

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Woody's Land

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Bob Santelli is a busy man. In addition to being president of the Grammy Museum, he's written [This Land Is Your Land: Woody Guthrie and the Journey of an American Folk Song](#) (published by Running Press, and available in [Cultural Weekly's store](#)), and he's producing a series of [Woody Guthrie Centennial](#) concerts across the country. The next one's in Los Angeles, where we caught up with Bob.

How did the Woody Guthrie concerts come about?

They've been two years in the making, a culmination of a longtime relationship I've had with the Guthrie family. There's also the Grammy Museum's desire to celebrate music that can act as an agent for social change and of course, when you're talking about that, you're talking about Woody Guthrie.

How do you assess Guthrie's impact today?

Guthrie's music is as relevant today as it was 70 years ago when he wrote it. Immigration reform, ecology, racial and economic injustice were all topics in the 1930's and 40'. They've come around again.

Although a lot of the man is steeped in mythology – he has the persona of the great American troubadour – a lot of it was true. He roamed and rambled across the country, riding in trucks and hopping trains, to see America and what it needed to get better.



Who was the first artist to commit to the Los Angeles concert?

Jackson Browne, and then Crosby & Nash. Ramblin' Jack Elliott just came on board – he's the only artist in the concert who actually played with Guthrie. These concerts tend to attract people at the last moment – you never know who's going to show up.

These concerts are moving across the country.

Yes, we're following Woody Guthrie's trail across America. We started in Tulsa, then went to Texas (at SXSW). After LA, we're heading up to Steinbeck Country, where we're doing a concert in Salinas. We'll celebrate Guthrie's relationship to John Steinbeck's work, especially Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, which inspired Guthrie to write the song *Tom Joad*. Then we're headed to Brooklyn in the fall, and culminate with a concert at the Kennedy Center on October 14 that will be broadcast on PBS.

What kind of guitar do you play these days?

I play two! I have a Baby Taylor, which is easy to take along, and a Gibson acoustic, the Robert Johnson model, a little parlor guitar Robert Johnson made famous.

Images: Top, Bob Santelli; below, Woody Guthrie. The Los Angeles concert is April 14 at Club Nokia.

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