

THIS SONG IS YOUR SONG

Del Collaborates with Woody

By Dale McCurry

The first time we met Del McCoury, he told High Notes publishers Jennifer Mandaville and me about a project to write music for an album's worth of tunes featuring some of the thousands of Woody Guthrie lyrics that were never finished as songs.

We are sitting on the bus with him and brother Jerry at the 40th annual Telluride Bluegrass Festival. We are wrapping up an interview about his iconic career and his and Jerry's then current tour with Bobby Osborne, J.D. Crowe and Bobby Hicks as "The Masters of Bluegrass." The last thing we ask him is a

"What have we missed?" open-ended, "What would you like to talk about that we don't know enough to ask about?" sort of query.

"Well, not many people know about this," he says, slowly, humbly. "Nora Guthrie [daughter of Woody Guthrie] called me and asked if I would finish some of Woody's songs. I couldn't believe it. She said, 'If my daddy could have afforded a band, he would want yours.' That was kind of cool, you know. So, we're going to talk to them some more and see where that goes. But we are sure going to do something; it's not every day something like that comes along."

SECOND VERSE

The next time we talked to Del was a year later, again at Telluride.



This year he wasn't on a bus. We were in the press tent, which sets at an obtuse angle to the stage. Someone was on stage tearing a fiddle tune up.

It is a great place to listen to the music, a challenging place to talk over it. It was a little hot and stuffy and not nearly as comfortable as a tour bus and, though always a gracious gentleman, it was fairly plain that Del would prefer to be somewhere else. His handler seemed even less enthusiastic. But when we told Del we wanted to talk about the Guthrie songs, he visibly eased and relaxed into the conversation, at home and animated talking about a project that had both challenged and humbled him.

"It was so exciting to get the lyrics from Nora and to pour through them," he said with his signature, yet real, from-here-to-there smile. "He had

dates and margin notes on them. You, know, I only got copies, but he had scribbled and doodled all over them." Del held his hands absently in front of him as if he were holding the papers, smiling.

"One of the things I love about Woody's work is that he would write about anything and make a great song of it. He wrote "This Land is Your Land" after riding a train across the country to New York City. Then, the next day he was sitting on the streets in NYC watching folks go by, and he wrote a song about ladies' hats. I just love that. And there were so many lyrics he had written and never finished."

Nora gave him thirty unfinished, unheard songs from the more than 3,000 archived by the Guthrie Foundation.

WWWD

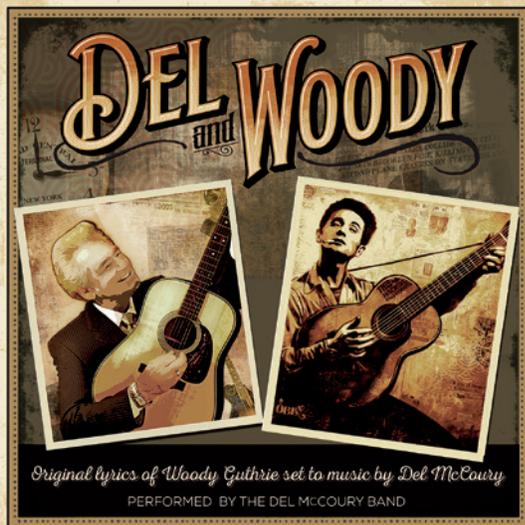
We asked Del about the process of writing the songs. Was it hard to own the tunes while staying true to the larger-than-life legend of Guthrie?

“You know, that was the funny thing,” he says, “I have written a lot of songs in my life, and I can tell you it is not an easy thing to do. But these have sort of felt natural. I read the lyrics and I listen to his other songs and I wonder, ‘How would he do it?’ And then I do that.”

In a YouTube video titled “Del McCoury & Woody Guthrie: A Landmark Collaboration at Caramoor,” Nora confirms Del’s proficiency: “I was able to give Woody ten songs off the top and he could write music to them in ten days. It was like: ‘Yeah. I know exactly what to do,’ and he would go into the studio and just play it.”

It would be one thing, however, to deliver Woody’s words in a solo troubadour manner, but in this case, Del’s charge was to compose a string-band arrangement of the poetry of folk music royalty. “I listened to a lot of the bands of the time to get a feel for what he would be hearing went he wrote these songs in the 30s.”

“When will the album be completed and released?” we ask. “Management doesn’t know this,” Del says leaning into us, momentary conspirators while management’s road dog sits across the room unaware, “but I think I want to do a double album. I don’t want to cut it to twelve songs. There are so many of them. And they are just so good.” **W&W**



To hear a cut from *Del and Woody*, go to



<http://bit.ly/2qMvcYh>

FREE SHIPPING 
ON ALL WEB ORDERS!
www.theacousticshoppe.com

THE ACOUSTIC SHOPPE    

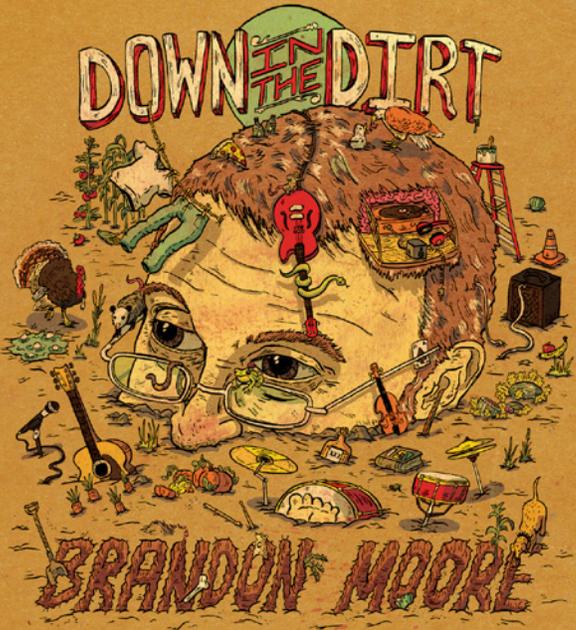
THE ACOUSTIC MUSIC EXPERTS

THE SHOPPE'S GOT YOU COVERED
FOR ALL YOUR ACOUSTIC MUSIC, ACCESSORY
& INSTRUCTIONAL NEEDS

CALL: 417-720-1223
or stop by
1913 E Seminole, Springfield, MO 65804



DOWN IN THE DIRT



BRANDUN MOORE

available today on

 Get it on
iTunes

<http://bit.ly/2qT5Vdl>

