name: Peter "Pete" Seeger

Years: May 3, 1919 - Present

Residence: Fishkill, New York

Brief Biography: Peter Seeger was born in Patterson, New York into a musically and politically active family; his father having left the University of California at Berkeley where he was a music professor due to his pacifism. Originally interested in journalism, Seeger's life changed at the age of thirteen when he laid his hands on a banjo at the Folk Song and Dance Festival in Asheville, North Carolina. He attended Harvard for two years but was unhappy and dropped out to move back to New York where he found a job with the Archives of American Folk Music assisting Alan Lomax. This connection fostered his musical interests. Seeger was valued so highly, he became a regular performer on Alan Lomax and Nicholas Ray's racially forward Columbia Broadcasting show *Back Where I Come From*. On March 3, 1940, Seeger met Woody Guthrie and in 1940 the two helped shape the Almanac Singers into a folk group. This group recorded labor songs at first but expanded to pacifist songs relating to World War II. With the outbreak of war Seeger and the Almanac Singers became very popular but Seeger was drafted in 1942. While in the army, he married Toshi Ohta who would end up helping him manage his

career. He joined the Communist Party in 1942 but left in 1950 before the internal sectarian bickering weakened the party. In 1948, Seeger joined Henry Wallace the Progressive Party presidential candidate on a tour in the South. In 1949, Seeger's car was attacked during the Peekskill Riot. In 1950, "Pete" Seeger and Lee Hays as well as others formed the Weavers who became popular singing folk music. This success was thwarted by the red-baiting he endured throughout the 1950s specifically in 1955 when he was subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Seeger was indicted for contempt of Congress and was convicted in 1961, sentencing him to ten years in prison (one for each charge) but after a year was released on a technicality. In the 1960s "Pete" was highly involved in the civil rights movement but was against the counter culture movement. During the Vietnam War he criticized Lyndon Johnson's war policies on the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour. Through the 1970s and 1980s he continued performing at benefits for a number of causes, many relating to environmental issues. As an example of this he helped launch the sloop Clearwater with his friends on the Hudson River in 1969 as an environmental awareness and reaction group.

Major Achievements: The [Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award](#) (1993), The [National Medal of Arts](#) from the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) (1994), The Harvard Arts Medal (1996), Induction into the [Rock and Roll Hall of Fame](#) (1996), The Mid Hudson Civic Center Hall of Fame (2008).

References: <http://www.peteseeger.net/biograph.htm>, <http://www.peteseeger.org/seeger/>