

Utah Phillips

*America's walking history book; great
songwriter, storyteller, and humorist*



“Utah Phillips has richness beyond measure. He writes of hobo travel, where the leaving of a new song pays for a meal and where longing can drive one traveling for days to locate an old friend. He has the sentiment of cherishing life's opportunities and the eye for making heroes of everyday people. He is a promoter and supporter of unions, laborers, railroads, the Industrial Workers of the World, and laying down the weapons of privilege. He is a storymaker, storyteller, story spreader, historian, anarchist, pacifist, philanthropist, agitator, entertainer, curmudgeon...”

— *Sing Out!*

“A Bard who gives us joy and hope.”

— *Studs Terkel*

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The son of labor organizers, **Bruce "U.Utah" Phillips**, born in 1935 in Cleveland, Ohio, is the fundamental pragmatist who makes stories of any raw material that finds its way to his experience. Whether miner, revivalist, revolutionary or visionary; all have received **Phillips'** polite attention. A former warehouseman in Salt Lake City, he learned yarning from **Earl M. Lyman**, an elder of the Latter Day Saints, and **Phillips'** employer, who interrupted the morning's wrapping and shipping to tell anecdotes and events of Mormon pioneer days. At the end of a workday, **Phillips** went to the library to read territorial history to find questions to ask **Lyman** the next day. Thus, **Phillips** learned the art of storytelling as a way to avoid work. Zuni chants and Navaho songs and lore from **Father Liebler**, a San Juan priest, plus conversations with hoboes and cowboys, lectures by anarchist and pacifist **Ammon Hennacy**, and a performance by **Marian Anderson** during the Korean War augmented **Phillips'** store of eyewitness accounts, anecdotes, tales, and philosophy.

Phillips ran away from home in his teens to gain an education on the road, riding the rails and bumming along with tramps. He taught himself to play the ukulele and guitar, and began writing songs about the hobo life while supporting himself as a printer, dishwasher, and stock clerk. His experience as a soldier during the Korean War convinced him that nonviolence is the only sane way to live. During the 1960s, **Utah** worked as a state archivist and founded the Poor People's Party in Utah. In 1968, he ran for the US Senate on the Peace & Freedom ticket. A leave of absence from state service turned into permanent dismissal and an opportunity to try his luck as a platform entertainer. In 1972 and every four years since, he has furthered his eccentricities by running for the presidency on the Sloth & Indolence ticket. An adherent of Everyman, he has garnered a store of tales in the style of **Mark Twain** and **Will Rogers**, and relates the adventures of labor heroes such as **Mother Jones** and **Big Bill Haywood**.

A promoter of the IWW and a national treasure of wit and humor, **Phillips**, dubbed the "Golden Voice of the Great Southwest," has earned a small but devoted following for his tales, guitar music, and songs, which he shares among the folk family in the style of a Celtic bard. He is known for researching a town to learn landmarks, anecdotes, and local minutiae before appearing onstage or at a festival. His programs extol self-reliance and encourage people to stop depending on government or corporatism, and to toss their televisions out the window. A heart condition prevents him from his usual circuit of 120 cities a year, but he continues to perform his history-based blarney about eccentrics and heroes of the road. Friends and fans of **Phillips** have rallied to his support since his disability.

Beloved as a rabble rouser and individualist, he remains true to unionism in the tradition of **Woody Guthrie**, **Pete Seeger** and the strikers of the 1930s.



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