

Revolutionary Voices that Shaped The Village — and the World

BY LIZ THOMSON

Planning a festival to take place in America's big birthday year was always going to be a bit of a challenge. July 4 will be long passed by the time The Village Trip (TVT) kicks off on September 25 and, of course, many people had mixed feelings about celebrating at all this year. I'm British and remember well the excitement around USA200, an excitement which carried across the Atlantic. USA250 was rather different, and when Cliff Pearson and I and our colleagues began planning for the eighth Village Trip, we took the "arts and activism" part of our title very seriously indeed. TVT2026 would celebrate the revolution that brought about the independence, honoring some of the many figures whose courage, creativity and intellectual heft helped shaped life in the United States since 1776 — and lives far beyond America's shores.



WOODY GUTHRIE: *Songs to Grow On*. All photos courtesy of Liz Thomson/The Village Trip.

likewise. Each Trip we've worked on has featured a thematic element (Jack Kerouac 100, civil rights), but The Village Trip 2026 is the most thematic overall.

Under the banner of "Revolutionary Voices," TVT2026 will shine a spotlight on many whose names we know but whose stories have faded over time — Dorothy Day's for example. A close friend of Eugene O'Neill (they drank in the Golden Swan), she inspired the figure of Josie in *A Moon for the Misbegot-*

Ellsberg who, as a 19-year-old Harvard drop-out, lived in the Lower Manhattan Catholic Worker House — having helped his father copy *The Pentagon Papers*.

- The premiere of Woody Guthrie's *Songs to Grow On*, a 40 minute interactive kids' show created and presented by the New York City Children's Theater (Saturday 9/26).

A plethora of music.

We're honored to welcome back **James C. Martin** with *Let Freedom Sing: Paul Robeson — His Words, His Music* (Sunday 9/27), a tribute created especially for the festival which also includes a premiere by David Amram and others setting words by Langston Hughes, Robeson's friend and fellow activist.

America Sings a Siren's Song (Thursday 10/1) features new works by composers each examining the immigrant experience, including Nehemiah Luckett's *Let It Be Told to the Future World: Reckoning with the American Experiment at 250*, commissioned by ASCAP for TVT2026.

Artist Emeritus David Amram honors old friends in their centennial year with *Miles and Train at 100* (Thursday 10/1).

Classical Cool: Ich Bin Ein New Yorker (Sunday 10/4), hosted by Nina Bernstein Simmons, celebrates the independent spirit of NYC.

We close with a 40-year, all-star celebration of **The Greenwich Village Folk Festival** (Sunday 10/4), featuring Suzanne Vega, Noel Paul Stookey, John McCutcheon, Rod MacDonald, and many others.

Framing the Village

The festival's annual art show runs throughout September — its theme — "Independent Thinkers!" And our free concert takes place this year on Gansevoort Plaza (10/3) and features The Slambovian Circus of Dreams.



JAMES C. MARTIN (right) performs a tribute to Paul Robeson.



And many of their voices rang out from the Village, among them Thomas Paine, who lived on Bleecker Street and Grove Street, the site of today's Marie's Crisis Café, named for one of Paine's many pamphlets. It was he who wrote, "These are the times that try men's souls." Indeed they do, perhaps more than most. Yet what this neighborhood — Greenwich Village, the East Village — teaches us is that, however trying the times, brave souls always fight back. Those lucky enough to live in the Village walk daily in the footsteps of many of them. Clara Lemlich, who battled for union rights. Elisabeth Irwin, a gay woman who led the fight for progressive education and established the Little Red Schoolhouse. Emma Lazarus, poet and activist whose immortal words adorn the Statue of Liberty. Eugene O'Neill, who revolutionized the American stage. Dorothy Day, one of the Silent Sentinels, a journalist and radical pacifist who founded the Catholic Worker Movement. Woody Guthrie, Dust Bowl balladeer and champion of the dispossessed. And Paul Robeson, a true renaissance figure who used his great voice to speak out against injustice whatever the personal cost.

They and so many others fought the good fight in the saloons and salons of the Village. The lines of so many revolutions — social, political, artistic — can be traced through its crooked streets, crossing metaphorically in Washington Square Park where, for genera-



SUZANNE VEGA: A welcome return.

tions, people have gathered both to protest and celebrate. It was music that drew me to Greenwich Village and the first of many visits came in 1995, when I reported on Joan Baez's live recording sessions at the Bottom Line. It didn't take me long to discover that the Village was about much more than music and when I realized there was no festival to celebrate its rich history, The Village Trip was born. It was thrilling to meet Pearson, a West Villager who came aboard in 2021 and works with me as joint artistic director, and to discover that our visions coincided. We bring to our shared endeavor our own knowledge and passions, and we've been fortunate to join hands with others who do



NOEL PAUL STOOKEY: Village folkie.



DOROTHY DAY speaking at a protest.



NEHEMIAH LUCKETT: a Village Trip premiere.

ten. Arrested more than once in the park, she was held at the Women's House of Detention. Day also knew Woody Guthrie — he and The Almanac Singers often played at protests organized by the Catholic Worker Movement.

Three unmissable events.

- Cecilia Rubino's Eugene O'Neill guided tour (Sunday 9/27).
- The Village Trip Lecture: Dorothy Day (Tuesday 9/29), delivered by Robert

There's 35+ events and music to suit every taste, as well as more walks and talks, poetry, and exciting kids' programming.

Booking is already open at www.TheVillageTrip.com and the full program will be available with September's *Village View*. Spread the word, sign up to the newsletter, mark your calendars — and remember Paul Robeson's words, "Artists are the gatekeepers of truth. We are civilization's radical voice."