

Musical Tribute and Memorial for Sandy Paton

A musical tribute and memorial for Charles Alexander “Sandy” Paton will be held on Saturday October 10th at one o’clock PM at Music Mountain, 225 Music Mountain Road, Falls Village, CT, Phone: (860) 824-7126. The program will include remembrances and music from family, friends and members of the American, English, Scottish, and Irish folk music communities, many of whom were recorded by Sandy Paton on his company label Folk Legacy. The memorial will be followed by a potluck meal of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food, and more music and sharing. Directions to Music Mountain can be found on the web at musicmountain.org.

Sandy Paton died peacefully on Sunday July 26th at the age of eighty. He was a well-known folksinger, folklorist, and music producer. He sang a wide repertoire of traditional songs in a fine and true tenor voice, accompanying himself with tasteful, flowing guitar work. His passion was to record and produce the expression of other artists, taking time to create the finest possible recordings. Producing records, and later CDs, involved recording, editing, and programming the music while also taking photos, designing covers, and writing notes for the accompanying booklets. The result was a catalog of 140 classic folk recordings, all of which are in print and available at: Folk Legacy, P.O. Box 1148, Sharon, CT 06069, Phone: (860) 364-5661, email: folklegacy@snet.net, Web address: folklegacy.com

Sandy and Caroline Paton founded Folk Legacy in 1961 with their friend and business partner Lee Haggerty. Their first release was of Frank Proffitt, a farmer and fretless-banjo player from the mountains of North Carolina who was celebrated as the source of the song “Tom Dooley” (made famous by the Kingston Trio), which launched the folk music



Sandy Paton in 1963

revival of the 1960s. Many other albums followed, featuring artists from all over the United States, as well as England, Scotland and Ireland. One exciting find was the singer Sara Cleveland from Hudson Falls, New York who knew hundreds of songs from her family tradition of classic ballads and lumbering songs. Folk Legacy also recorded many fine musicians from the folk revival including Gordon Bok, Rosalie Sorrels, Bill Staines, Jean Redpath, Archie Fisher, and many others.

Because his father worked for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, Sandy’s family moved almost every year before he was thirteen. He left home early to travel around the country with a guitar and a sleeping bag. During World War II, when many men were in the army, Sandy worked harvesting wheat in Salina, Kansas. He studied painting at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. and later in Seattle with Mark Tobey and Morris Graves, resulting in a successful one-man show. He worked as an actor in the Northwest and later in New York City where he played the male lead in Shaw’s “Arms and the Man” Off Broadway.

As time went on, he focused more and more on traditional folk music, researching and performing a varied repertoire. In 1957 he met a folk enthusiast, Caroline Ann Swenson, at one of his concerts in Berkeley, CA. The story is that Sandy noticed a young woman singing vigorous harmony on the choruses of his songs, and wasted no time getting to know her after the concert. The couple married and spent a year in England performing in clubs and studying British folk music. They visited and collected songs from traditional singers including Jeannie Robertson, a magnificent ballad singer from Aberdeen, Scotland. Sandy and Caroline’s first son David was born while the couple was living in England.



Sandy and Caroline Paton, CT State Troubadours, 1993

Returning to the U.S. and the greater Chicago area, Sandy sang at the Gate of Horn with Odetta and Martha Schlamme. He recorded his first album "The Many Sides of Sandy Paton" for Elektra Records. Later in Colorado, Sandy sang at the Limelight Club. Around that time, the Patons met Judy Collins, a young singer with whom they shared songs and baby sitting. The Patons moved back to the Chicago area in 1960 where their second son Rob was born. Soon after, Sandy met Lee Haggerty, another folk enthusiast, who suggested that they start Folk Legacy.

Folk Legacy was incorporated on October 31, 1961 in Huntington, VT. Though the choice of Halloween was coincidental, it is one of the most important folkloric dates in the annual calendar. Living in Vermont, the Patons presented programs all over the state including the Trapp Family Lodge and the Sugarbush Inn. In 1967 Folk Legacy, Lee Haggerty, and the Paton family moved to Sharon, CT where David and Rob were enrolled in Sharon Center School.

Over the years, Sandy and Caroline produced recordings of their own music, presented hundreds of concerts in CT and around the U.S., enlarged the Folk Legacy catalog, and participated in folk gatherings, including the Chicago, Fox Hollow, Newport, Smithsonian, Philadelphia, NEFFA,

Nomad, and Old Songs festivals. They were founding members of the North American Folk Alliance and were designated Connecticut State Troubadours in 1993. Their sons David and Rob are both musicians, each performing on his own and together as the Paton Family.

Folk Legacy will enter its 48th year in late October. Caroline, David and Rob will continue collecting, performing, and producing folk music, carrying on the work initiated by Sandy, Caroline and Lee (who died in 2000).

Sandy Paton is survived by his wife Caroline; sons David and Rob; grandchildren Linnea, Erik, Hannah, Shannon, and Juliana; sisters, Barbara Gardner and D'Ann Paton of CA; and many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his grandson Kaelan who was swept away by the Housatonic River on June 16, 2009 after helping two friends to safety from the rushing water.

Tax-deductible contributions in Sandy's name can be made to the Kaelan Paton Memorial Fund and sent to: Caroline Paton, P.O. Box 1148, Sharon, CT 06069 or Salisbury Bank, P.O. Box 7, Sharon, CT 06069.

Anyone with stories, photos, and/or remembrances of Sandy Paton is invited to send them to Linnea M. Palmer Paton at P. O. Box 472, Sharon, CT 06069 or to Lpalmerpaton@yahoo.com for possible inclusion in a future biography or history.



Sandy Paton, Nomad Folk Festival, 2004