

# Guthrie assures 'Alice's Restaurant' is still open

**A**rlo Guthrie: 40 years later, same old garbage.” So read the stickers that folk music legend Arlo Guthrie says he’s creating for his upcoming tour celebrating 40 years since writing “Alice’s Restaurant,” his epic, anti-war story song.

The 18½-minute tune, written in 1965 and recorded in 1967, has become a Thanksgiving Day radio staple, as it relates the tale of Guthrie’s arrest for littering in western Massachusetts and subsequent draft rejection because of his “criminal” record.

Guthrie, 58, and son of legendary folk singer Woody Guthrie, will bring his three-man show to Plymouth Memorial Hall on May 8.

Contacted by phone on tour in Palo Alto, Calif., Guthrie said he retired “Alice’s Restaurant” from his playlist years ago, first when the draft and Vietnam War ended, and then again in the ’90s.

But he noted that the current war in Iraq didn’t require new material.

“Strangely enough, the times are eerily familiar,” he said, laughing. “So it’s not like we need new material. It’s haulin’ out the old stuff. This is sort of the same old, same old.”

Growing up in Coney Island, N.Y., Guthrie learned from folk singers like Pete Seeger, Leadbelly, and, of course, his own father. He eventually developed a style uniquely his own, and gained a ’60s following in Greenwich Village, Cambridge, the Newport Folk Festival and Woodstock.

He plays guitar, piano and harmonica, but he’s widely known for his storytelling, often a highlight of the

## CONCERT PREVIEW

### ARLO GUTHRIE

At Plymouth Memorial Hall May 8. \$30 and \$35, at TicketWeb at 866-468-7619 or in person at the Plymouth Memorial Hall box office.

show. Fans hang on his every word, and they appreciate Guthrie’s knack for knitting a comical yarn – sometimes absurd (like “The Ballad of Reuben Clamzo”) – and concluding with song. “Part of the fun of hearing these things is that you don’t know if it’s a one-line introduction or a 20-minute piece,” says Guthrie.

If Guthrie’s folk icon status wasn’t

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Arlo Guthrie

solidified after writing “Alice’s Restaurant” and starring in the movie of the same name, Guthrie will be forever known for immortalizing Steve Goodman’s “City of New Orleans,” a hobo’s glimpse of middle America from a rolling train, and his folk-rock classic “Coming into Los Angeles.”

It’s not unusual for a Guthrie CD to span genres, from folk to bluegrass to rock or even world music, with songs about love, the destitute or consequences of greed. His songs show a diversity few other artists have achieved, from a ballad about Chilean activist “Victor Jara,” to the “fire burning bright” in “Massachusetts,” named the state folk song, or his version of Ed McCurdy’s song of peace, “Last Night I Had The

Strangest Dream.”

Guthrie said he hasn’t yet chosen his playlist for the Plymouth show. But he notes that after 40 years and more than 20 albums, his repertoire gives him many choices.

## Celebrating diversity

Guthrie bought the Trinity Church – where his friend Alice Brock used to live and where “Alice’s Restaurant” was written – in Great Barrington in 1992. There, he began his own interfaith church, which celebrates diversity among cultures and religions.

“I was actually always interested in spiritual traditions of every tradition,” he said. “I was raised a Jewish kid in New York. I joined the Franciscans at some point because I loved the tradition of Catholic spirituality. I am also fond of the Protestant tradition, as well as just Native American stuff.

“There are all kinds of wonderful ways, I think, that people contribute to our understanding of what the divine is and what the nature of human beings are.”

After 9/11, he said, the church brought in a Muslim speaker to help foster understanding.

Ordained a member of the interfaith clergy in the Eastern Yogi tradition in Massachusetts, Guthrie said he believes that finding common ground among ethnic, cultural and religious groups is the key to curbing “wacko” fundamentalism.

“There are two kinds of fundamentalists. There are fundamentalists who keep the ‘fun’ in fundamentalism and there are those that do not,” he said. “So, we founded the church to have a neutral ground.”

Guthrie doesn’t consider himself a cause-oriented person. He says he just sings about things that are going on. But some causes go beyond song, which is one of the reasons he bought the church.

The church also is home to the Guthrie Center & Foundation, named



STEPHEN IDE photo/The Patriot Ledger

**Arlo Guthrie will play At Plymouth Memorial Hall on May 8.**

for his father, which raises money with a Walk-a-thon and concerts for research into Huntington’s Disease, which claimed the Dust Bowl balladeer’s life in 1967.

“We also have a Thanksgiving dinner each year with all the Huntington’s families and the doctors who work with them, and the

scientists who study it,” he said. “Give everybody a chance to meet each other. And that’s a great event.”

## Never tested

Though Huntington’s Disease is a genetic disorder, Guthrie says he has not been tested because, even if he knew he could become afflicted, there

is no treatment.

“So far, so good,” he said.

The church provides weekly free lunches in the community and support for families living with HIV/AIDS, as well as other life-threatening illnesses.

Along with multi-instrumentalist Gordon Titcomb, Guthrie has been touring with his son, Abe, one of his four children with Jackie, his wife of 36 years. All told, Guthrie, who has five grandchildren, says he’s been touring 10 months a year for the past six or seven years, a hectic schedule that doesn’t give him much time off.

“When we’re off, we’re not visiting or anything,” he said. “We’re just sticking around the fireplace, you know, trying to remember who the kids are.”

For the 40th anniversary tour, which begins June 15 and will run about two years, including a Boston stop Nov. 16, Guthrie will feature as openers the folk-rock quintet The Mammals, which includes Tao Rodriguez-Seeger, the grandson of family friend and folk legend, Pete Seeger.

And, naturally, for the tour, he will resurrect “Alice’s Restaurant.”

“At some point I have to start remembering that freaking thing,” Guthrie said, joking that there was a time when he saw longtime fans heading for the restrooms when they heard the lengthy song beginning.

He knew then it was time to take it off the playlist.

## Film on Saturday

Coincidentally, the 1969 film “Alice’s Restaurant,” starring Guthrie with Pat Quinn and James Broderick is on cable channel Flix at 6:05 p.m. Saturday. And Guthrie will appear on the opening night of this summer’s Newport Folk Festival, Aug. 5-7. For information: [www.newportfolk.com](http://www.newportfolk.com).

On Nov. 16, Guthrie brings his 40th anniversary of “Alice’s Restaurant” tour to Symphony Hall as part of the Bank of America Celebrity Series. For information: [www.celebrityseries.org](http://www.celebrityseries.org).

– STEPHEN A. IDE  
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