



## Tom Paxton, Iconic Songwriter and Singer

BY MARK ZNIDAR

Tom Richard Paxton, his shoulders hunched from the gear that he carried, shuffled through the lobby of the McConnell Arts Center and made a hard right hand turn down a hallway to his dressing room.

He and bandmates Jon Vezner and Don Henry, better known as The Don Juans, were going to record a segment of the Songs at the Center television program hosted by Eric Gnezda. Paxton, 86, could have retired decades ago and lived off royalties from songs that he wrote for himself and others. Yet there he was, having makeup applied before going before the cameras and a small audience with his trademark Greek fisherman's cap.

"I haven't run out of songs – not yet," he said. "I think it's almost religious for me. I feel like I've been given a gift. I used to think that everybody had this gift. I think it would almost be sinful if I didn't use this gift. I have worked at it. It matters a lot to me."

[See Paxton, pg 5](#)

*This music is not afraid to face the world.  
Folk music is not the toy department.*

*Tom Paxton*

## A Different Strummer Newsletter Highlights

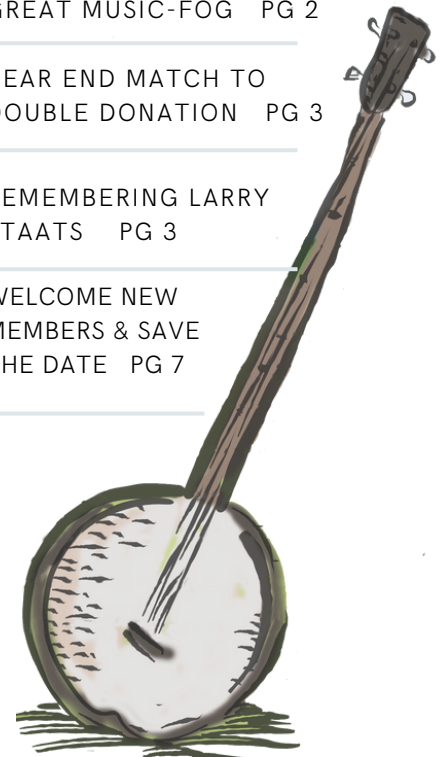
TOM PAXTON, ICONIC SONGWRITER & SINGER  
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# Weird Arithmetic to Make for Great Music

BY BILL COHEN

What do you get if you add together 2/5 of the beloved local Americana group Halfway Home, 3/4 of the wonderful band Whinestopper, and 3/4 of Bill Cohen and the Harmonettes?

Well, you get the lineup of veteran Columbus musicians who will be in the spotlight Sunday afternoon December 10 from 3 to 5 pm, as the Columbus Folk Music Society presents an entertaining and fun fund-raising concert at El Vaquero's Mexican Restaurant.

Among the musicians will be Mike Hale and Renilda Marshall of Halfway Home; Charlie Flowers, Teresa Schleifer, and Renilda (again) of Whinestopper; and Bill Cohen with 2 of the 3 Harmonettes, Teresa (yes, again), and Renilda (yes, again).

The concert will feature an eclectic mix of folk songs from the 1950's and 1960's, swing tunes, jazzy songs, and standards from the 1940's, early rock songs from decades ago, and modern-day Americana-style songs made famous by singer-songwriters who use their music to tell compelling stories about life's triumphs and struggles. Tight 3 and 4-part vocal harmonies will be in the spotlight as will some intricate guitar, bass, piano, and mandolin playing.

Expect songs that will make you laugh, make you cry, make you think, make you want to dance, and make you remember. We're talking about songs linked to Joni



**Sun, Dec 10 3-5pm**  
**At El Vaquero's,**  
**3230 Olentangy River Rd**  
**Experience a legacy**  
**of folk music &**  
**usher in the season!**

Mitchell, John Prine, James Taylor, Cheryl Wheeler, Bill Staines, Ella Fitzgerald, Kate Wolf, Simon & Garfunkel, Crosby Stills & Nash, and Peter Paul & Mary. And many others.

Since the show will take place during the run-up to holidays later in the month, you can also expect to hear some Christmas and wintertime holiday songs, some of them familiar and others you may never have heard before. The weather will no doubt be cold outside, but the music and schmoozing with fellow Columbus Folk Music Society members and followers will warm our hearts.

Speaking of warmth -- while you enjoy the captivating music, you'll be able to also enjoy spicy delectable Mexican food (and refreshing drinks) that will be available for purchase from El Vaquero's huge menu selection. This concert is just the latest that CFMS has held at the restaurant over the years, and it's always been a welcoming venue for us.

[See Weird Arithmetic, pg 3](#)

\$15 per person donations are suggested at the door, with proceeds going to help produce the Central Ohio Folk Festival next May 4-5. The annual festival has been going on for more than a quarter century, and it now attracts more than 11,000 music-lovers each year. The musicians performing on December 10th are eager to perform together again and to share their music. If you combine their performances in other bands and as soloists for decades, it all adds up to them spreading their love of music for more than 150 years now.

## Remembering Larry Staats, Long-time CFMS Member 1933-2023

BY PETE INSABELLA

*Editors Note: In addition to being a regular attendee at Worthington Square's jamming events, Larry Staats was a strong CFMS supporter. Over the years, he served on the CFMS board, held the role of Media Chair and Newsletter editor. And in the very beginning, he provided legal advice to help CFMS create its bylaws and file for its non-profit status. CFMS past and current board members, Bill and Randi Cohen, remember: "We appreciated his calm demeanor and his quirky sense of humor! His absence has been felt by our group. He was a good guy!" Long-time CFMS member, Pam Raver recalls: "Larry worked tirelessly to gather news on folk events in the North-central US to publish in the newsletter, a much appreciated task...And don't forget his talent for telling homespun stories about his childhood in WV. His sharp brilliance was often missed in the simplicity and gentle wit of his tales."*

[See Larry Staats, pg 4](#)

## DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT!

### 2023 Year End Match to Double Donation!

Thank you to ALL who have donated so far. We're almost 3/4 of the way there and we are so grateful! For the past seven years, we've had an anonymous donor come forward towards the end of the year with an offer to match all donations to our organization beyond those of regular membership dues, received before December 31, up to a total of \$1,000. That means if we are able to raise \$1,000, it will be matched by our generous donor to a grand total of \$2,000!

If you have had a chance to attend any of our monthly concerts or if you have been one of the thousands that has attended our May festival, you might be interested in this opportunity to show your thanks to the Columbus Folk Music Society. A donation yet this year may be doubled!

Donations may be made by credit card via our website (PayPal account not needed): <https://www.columbusfolkmusicsociety.org/contact-donate.html>, via the Columbus Foundation's Giving Store (search Columbus Folk Music Society): <https://www.columbusfoundation.org/the-giving-store/nonprofit-directory-listing/ColumbusFolkMusicSocietyInc/6505> or by check made payable to Columbus Folk Music Society and mailed to: CFMS, PO Box 20735, Columbus, OH 43220.

**Please write "matching challenge" on your check or online donation note.**

We thank you in advance!





*Larry Staats, Image by Linda McDonald*

Larry Staats passed away recently. He is remembered fondly by those who knew him in the folk music community.

**Dan Clarke:** He stood for everything that the CFMS mission represented. He was a Storyteller extraordinaire. I had the pleasure to hear him practice his art at many of the monthly CFMS Coffeehouse events. I also had the pleasure of seeing him dance on the board when he brought the dance board to the Gilly Center Music jams. Larry seemed at home in just about any situation. Often at music jams we had the pleasure of hearing Larry on his harmonica, his nose whistle, his corrugated tie or his shaker stick and his jug. And let's not forget Larry's great banjo playing. Then there's the time I remember him handing me a paper sack and asking me to play the sack with him. He was a wonderful character and friend and someone that added to each community that he had a chance to come across on his path as he went through life.

**Steven Ing:** Larry Staats was one of the first Worthington Jammers I met ... at the Worthington Farmer's Market circa 2010.

He (and others) were so welcoming that I soon joined the fun and more than a decade later I still find Saturday morning jam sessions to be my favorite time of the week! This is all thanks to Larry and Jan Staats who started the Farmers Market and its jam session. Larry was very generous about bequeathing (unloading) some of his possessions on me. I still have a collection of stuff from Larry, e.g., a battery-powered keyboard, a nose flute, an army-issued can opener, a paper bag... I wish I had one of his vintage re-used plastic jug-musical instruments! Larry could dance on that wooden plank well into retirement, and even when he slowed down just slightly he was able to participate at the monthly Coffeehouse with storytelling. Larry always had a kind word, except for those who took advantage of the less fortunate and then he would share hilariously snide comments. I wish I could have seen him in action as a lawyer!!

**Hugh Farthing:** Even if I hadn't known Larry Staats pretty well, he (and his wife Jan) were very important people in my life and in the lives of all the people who have been part of the Worthington Square jam. Jan was part of the Worthington Farmers Market and Larry and friends started a jam at her request that has continued since about 2006. I have been going for most Saturday mornings for 10 or so years and it is one of the best things I have ever been involved in and something I enjoy very much. Larry was many things and the one I would lead with is UNUSUAL!!! When you add husband, father, veteran, storyteller, lawyer and of course musician; he was a very interesting guy. He will be missed and remembered with a big smile!



*Tom Paxton, PRESS Photo*

Paxton, from pg 1

Paxton admits that the road is getting rougher. But he thrives on the interaction with the audience, the pressure to perform under the lights and delivering his message.

"I love performing, but that's a different love from songwriting," Paxton said. "There is a little ego involved in that. It's a healthy ego. I've had moments while performing when I thought that I was put in the right place at the right time. This feels so good to me. I am having fun. I love communicating with an audience, the back and forth. But creating, writing, is so different. I'm as good as I can be at that. I'm not bad. But there are a lot of people who are better (writers) than me."

The list of stars who have recorded Paxton's songs only begins with Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, The Weavers, Judy Collins, Joan Baez, Harry Belafonte, Peter, Paul and Mary, The Seekers, The Kingston Trio, Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash and Flatt & Scruggs. Paxton's hits include "Ramblin' Boy," "What Did you Do in School Today?" and "The Marvelous Toy."

He's a roll-up-the-sleeves icon in that he chooses to work with and inspire up-and-coming acts such as Buffalo Rose, Jackson Emmer and Siena Christie. Buffalo Rose and Paxton routinely write songs on Zoom.

Emmer and Christie, he said, collaborate with him once a week to write songs. He guesses that they have written 60 to 70 songs. One could say that Paxton is paying it forward. Pete Seeger gave him plenty of time to talk music and perform.

"I care about young performers because I was cared about," Paxton said. "When I was young, I received encouragement from Pete Seeger and another singer nobody remembers by the name of Ed McCurdy. That meant a lot to me and I know it means a lot to these young people. I see the hope in their eyes that they can get better and better."

There's more to it than that. Paxton wants the folk genre to thrive and not just survive. For him, it's the music of the people.

"I like to teach these young musicians that this is important," he said. "Making music is important. And we need this kind of

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Tom Paxton

music badly. This music is not afraid to face the world. Folk music is not the toy department.”

When Paxton was in his 20s, folk music sat on a high perch in America with the Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Doris Day and Nat King Cole crowd starting to fade. He was a regular at the famous Gaslight Café in Greenwich Village. In 1963, he received national acclaim after performing at the Newport Folk Festival.

It was the age of socially conscious Dylan, Baez, Collins and Peter, Paul and Mary. Paxton became involved with causes that promoted human, civil and labor rights. He and a group of other musicians performed and offered support to striking coal miners in Hazard, Kentucky in 1963.

“I want to see the genre survive, and that’s why I keep going,” he said. “Of course, there is a future. It always will be. People will always be ready to pick up a guitar after a hard day’s work and sing a song. When I was younger, we used to have near fistfights – big arguments – because we took it so seriously. Folk music is made by somebody who does something else for a living. It’s amateur music, which in the 20th century began to be raised to a professional level. But it always retains the amateur nature of it.”

“ ‘I care about young performers because I was cared about,’ ... Paxton wants the folk genre to thrive and not just survive. For him, it’s the music of the people.”



*Image by Barbara Wright*

Anyone, Paxton said, should be able to sing folk. “These are mainly three-chord songs,” he said. “Most of the songs that I write can be sung by anybody with a knowledge of the guitar and three chords. They can get through anything that I write.”

Paxton decided to make folk music his life while a student at the University of Oklahoma when he heard a record of The Weavers at Carnegie Hall as a freshman. He graduated with a bachelor’s degree in fine arts in 1959.

“When I heard that, I said, ‘That’s it,’” Paxton said. “I wanted a seat on that bus. It was music about people. The breadth of folk music was phenomenal.”

Paxton was asked about the possible fortune he passed up by not going commercial.

“Sure, I could have gone commercial,” he said. “I have nothing against that. I know people in Nashville who are involved in commercial writing. That’s a vastly different world and it’s exciting. Two or three (songwriters) will be in cahoots. They will spend the afternoon writing songs that fit the singer like a glove. All that singer has to do is step in front of a mic, sing and make a lot of money from that. I understand that, but I don’t want to do it.”





## Welcome NEW Members

John Bir, William Ganz,  
Ronald Inkrott, Denis Grabill  
All Those Who Wander (band)  
and **Welcome Back** returning  
members!



## Save the Date!

### Other CFMS Events

#### December Musical Show

#### Featuring FOG

**Sun, Dec 10, 3-5pm**

El Vaquero's Restaurant  
3230 Olentangy River Rd, Cols.  
Fundraiser for Central Ohio Folk  
Festival. Food and drink available.  
\$15 suggested donation

*If you want to find out more about all the  
Columbus Folk Music activities, you can  
find them here:*

<https://www.columbusfolkmusicsociety.org>

### Zoom Jam Sessions

**Mondays & Thursdays 10 am-Noon;**

**Saturdays 9:30-11:30 am.** Contact

Jane at: [vanaukj@gmail.com](mailto:vanaukj@gmail.com)

### In-Person Jams

**Saturdays, 9:30-11:30 am** at All  
Saints Lutheran Church, 6770 N. High  
St., Worthington. Dec 2, 16 and 30.

**Saturdays, 9:30-11:30 am** at  
Whetstone Community Center, 3923  
N. High St., Cols. Dec. 2, 9, and 16.

**Mondays, 6-8 pm** at 4th Avenue  
Christian Church, 296 W 4th Ave. Dec  
4 and 11.

## NEWSLETTER TEAM

**Editor (interim):** Diane Boston

**Regular Writers:** Pete Insabella, Michelle Hughes

**Layout:** Sherry Hubbard

**Distribution:** Pete Insabella

**CFMS Event Photos:** Linda McDonald

## CFMS Annual Membership dues are now due by Dec 31! Why Not Consider Joining?

It's simple, inexpensive, and you're supporting  
the CFMS! You can fill out the form on the back  
of this newsletter OR join/renew online at:  
<https://www.columbusfolkmusicsociety.org/mem-ber-application.html>. Please note you do not  
need a PayPal account to join/renew online.  
NEW PRACTICE: If you choose to receive a  
monthly hard copy of the newsletter (as opposed  
to the digital version), we request an additional  
\$15 contribution over & above dues to cover  
postage & handling.

## Looking for opportunities to play (music) nicely with others? Join the Worthington Squares!

The Worthington Squares meet several times a  
week, in person and via Zoom, to jam together.  
These informal jam sessions are a great  
opportunity to practice your instrument while  
getting to know some fellow folk music lovers. We  
also sometimes play at farm markets, metro  
parks, nursing homes, children's events, etc. All  
folk instrument players are welcome, regardless  
of skill or experience!

For questions or to be added to the jam list,  
contact Jane VanAuken at: [vanaukj@gmail.com](mailto:vanaukj@gmail.com)

And see the current jam calendar here:  
<https://www.columbusfolkmusicsociety.org/jam-sessions.html>



## The Columbus Folk Music Society

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VMB: 614-470-3963



[www.campusprinting.net](http://www.campusprinting.net)

[info@campusprinting.net](mailto:info@campusprinting.net)

(614) 261-7991

### BECOME A MEMBER OF THE COLUMBUS FOLK MUSIC SOCIETY

Date \_\_\_\_\_  New  Renew Preferred Newsletter Format:  Digital  Hard Copy **[NOTE: if you choose hard copy, we request an additional \$15 contribution over & above dues to cover postage & handling]**

Name(s) / Band Name (if applic) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

General Age Range – Born:  1930s-40s  1950s-60s  1970s-80s  1990s-2010s

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ (Cell) \_\_\_\_\_ If Band, website \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_ Additional e-mail (if a household or band) \_\_\_\_\_

**We are also a growing, vibrant community of volunteers; the awesome force behind our work! Please  at least 1 box.**

- |  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> May folk festival   | <input type="checkbox"/> General Help      | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational Skills   | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CFMS concert events | <input type="checkbox"/> Graphic Design    | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Musician   | <input type="checkbox"/> Web Design           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking / Baking    | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership Skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Instructor | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing / Newsletter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Data Management     | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal             | Instruments: _____                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising         | <input type="checkbox"/> Musician          | <input type="checkbox"/> Publicity               | <input type="checkbox"/> None                 |

**MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE ANNUALLY ON DECEMBER 31.  one of the membership levels listed below.**

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Band \$25        | <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor \$100 | <input type="checkbox"/> Silver \$250      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Household \$25  | <input type="checkbox"/> Good Friend \$50 | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$200  | <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member \$500 |

I have included an additional \$15 (postage & handling) to have a printed version of newsletter mailed to me.

**To join/renew by credit card**, visit CFMS' website: [columbusfolkmusicsociety.org](http://columbusfolkmusicsociety.org) (About Us/Join)

OR click here: <https://tinyurl.com/CFMS-Join>

**To join/renew by cash or check**, please mail completed membership form with payment to: *Columbus Folk Music Society, PO Box 20735, Columbus, OH 43220.* Membership amounts may be tax-deductible.

My place of work matches donations:

