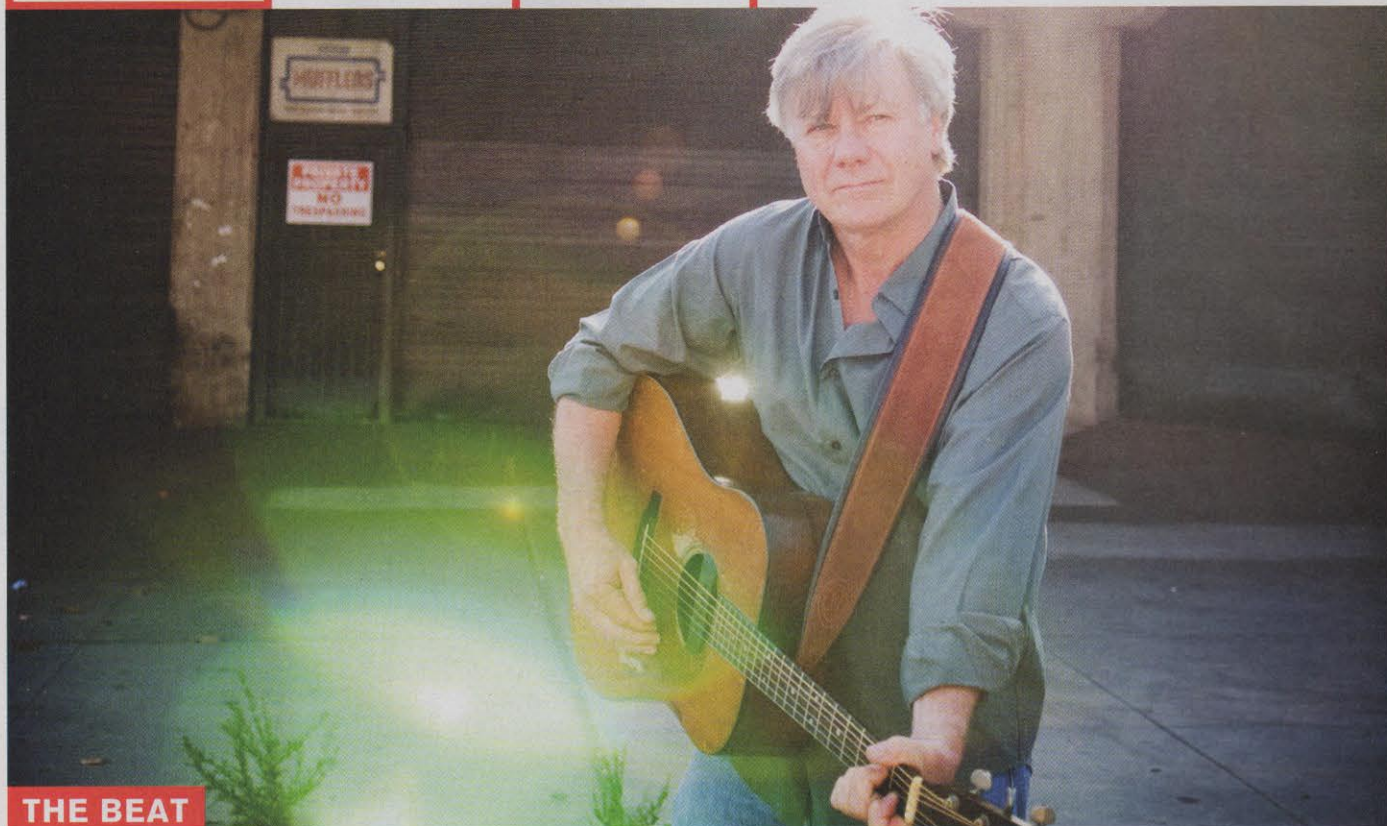


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California star:
Darryl Holter

Woody on the Left Coast

A new album and book explore
Woody Guthrie's formative years in L.A.

BY WHITNEY PHANEUF

Woody Guthrie moved to Los Angeles in 1937, just one among hundreds of thousands of penniless Okies fleeing the Dust Bowl in search of a better life. By the time he left California in 1940 to move to New York City, Guthrie was an established songwriter, urban radical, and successful radio host.

A new album, *Radio Songs: Woody Guthrie in Los Angeles 1937-1939*, and forthcoming book by Americana musician and folk-music scholar **Darryl Holter** explore Guthrie's formative years in L.A. Holter says his historical research, funded by the Woody Guthrie Fellowship, led him to a deeper understanding of Guthrie's musical and political evolution.

"We all have this image of Woody Guthrie as the guy that rode on the rails during the Depression, as the guy who was in the folk-revival movement in Greenwich Village, as the person who had a guitar that said 'This machine

kills fascists,' as the person **Bob Dylan** emulated, but for me, the real question was how did he get that way," says Holter, during a phone interview. "It was in Los Angeles that Guthrie transformed from an amateur guitar player-singer to a professional person with a radio show that had a following, and started to write his own songs and evolve musically. And there was a parallel evolution politically."

Much of Guthrie's artistic development, depicted in Haskell Wexler's 1976 film *Bound for Glory*, took place during the singer's stint as a radio host on L.A. station KFVD. Guthrie performed traditional ballads and gospel tunes with his co-host Maxine Crissman (known as "Lefty Lou"), as well as such original songs as "Do Re Mi," "I Ain't Got No Home," and "Talking Dust Bowl Blues," which chronicled the tough realities of being a down-and-out Okie in L.A. At the same time, Holter says, Guthrie was introduced to

members of the American Communist Party and left-wing activists who influenced his thinking and introduced him to the local radical scene.

To capture the original spirit of the songs performed by Woody and Lefty Lou, Holter enlisted a number of guest vocalists, including Nickel Creek's **Sara Watkins** on "California Stars," **Ani DiFranco** on "Looking for That New Deal Now," and his daughter **Julia Holter** on "My Flowers Grow Green." They're backed by guitarist Tim Young, pedal- and lap-steel guitar virtuoso **Greg Leisz**, fiddler Gabe Witcher, bassist Billy Mohler, and drummer Dave Kemper.

The album includes a 30-minute DVD of Holter performing in and talking about various L.A. locales that have historical significance to Guthrie's songwriting. Also due sometime this year is Holter's *Woody Guthrie L.A.*, a collection of 20 essays by various scholars about Guthrie's stint in the City of Angels.