



New American Gazette: Transcript of Pete Seeger Forum

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Title: New American Gazette: First Amendment Award Honoring Pete Seeger at Ford Hall Forum.

Recording Date: May 15, 1988

Speakers: Pete Seeger, Charlayne Hunter-Gault

Item Information: New American Gazette: “First Amendment Award Honoring Pete Seeger,” at Ford Hall Forum. Ford Hall Forum Collection, 1908-2013 (MS113.3.1, item 0082) Moakley Archive, Suffolk University, Boston, MA.

Digital Versions: audio recording and transcript available at <http://moakleyarchive.omeka.net>

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Recording Summary:

Transcription of a Ford Hall Forum event that honored Pete Seeger, a singer-songwriter and activist, with the Forum’s First Amendment Award. Seeger sang songs while discussing the Great Peace March and the value of the First Amendment. The forum was recorded and broadcast on the New American Gazette radio program on January 8, 1989. The program was introduced by host Charlayne Hunter-Gault.

Transcript Begins

ANNOUCER: From Boston, the Ford Hall Forum presents an archive edition of the New American Gazette with guest host, Charlayne Hunter-Gault.

CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT: When singer, songwriter and activist Pete Seeger first addressed the Ford Hall Forum the Vietnam War was just emerging as a major issue. Student demonstrations had only begun. Lyndon Johnson was president. Martin Luther King was at the center of the Civil Rights Movement and Ronald Reagan was best known as the host of *Death Valley Days*. It was 1967. On that occasion Mr. Seeger touched on many issues of the day, the US War in Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement and his concern for the environment.

[00:00:54]

When he returned to the Forum last spring to accept the First Amendment Award he was still fighting many of the same issues, still struggling and still singing, still smiling that enigmatic grin in the face of adversity. Pete Seeger has always given voice to the causes he believed in, Civil Rights, labor unions, disarmament, the environment, and an end to apartheid. The Pete Seeger we know could not exist without the freedoms of the First Amendment.

Speaking today on the value of the First Amendment and leading a spirited forum crowd in a rousing rendition of “Amazing Grace,” while sharing his visions for the future of humanity is Pete Seeger.

(applause)

[00:01:54]

PETE SEEGER: I’ll be speaking some prose later on but I thought I’d sing a few little poems here.

(applause)

[00:02:07]

Partly to, I guess, put myself at ease. Some of these songs you know perhaps.

SEEGER: (sings) How do I know my youth is all spent?

My get up and go has got up and went

But in spite of it all, I'm able to grin

When I think of the places my get up has been

Old age is golden, so I've heard said

But sometimes I wonder as I crawl into bed

With my ears in a drawer, my teeth in a cup

My eyes on the table until I wake up

As sleep dims my vision, I say to myself

Is there anything else I should lay on the shelf?

But though nations are warring and business is vexed

I'll still stick around to see what happens next

How do I know my youth is all spent?

My get up and go has got up and went

But in spite of it all, I'm able to grin

And think of the places my get up has been

When I was young, my slippers were red

I could kick up my heels right over my head

When I was older my slippers were blue

But still I could dance the whole night thru

Now I am older, my slippers are black

I huff to the store and I puff my way back

But never you laugh, I don't mind at all

I'd rather be huffing than not puff at all.

ALL: (singing) How do I know my youth is all spent?

My get up and go has got up and went

But in spite of it all, I'm able to grin

And think of the places my get up has been

SEEGER: (sings) I get up each morning and dust off my wits

Open the paper and read the obits

If I'm not there, I know I'm not dead

So I eat a good breakfast and go back to bed

ALL: (singing) How do I know my youth is all spent?

My get up and go has got up and went

But in spite of it all, I'm able to grin

And think of the places my get up has been

(applause)

[00:05:11]

SEEGER: [reads] Three, four thousand years ago some fellow with a beard and sandals probably, put this set of lyrics together. All I did was put a tune to it and add one line, one and a half lines.

SEEGER: (sings) To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)

ALL: (singing) There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)

And a time for every purpose, under Heaven

SEEGER: (sings) A time to be born, a time to die

A time to plant, a time to reap

A time to kill, a time to heal

A time to laugh, a time to weep

ALL: (singing) To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)

There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)

And a time for every purpose, under Heaven

SEEGER: (sings) A time to build up, a time to break down

A time to dance, a time to mourn

A time to cast away stones, a time to gather stones together

ALL: (singing) To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)

There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)

And a time for every purpose, under Heaven

SEEGER: (sings) A time of love, a time of hate

A time of war, a time of peace

A time you may embrace, a time to refrain from embracing

ALL: (singing) To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)

There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)

And a time for every purpose, under Heaven

[00:07:35]

SEEGER: Some people are singing very well. But there's—I can see, even though I'm not good at seeing that some people are—(laughter)—Preserving their academic objectivity.

(laughter)

SEEGER: (sings) A time to gain, a time to lose

A time to rend, a time to sew

A time of love, a time of hate

A time of peace, (all singing) I swear it's not too late

ALL: (singing) To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)
There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)
And a time for every purpose, under Heaven

[00:08:31]

SEEGER: Oh, sing it again

ALL: (singing) To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)
There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)
And a time for every purpose, under Heaven.

(applause)

[00:09:06]

SEEGER: I count myself one of the luckiest musicians in the world, one of luckiest people in the world. You're quite right. I would have been jailed—in jail if it hadn't been for the First Amendment. In 1955 I was questioned by the House Un-American Activities Committee. And I didn't cooperate with them. I simply said, "I think these are questions no American should be forced to answer, especially under threat of reprisal if you give the wrong answer." And every time they asked me another question I said, "Same answer."

So after three-quarters of an hour they said, "We don't consider this a good answer and you may be cited for contempt of Congress. And I think I shrugged.

(applause)

[00:09:54]

I—well—I—they said, "Aren't you courageous?" I was just doing what came naturally, I feel. I had a good upbringing, some wonderful parents and grandparents. And even when we disagreed we had a right to argue. Had some good schools and good teachers I went to. So I was very, very

lucky. And I had—my own family stuck up for me. And then I had friends who could help pay for the lawyer. It took about \$15,000 dollars. Not to—for the lawyer but so much as all the printing of the court records and so on, the transcripts and everything. It takes a huge amount of money. I didn't know, justice isn't cheap.

And—but I was acquitted by the appeals court. I was sentence to a jail for a year. Only spent four hours behind bars while my lawyer was getting bail money. I learned a folk song while I was there.

[00:10:59]

They gave—handed out a lunch of a baloney sandwich and an apple. And the guy next to me was opening his sandwich and singing: (sings) “If that judge believes what I say, I'll be leaving for home today.” Guy next to him says, “Not if he sees your record you won't.”
(laughter)

No, I'm very, very lucky. And I made living my whole life, my kids never went hungry. And in the little town where I live, a conservative little upstate New York community, 13,000 people, the head of the local hardware store, I was building a house for myself, around that, for my family, which we lived in, have lived in all these years. And he said, “Well, young feller, I don't know what your opinion is but it's America. You got a right to your opinion.” And I know he voted for Goldwater. But he is what I call an old-fashioned conservative.

[00:12:00]

Yes, all of us are lucky, every single one of us for having—thank Thomas Jefferson and Madison and the others who insisted on putting that First Amendment in. You know—I guess you know from the history of the Constitution, that this group of rather extraordinary people, they're mostly wealthy men, slave owners from the South and merchants from the North. But some of them were scholars like Madison and some of them were philosophers like Franklin. And after arguing bitterly, bitterly, they made compromise after compromise and had checks and balances all through that.

They weren't able to get a Bill of Rights written into the Constitution. It couldn't be agreed on. So Madison and Jefferson and some of the others said, "Well, we'll see about that. And they got—when it came to the states it had to be ratified. And state after state said, "We won't ratify it unless you promise to put a Bill of Rights on it right away." So within a year it got the ten additional amendments.

[00:13:10]

And that first one I guess you could say was the most important one. I guess some judge said, "If there is any one, fixed star in our firmament it's that First Amendment." I just kind of did not say the soul of the—that extraordinary piece of paper, a very conservative piece of paper in many ways. It was not a revolutionary document—trying to see if they wouldn't need to have revolutions again.

I've been to countries where they do have censors and they didn't have—I sang in Spain once. I was—I never thought I'd sing in Spain under Francisco Franco but some people said, "It would encourage us if you'd come over." So I sang. One censor had to pass every song that I was going to sing, the complete words of every song. A different censor passed the words, which were going to be printed in the program, although they're the same songs. Because it was printed the law said that a different bureau was in charge of anything printed.

[00:14:17]

These two censors didn't always agree. I could sing something but couldn't be printed. Or something could be printed but I couldn't sing.

(laughter)

And it was a joke, a terrible joke, a 40-year joke until Franco was gone and they abolished those rules. I went back to Spain a few days—years later and was able to sing any song I wanted to. I've been, I've sung in about 35 other countries of the world, never had anything—experience like that no matter where I went, anybody telling me what to sing. Of course, there's always discussion of what to sing but nobody telling me what to sing. And—

[00:15:01]

This is really what I'm—thought I'd talk about because let's not kid ourselves, I don't think a single one of us would want to see such freedom of expression that our children or we would actually be endangered. And it's real, big, hot arguments now. I've censored things. Well, I've been an editor. I don't know really where to draw a line between a censor and an editor. I've put out books of folk songs. And when I came across some of the old folk songs that were very racist I didn't put them in, or changed a word here that even—you rarely see, "Oh, Susanna," put in as it was originally made, "I's gwyne to Alabama." You say, "I'm going to Alabama."

But the person who really put me onto that was Woodie Guthrie. Woodie had been raised in a racist atmosphere, a small town in Oklahoma. His father once precip—participated in a lynching. But Woodie cut loose from his father and went out to California, was singing his Okie songs on a little radio station. I think he was paid one dollar day, which was pretty good pay in those days. And he sang an old minstrel show full of that so-called darkie dialect.

[00:16:43]

And he got a letter from a black man the next day who said, "Mr. Guthrie, I believe you mean well but—or else I wouldn't bother writing. But I wonder if you realize that that song you sang," and he identified it, "is deeply offensive to me and a lot of others like me." And he went into detail why. Well, Woodie read the man's letter on the air after he received it. He said, "Now, folks," he says, "I just read you the man's letter. Now I got in my hand that song I sang to you the other day. I want you to listen carefully." (ripping noise)

(laughter)

My guess is we wouldn't be here if we didn't in some way use our power to editorialize. If you had a three-year old girl do you start discussing what rape is with her at that age? No, you wait a few years. She has to—she must learn sooner or later but you don't introduce it—I've got a seven-year old grandson who is part African. Am I going to go into detail what a lynching is for this seven-year old boy?

[00:18:13]

And so I say that—I once wrote a letter to the editor of the *Progressive* magazine and said, “Don’t you realize all editors are basically censors?” You know what A.J. Liebling said when he wrote the book about the press. He said, “There’s freedom of the press for the person who owns it.”

(laughter)

Oh, he didn’t go for that at all. He said, “Look,” he said, “censor is something the government does. I’m an editor.” He didn’t agree with me. But you know what—you remember Justice Holmes’ famous line was, “Freedom of speech doesn’t give you a right to shout ‘Fire’ in a crowded theater.” And this world today is full of ever more crowded theaters. What are we going to do?

[00:19:08]

I think we want to try not to be hypocritical. Let’s face it. We’ve got some very hard decisions to make. There are some contradictions we face. We don’t want children to have their lives warped by the wrong kind of information at the wrong time. On the other hand, I don’t think, frankly, a censor is the way to handle it. Frank Zappa, a musician out on the West Coast is fervently fighting hard to see that they don’t label phonograph records with the letter R and PG and all that. It’s kind of silly anyway.

You see the cartoon, the record store owner has got one section full of the R records and over here the PG records. Nobody is over there buying them. All the people are at the other end of the store. He said, “Boy! Sales have never been so good.”

(laughter)

[00:20:17]

We want to see freedom of information. We wouldn’t want to see information on how people could unlock our cars when we lock them on the street. That’s why I sang, “Turn. Turn. Turn.” I think what’s true and false is often, depends on when—let me take a minute or two to tell you about one of the extraordinary achievements of the last few years in America, which I don’t think was widely enough publicized. It was such an extraordinary achievement that I wish it had

been on the—in the headlines every single day, for nine months as this group of 500 or more people walked from California to Washington. They called themselves the Great Peace March.

In February 1986 a thousand people had been enticed of this thing by some—a lot of Hollywood hype, too much. And they found—got—walked for a couple weeks. And they are on the desert, camped out near Barstow, California when the organization that got them all together went bankrupt. Their support vehicles were taken by the creditors. There they were, camped out in the desert. Five hundred went home. Said, “We can’t, this is a fiasco. No hope.”

[00:21:43]

The other 500 said, “Somehow we’re going to make it.” And they got on the telephone. Some of them mortgaged their homes or their cars or something. And two weeks later they started off. It wasn’t the money that was the horrendous problem. They woke up to the realization they disagreed more than they could have believed. They had devoutly religious people on this march, Catholics, Protestants, Jews. They had devoutly anti-religious people. They had people who called themselves anarchist and people who called themselves Marxists and all sorts of people.

They had gay lib male and gay lib female. And they had families. There was a school for 40 kids that had—went—followed the whole trip, kindergarten through high school. And the older people were always saying to the younger people, “Can’t you dress a little more respectably? We’re trying to prove that peace is not something to be frightened of and we walk in there looking like a bunch of kooks.”

[00:22:46]

And next day a bunch of men all walked—oh, yes, they said, “Can’t the women wear dresses, for example.” The next day a bunch of men all walked wearing dresses.

(laughter)

They ended up having to have three chow lines, carnivores, veggies, and macro biotics.

(laughter)

The made a number of very important decisions, though. One of them was, they said, “Let’s have frequent elections.” They voted for their governing body. And every week or two they’d have another election in case they changed their minds. Even more important they said, “Let’s not use Robert’s *Rules of Order*, unless we have to. Let’s try and make decisions by consensus. You know it’s, Robert’s *Rules* speed things up but we’ve got a lot of time to talk.” And they did. They talked and walked and they walked and they talked for nine months.

[00:23:45]

And they didn’t—weren’t able to make all the decision by consensus but most of them. But the most important decision they made, “Let’s not turn each other off. Let’s agree that we’ll never stop listening to each other no matter how mad we get at each other.” You know, that one thing was the most important of all because it was hard to break them up. If they had ever gotten so mad they would talk to each other, then a provocateur could have easily split them up into two or more groups. They never would have got to Washington. But they agreed no matter how mad they got at each other they would always listen.

Curiously enough one of the most effective things was a young German who, about three-quarters of the way through the trip walked around with a piece of tape on this mouth. He could only eat by putting a straw through his mouth. And they’d say, “Heinrich, what’s that for?” He’s show them a card. I will not take this tape off until I see at least 100 people walking together. We are too spread out.”

[00:24:45]

He forced the issue to be discussed. Some people liked to get up early. They would walk. Some people walked later. They were spread out over ten miles along the road. It didn’t look like a great peace march. Finally, after a month of arguing they came to a compromise. They would bunch up in the cities but they’d stay spread out in the countryside. And curiously enough when they came into Washington, even the transvestites start wearing normal clothes.

And I think that just as they got to Washington that you and I and our families have got a chance that this human race will survive and that life on earth will survive if we can work our way out of some of the contradictions.

[00:25:41]

The biggest contradiction right now is one that I'm really not supposed to be entitled to talk about. I'm not a scientist. I've joked a lot about science. And said a long time ago people had more time before they inven—had so many labor saving devices.

(laughter)

My father, though, who was an old scholar, the last few years of his life he was almost hipped on this subject. He said, "I'm concerned with value judgements. How do people make value judgements? What's good and what's bad?" And then he realized, he said, "I realized that most scientists insist that science is neutral. There is no such thing as good or bad science. Science is science. It's the jobs done with science that could be good or bad."

[00:26:41]

And most scientists say it's nothing but good to have an ever-increasing store of empirical knowledge. "Ah," said my father, "if the world were destroyed by the misuse of that knowledge, could you then say it was a good thing to have been a scientist?" It throws them for a loop. "You have no right to ask that question. Ask it of anybody but don't ask it of me." He insisted on asking it. And I think he was right to ask it. To me it seems a logical question.

It's true. Nothing in this world is good or bad but the thinking makes it so. That's what Hamlet said to Horatio and I agree. But we're thinking people. I think anyone of us has a right to think that science is bad if it puts us in danger of our lives. Einstein himself is supposed to have said, "Ach! Mankind is not ready for it." Does that mean that $E = MC^2$ is bad science? Perhaps. And I tell you how I work it out. I decide that science out of sequence is, is bad.

[00:27:51]

Now normally in any project you want to have a sequence of steps. You get the—you plan what you want to do. You number the steps you are going to take. You assemble the tools. You assemble the materials. You do the job. You test that the job is properly done. Now thalidomide and the Dalkon Shield are two recent examples of science out of sequence. They put some on the market before sufficient testing.

Vonnegut, Kurt Vonnegut thinks that there is no hope for us because we have too big brains. I guess some of you read his book Galapagos. But I think that's like saying there's no hope because we're—some people are over sexed or there's no hope because some people are avaricious and power hungry. He's saying there's no hope because people are curious. And I'm convinced that if this world survives it will be because we face up to this contradiction.

ANNOUNCER: From Boston you have been listening to an archive edition of the New American Gazette presented by the Ford Hall Forum.

[00:29:17]

SEEGER: There's hardly a scientist in the world who will go along with this. They say science is neutral. I sent a copy of this little idea to George Wald, the Nobel Prize winning biologist. And he sent me a copy of a paper he'd written some years ago. He say, "I used to think I knew the answer to that question." And he sent me this paper. He implied that now he's not sure.

He said, "Is science amoral, the changing ethics of science? I happen to be one of those scientist who think there is something wrong with naping peasants. And a few years ago began to wonder from what base, from what vantage point may a scientist make moral and political judgements?" And that is what I want to talk about today. In a sense it is my religion, the holy secular religion of one scientist. Mankind has been engaged throughout history in a ceaseless struggle to know. Science is a systematic attempt to understand all reality.

[00:30:25]

Reality covers a very wide province, not only such simple things as stones falling and the structures of atomic nuclei but more complicated things such as poets writing sonnets and people

praying. Some of those more complicated things I doubt science will ever understand. I used to think a few years ago, and this question is more current now—I'd find myself in a room full of physicists and raise the question, should one do everything one can. That seemed to be a new question then that very few persons had asked. And as soon as you asked it, it seemed as though to answer, in most person's mind was, "Yes, of course. Do everything you can." But the right answer clearly is, of course, not.

Among all the things one can do, one needs to make a choice of the things that it is good to do, those things that satisfy the needs and goals and aspirations of one's society. Who is to make those judgments?

[00:31:25]

One of our most serious troubles now is that we've grown used to having those judgments made the wrong way. We've grown used to having those judgments made almost entirely by the producers of the technology, by those who see a way to make a profit from it, achieve increased power through it, or perhaps increase status through it. One should listen carefully to all such persons. But it is of the utmost importance that those decisions cease to be made by the producers and begin to be made by those who will have to live with the products, you and me.

I'd mentioned in my letter to George, "What are you going to do about recombinant DNA?" I don't really like what I read of Jeremy Rifkin. He seems awful, kind of tunnel vision. And I suspect all tunnel vision whether in scientists or housewives or musicians. But I think he's gone onto to something. What would Hitler do if he knew all about recombinant DNA? Have some scientists work out a bacteria that would kill every dark-skinned person in the world? I don't know.

[00:32:41]

George said, "My wife and I fought hard against recombinant DNA as a technology. It could solve certain important biological problems all of us wanted answered but not in that way, not by messing up three billion years of evolution. We have three, top operators in this field in our

department at Harvard, each with his own corporation.” Profit-making corporation, I presume. Harvard has just patented a mouse. The patent covers that kind of manipulation in all animals.

No doctor can cure a patient unless the patient is willing to admit their sick. The first step in solving any problem is a admitting there is a problem. And my own little paper said, of course it’s going to take a lot of time, perhaps hundreds of years, perhaps thousands of years to argue these questions out properly. But what’s that compared to 16 million years before the next nemesis planet visits us or five billion years till the sun puts an end to the watery planet. Let’s argue about it. I believe that only lazy people and bad scientists will shy away from such arguments.

[00:34:21]

Well, I’ve talked long enough and I thought maybe stopping. How long have I kept on, about 25 minutes? I’m going to sing a couple of songs, different kinds.

I’m going to sing an old hymn. Many of you have heard it before. Maybe you don’t know who—it was written by a sea captain. Of all things this sea captain was a captain of a slave ship. It was about 200 years ago. The man had been a rank and file seaman and he rose through the ranks, become a captain. Now he’s a captain and the owners went into the slave trade. The man’s name was John Newton. This happened about 100 years ago in the middle of the ocean once he turned his ship 180 degrees around and took those people back to their homes. He went back to England, became a preacher. And this is just one of the many hymns he wrote.

[00:35:32]

Arlo Guthrie told me this story. He said, “That man is a friend of mine today. That was a long time ago but he is a friend of mine because he showed us, we can turn the ship around.”

(applause)

Now some people sing this hymn faster than I do. But I do what they call long-meter style, which is an old-fashioned southern style of singing. No matter how slow we go, don't stop singing, just take a new breath and keep on going. No one will know the difference.

[00:36:10]

SEEGER: Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.

ALL: (singing) Amazing grace.

SEEGER: You're going too fast.

(laughter)

SEEGER: I'm still on A.

ALL: (singing) Amazing grace,

SEEGER: Where's the tenors and sopranos?

ALL: (singing) Grace, how sweet—

SEEGER: Where's the basses? Where the basses and the altos?

ALL: (singing) —the sound

SEEGER: (singing) That saved a wretch like me

ALL: (singing) That saved a wretch—

SEEGER: Where's the bass part?

ALL: (singing) —Like me.

SEEGER: (singing) I once was lost but now am found

ALL: (singing) I once was lost but now—

SEEGER: Where's the basses and where's the altos?

ALL: (singing) I'm found.

SEEGER: (singing) Was blind but now I see.

ALL: (singing) Was blind—

SEEGER: Where's the bass part?

ALL: (singing) —but now I see.

SEEGER: Shall I be wafted to the sky

ALL: (singing) Shall I be wafted to the sky

SEEGER: On flowery beds of ease

ALL: (singing) On flowery beds of ease

SEEGER: While others strive to win the prize

ALL: (singing) While others strive to win the prize

SEEGER: And sail through bloody seas

ALL: (singing) And sail—

SEEGER: Don't hear those basses.

ALL: (singing) —Through bloody seas.

[00:40:00]

SEEGER: We don't have quite enough basses. I think it's because that was in too low a key. We're going to raise up a little higher. Let's try that first verse again. Remember, there's no such thing as a wrong note as long as you're singing.

(applause)

SEEGER: Amazing grace, how sweet the sound

ALL: (singing) Amazing grace, how sweet the sound

SEEGER: That saved a wretch like me

ALL: (singing) That saved a wretch like me

SEEGER: I once was lost but now I'm found

ALL: (singing) I once was lost but now I'm found

SEEGER: Was blind but now I see

ALL: (singing) Was blind but now I see.

(applause)

[00:42:27]

SEEGER: Incidentally, I had a whole lot of things I was going to say to you but I didn't get the time to say them. I was going to say that, remember Ben Franklin's great line, "Love your enemies". They teach to you your faults." Remember Rabbi Hillel about 2,000 years ago with three short lines of wisdom, "If I am not for myself, who will be. If I'm only for myself, what am

I? If not now, when?” Remember the English philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead. I once saw him give a lecture when I was at Harvard. He says, “One should try not to speak more clearly than one thinks.”

(laughter)

This is one I also remember. In 1957 the great Soviet novelist Ilya Ehrenburg was in Buenos Aires. And a newspaper reporter asked him, “Mr. Ehrenburg, how do you account for the terrible things that went on under Stalin?” This was only a year after Khrushchev gave his speech about Stalin. Ehrenburg said, “Well, we found it was easier to get rid of the capitalists than to get rid of the damn fools.”

(laughter)

[00:44:14]

When you think globally and act locally, sometimes maybe very, very local—E.B. White wrote a little poem when he had to go away on another trip. And he gave it to his wife.

(sings) The spider, dropping down from twig,
Unfolds a plan of her devising,
A thin premeditated rig
To use in rising.

And all that journey down through space,
In cool defense and loyal hearted,
She spins a ladder to the place
From where she started.

Thus I, gone forth as spiders do
In spider's web a truth discerning,
Attach one silken strand to you
For my returning.

[00:46:02]

SEEGER: Before I go I'm going to sing the most recent song I've been able to put together. The tune, actually, I've had for almost 25 years. I whistle it mostly. About 25 years ago I learned how to flutter with (whistles). It's not hard. What you do is pull your tongue back and then you push, you, well you flatten your tongue so the sides of your tongue touch the sides of your lower teeth and front of your tongue is the back of your front teeth on the bottom. So, in effect, your tongue cuts off, all of a sudden, a little bit of air at the bottom. So instead of being this (whistles). You don't do like that, because that's your just bring the middle of your tongue up to the roof of your mouth.

(laughter)

You keep your tongue far away from the roof of your mouth (whistles). It becomes broad.

[00:46:56]

AUDIENCE: (whistling)

(laughter)

SEEGER: (whistles). Anyway I whistle this tune.

(whistles) I even had an idea for a music video of this.

(laughter)

I sent it, the idea, into Sesame Street but they didn't reply. I don't, I don't know. I called for a little roly-poly guy who is really a dancer walking down the street whistling this tune maybe kicking at a garbage can in rhythm as he goes down. And a kid sitting on a stoop sees him and grins. And the man sticks out his hand and the kid grabs it. And then another kid joins him. By the time they get to the edge of, end of this one little melody, it only takes 34 seconds I know, because I timed it, they've got three or four kids there.

[00:48:19]

All of a sudden they come to one of these little graveyards like you can sometimes see in an old city like Boston or Philadelphia or New York, in between two brick buildings, there's a little graveyard. And the camera zooms in on a grave stone. Maybe says, "Katerina von Trump. Born 18—1790. Died 1795." The kids look at it and they suddenly grow serious. And the man sings.

(sings) Whistling past a graveyard is not a foolish thing
When all of the world appears to be coming apart at the seam.
And who can tell for sure what'll be next to go.
Did you ever think that Tricky Dick would leave like he did?

Whistling past a graveyard, I'll keep on whistling.
And if you want you can whistle along.
For who knows just how many more might like to try the melody
And whistle a similar song.

(whistles)
And whistle a similar song.

[00:49:22]

SEEGER: And now the little guy starts down the street again with the kids. And they're whistling this tune. And they turn a corner and suddenly instead of city street there's the Eiffel tower there and a bunch of French kids come out to join them. They turn the corner and there's a pagoda there and a bunch of Chinese or Japanese kids come out to join them. They turn a corner, there's the pyramid of Egypt and some Egyptian kids come out to join them. They turn a corner and there's St. Basil's cathedral, a bunch of Russian kids come out to join them. They turn a corner there's a pueblo out in New Mexico. A bunch of Native American kids come out to join them.

[00:49:57]

All of a sudden there is Sugarloaf Mountain in Rio de Janeiro. And a bunch of black Brazilian kids come out to join them. Now there's 50 or 100 kids all gathered around. And now they're on the beach. Laurie Wyatt lives over in Northampton helped me write this verse. He did most of it.

(sings) Whistling by the seashore upon a windy day.
A look at the breakers trying to drown out my song.
The sea gulls laugh as they glide past
And sand castles all around come tumbling down

Whistling by the seashore, I'll keep on whistling
And if you want you can whistle along
The ocean may be wide but on the other side
There's lots of people whistling a similar song.
(whistles)

Oh, you know what? This is what you can do on video. There's a cutaway to a woman in Japan in elegant costume playing the Koto (makes sound). And then—

(sings) —whistling a similar song.

There's a cutaway to a family in Guatemala, all playing one marimba (makes sound).

(sings) Whistling a similar song.

It goes to a European symphony orchestra all in white tie and tails (makes sound)

(sings) Whistling a similar song.

Maybe in India where they have these tuned tea cups (makes sound)

(sings) Whistling a similar song.

[00:51:24]

SEEGER: Maybe some steel drums. Lord know what they have. Finally, the last time it's the birds in the tree. You can do this if you cut up the tape and scissor it and do tricks with it. And the birds are all singing (whistles).

(sings) Whistling a similar song.

SEEGER: And the last thing you hear is the ocean wave (makes sound).

Well, if anybody wants to try whistling this tune with me, you're welcome to try it tonight before we go home. You'll find it's a lot of fun, although people will sometimes look at you and say, "What you so happy about?" Try it.

(all whistling)

(applause)

MODERATOR: Thank you. Thank you. Pete Seeger.

(applause)

[00:53:37]

SEEGER:

(sings) One blue sky above us
One ocean lapping all our shore
One earth so green and round
Who could ask for more?

SEEGER: And because I love you

ALL: (singing) And because I love you

SEEGER: I'll give it one more try

ALL: (singing) I'll give it one more try.

SEEGER: To show my rainbow race

ALL: (singing) To show my rainbow race

SEEGER: It's too soon to die.

ALL: (singing) It's too soon to die.

SEEGER: (sings) Some folks want to be like an ostrich,

Bury their heads in the sand.

Some hope that plastic dreams

Can unclench all those greedy hands.

Some hope to take the easy way:

Poisons, bombs. They think we need 'em.

Don't you know you can't kill all the unbelievers?

There's no shortcut to freedom.

SEEGER: One blue sky above us

ALL: (singing) One blue sky above us

SEEGER: One ocean lapping all our shore

ALL: (singing) One ocean lapping all our shore

SEEGER: One earth so green and round

ALL: (singing) One earth so green and round

SEEGER: Who could ask for more?

ALL: (singing) Who could ask for more?

SEEGER: And because I love you

ALL: (singing) And because I love you

SEEGER: Give it one more try

ALL: (singing) I'll give it one more try

SEEGER: Show my rainbow race

ALL: (singing) To show my rainbow race

SEEGER: Too soon to die.

ALL: (singing) It's too soon to die

SEEGER: (sings) Go tell, go tell all the little children.

Tell all the mothers and fathers too.

Now's our last chance to learn to share

What's been given to me and you.

ALL: (singing) One blue sky above us

SEEGER: One ocean

ALL: (singing) One ocean lapping all our shores

SEEGER: One earth

ALL: (singing) One earth so green and round

SEEGER: Who could ask

ALL: (singing) Who could ask for more

SEEGER: And because I love you

ALL: (singing) And because I love you

SEEGER: Give it one more try

ALL: (singing) Give it one more try

SEEGER: To show my rainbow race

ALL: (singing) To show my rainbow race

SEEGER: It's too soon to die.

ALL: (singing) It's too soon to die

[00:56:24]

SEEGER: One blue sky above us

ALL: (singing) One blue sky above us

SEEGER: One ocean

ALL: (singing) One ocean lapping all our shore

SEEGER: One earth

ALL: (singing) One earth so green and round

Who could ask for more

(applause)

ANNOUCER: You have been listening to an archive edition of the New American Gazette from Boston's Ford Hall Forum. The New American Gazette was produced by Deborah Stavro with post-production engineers Roger Baker, Brian Sabo and Anthony di Bartalo. The New American Gazette was produced in cooperation with the nation's presidential libraries, the National Archives and Northeastern University.

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