

Lonesome Traveler: The Life of Lee Hays

Doris Willens



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During the Great Depression, Lee Hays, the son of a Southern Methodist minister, used his music to life the hearts of sharecroppers and miners and union organizers. He helped bring black music to America's consciousness. He could make people laugh in times when there seemed little to laugh about. An Arkansas traveler and radical minstrel, he commented wryly on events and impaled reactionary southern congressmen on their own words. A kind of Mark Twain of the left, people said. But Lee Hays, for all his great size and talents and humor, was also a difficult man, plagued by self-doubts and a driving need to discombobulate any person or group that struck him as self-satisfied.

Lonesome Traveler is the story of a prodigious talent with a zeal for changing the world. With Pete Seeger he formed the popular folksinging group the Weavers, which sang songs of social justice just as a tidal wave of red-hunting hit America. The rest of his legendary story will anger, touch, and delight.

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