

He's in his late 70s now, and his voice, which has led several generations in song, is, by his own reckoning, "about 70 percent gone." In theory at least, Pete Seeger is retired. But in truth, there's no slowing him down.

Seeger still performs occasionally, though these days it's most often up and down his beloved Hudson River, where he is joined by his grandson, who handles the vocal chores while Pete plays the banjo and exhorts the crowd to sing along to every-

through my head 24 hours a day."

None of the artists on the album take Seeger's music too far afield, though it would only be fair if they had, considering that Seeger himself came by much of his material by borrowing a line here or a verse there, or changing the chord structure or the rhythm of a song to make it serve a new purpose. "My father, who was a musicologist said, 'Don't get in big arguments about is this folk or is this not folk,'" Seeger says. "Keep your eye on the folk process,"

Cromwell was fighting King Charles. And in the 18th century, somebody made Christmas carol verses to it. And it's stood up under all these treatments. On the other hand, there's many a song which hits the spot at one time in history and it may never be sung again, but boy it hits the spot then. Arlo Guthrie and I often sing, 'One, two, three, what are we fightin' for'—we belt it out in Washington almost every time we go there. And the young people look around at their parents who are singing along and say, 'How do you know this song?'"

Which goes to show that Seeger never turns loose of a good ideological fight. Asked about the failure in recent years of labor unions, another of his longstanding causes, he is forthright about their shortcomings, but hopeful for their future. "For

# PETE SEEGER

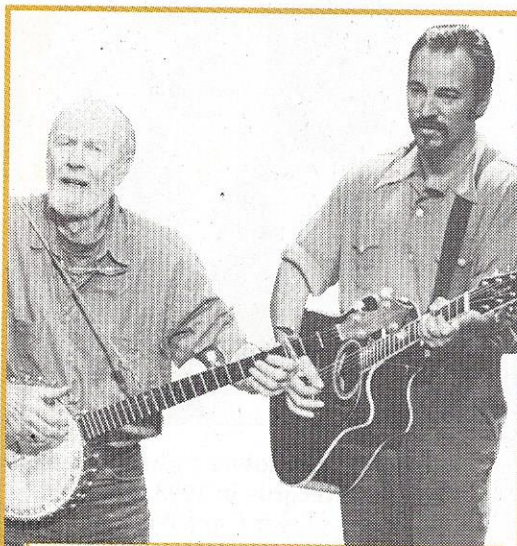
## WORKER OF THE WORLD

BY DANIEL DURCHHOLZ

thing from ancient airs to *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*. "People call me a folksinger, but the word is so misused," he says. "So they say, 'So what are you?' and I say, 'I'm a river singer. You can have a western singer, or a mountain singer. Why not a river singer?'"

Perhaps more than any other musician of this century, Seeger has earned the right to be called whatever he wants. As a driving force behind such groups as the Almanac Singers (which also featured Woody Guthrie) and the Weavers, Seeger helped America discover the glory of its crazy-quilt history in the form of its indigenous music. He also added immeasurably to the tradition with contributions of his own, such as *Turn, Turn, Turn, We Shall Overcome, If I Had a Hammer*, and *Where Have All the Flowers Gone*. A tireless political activist and advocate for working people, Seeger has sometimes paid dearly for his beliefs, but seems to have few regrets.

Nor does he stand on ceremony when it comes to his own legacy, which is the topic at hand today thanks to a new collection of his songs, **Where Have All The Flowers Gone: The Songs Of Pete Seeger** (Columbia/Legacy recently released two Seeger classics, **God Bless The Grass and Dangerous Songs!**?) which contains fresh interpretations of his work by Bruce Springsteen, Ani DiFranco, Bonnie Raitt, Nanci Griffith, Indigo Girls, and many others. Seeger likes and admires all the artists who contributed to the set, but admits that, thus far, he's only listened to it once. "I never listen to records," he says. "I've got too much music running



Pete Seeger, on stage with Bruce Springsteen, told us: "People call me a folksinger, but the word is so misused."

which has been going on for who knows how many tens of thousands of years. Old forms are continually changed, sometimes little, sometimes more. It probably happens in every field of culture. Cooks change old recipes to fit new stomachs. Lawyers change old laws to fit new citizens."

Seeger has spent as much time as anyone considering just what makes one song good and another bad, or one song timeless and another yesterday's news. "Often the test of a good song is its ability to be used in different ways," he says. *Greensleeves* was a pop song of the 16th century. It was a political parody when

fifty years, you know, the radicals were not welcome in unions," he says. "And in many ways, the unions lost their vision. In a column I wrote, I quoted something written on a 17th century church wall: 'A vision without a task is but a dream, but a task without a vision is drudgery.' You get 'em both, that's the hope of the world. But unions slid back slowly but steadily for 50 years. Now they're trying to rebuild 'em. The spirit of Joe Hill has been pushed into a corner, but hasn't died completely."

Which is true, he claims, of the movement in general. "After the '60s, most of the media ignored it. They thought, 'Well, we don't hear about those things anymore, so I guess they're dead.' They are not dead. They're just scattered. There are more little organizations going on now than ever. I have to laugh. When George Bush talked about a thousand points of light, he got it wrong—there's millions of points of light. If there's one big organization, you can subvert it, you can jail it, you can beat it down, you can assassinate people. But you can't assassinate a million people easily. This is actually my hope for the future. If there's a human race in a hundred or two hundred years, it will not be because of any big organization, not big political parties, not big government, not big corporations, not big church, not big union, not big media. I hope I can live to the day when the conservative Republicans say, 'When did we ever let that phrase loose? There's tens of millions of points of light, and we can't control 'em.'"