

# Oh, freedom Guthrie relishes big issues



PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO

**ARLO** Guthrie became a well known social commentator and musician during the '60s folk scene thanks in large part to "Alice's Restaurant," an 18-minute rambling musical narrative about his experiences with police and military recruiters during the Vietnam era.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the song, and he's bringing the celebration to The Paramount on September 30. Faced with *The Hook's* questions about the society that emerged from his activism 40 years ago, Guthrie began to gush.

"There were a lot of people engaged in all kinds of stuff 40 years ago. It wasn't just the war—the war was only one thing in the cultural revolution—the civil rights movement, people concerned about the war, people worried about nuclear power, and people burning lingerie— it was a lot of the same people, even though we tend to isolate these events and think of them as separate. It wasn't just about the war, it was taking stock of the nation as a whole and wondering what kind of country we were going to have.

It's no different now from the way it was 40 years ago. It's not just the war— people are concerned about who you can marry or what you can grow in your backyard.

These are the issues that concern the times, and there are people heavily involved in all of them, and right or left, that's terrific.

Every individual doesn't have to be right about everything, you just have to engage in the discussion of the times. If enough people do that on the left and the right and the top and the bottom, we'll do alright.

I think we have accomplished exactly what we had hoped to, which is to continue to make people feel like their voice counts. Forty years ago, there were people telling us to shut up, get out of the country if you don't like it, but we got up and we said, "No. You've gotta speak up. If you're American, you have an obligation to present your point of view, and by doing so you make the country free."

You have to use the freedoms you have, or you lose them. There are people telling people to shut up now, and I'm opposed to those people.

Before the war in Iraq, millions of people all across the world took to the streets. Some of them were saying, "Don't go," and some of them were saying "Let's roll."

That's when I knew what we had accomplished. In every community now, there are groups concerned about nuclear energy and the environment, civil rights, and women's rights. All the things that were controversial 40 years ago have become part of the fabric of the culture. They've become ordinary. That's the ultimate success of the activism of those times. ■

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