



RED HOUSE RECORDS

Publicity Contact: Ellen Stanley • promotions@redhouserecords.com • (651) 644-4161



Rosalie Sorrels

Strangers in Another Country The Songs of Bruce "Utah" Phillips

GRAMMY NOMINATED!

RHR-CD-214 • Release Date: August 5, 2008

"a tender, deeply personal masterpiece of song and memory"
- *Boston Globe*

"Rosalie Sorrels, who must know a million songs,
can sing each one as if it's her life story."
- *Rolling Stone*

Recently nominated for a **Grammy Award for Best Traditional Folk Album**, Rosalie Sorrels' new album *Strangers in Another Country: The Songs of Bruce "Utah" Phillips* is a moving tribute to the late great folk hero, who died of congestive heart failure on May 23, 2008. The legendary songwriter, storyteller, humorist, workers' rights advocate and radical raconteur is recognized as an American icon, and his songs have been covered by everyone from **Joan Baez** and **Emmylou Harris** to **Tom Waits** and **Ani DiFranco**. Yet for over 50 years his greatest interpreter has been his lifelong friend Rosalie Sorrels, a folk legend in her own right.



The self-described "travelin' lady" has officially retired from touring, but she returned to the studio in 2007 to make an album to benefit her friend Utah Phillips, who had heart disease. Although he recently passed away, his songs are given new life on this remarkable recording. Remembering songs that even Utah had forgotten, she covers some of Utah's lesser known, rarely performed classics, many of which have only been available on obscure recordings and are only now available on CD. Songs like "**I Had a Mule**" (made famous by **The Limelitters**) and "**Don't Go Home**" were recorded in the 1960's but have not been readily available since. Now Rosalie gathers these and other great songs together with stories and poems, offering rare insight into the man behind Utah's larger than life character. In addition to the 22 tracks of music and stories, the album includes a 16-page booklet with extensive commentary and memories from Rosalie with historic photos, drawings and other material from her personal collection.

Strangers in Another Country was produced by **Roma Baran** and features many special guests, including **Kate & Anna McGarrigle**, **Peggy Seeger**, **Jay Ungar & Molly Mason**, **Bryan Bowers** and **Dakota Dave Hull**. These eclectic roots musicians team up with Rosalie to make a loving tribute to Utah's work that documents the heaviness and hilarity of life. The album begins with the road-weary "**Starlight on the Rails**" about the loneliness of exile and moves to the comforting warmth of "**Mountain Valley Home**" and "**Green Rolling Hills of West Virginia**." From these songs of home, the album travels through hard times and untold tragedies with a few light stops on the way, ending on an up-tempo train ride on "**Talkin' Wolverine 14**," a song taken from her 1978 release *Travelin' Lady Rides Again*. This classic track (the only song on this CD that was previously released) is a fitting finale to this celebration of a man who was known as a rider of the rails.

Inspired by Utah's own full and varied life as a Korean War veteran, hobo, poet and political activist, the album is pure Americana, with folk and country sounds and images of freight trains, hard work, big dreams and the roads that lead us back home. Sometimes sad, sometimes humorous but always full of heart, this album is one like no other. *Strangers in Another Country* is an instant classic and represents Rosalie's finest singing, full of the beauty, strength and honesty that has made her one of this century's most important American voices.

BIOGRAPHY

At 75, **Rosalie Sorrels** is one of the most notable and vibrant voices in the American folk music scene. She has traveled this country, usually driving herself, for over 40 years. Wherever she has stopped she has made lifelong friends, whether they be artists, writers or political activists. **Gamble Rogers** referred to her as “the hillbilly Edith Piaf,” and the **Boston Globe** has called her “one of America’s genuine folk treasures.”

Rosalie was born in Idaho and still lives there today in a log cabin her father built, 30 miles outside of Boise. She began her career as a folklorist in the 1950’s and has accumulated an encyclopedic knowledge of the folk idiom, ranging from English ballads to Mormon songs to the work of contemporary songwriters. Her interpretation of these songs and stories, along with her own impressive body of original work, serve to create and preserve the oral folk tradition.

An independent spirit, Rosalie left her husband in the mid 1960’s and went on the road with her five children to begin a career as a musician, playing at the **Newport Folk Festival** and other legendary venues. Her homes in Boise and then in Salt Lake City were the stopping places for just about any creative person who came through town, including not only musicians but some of the pivotal figures of the Beat Generation. Many of them have remained her friends and sometime collaborators. **Oscar Zeta Acosta**, **Hunter Thompson** and **Studs Terkel** wrote introductory liner notes for her albums. **Robert Creeley** wrote a poem about her. The noted composer and filmmaker **David Amram** played French horn and flute on one of her early albums. Studs Terkel has included interviews with her in two of his books, *American Dreams Lost and Found* and the most recent, *May the Circle Be Unbroken*. The late great folk icon **Bruce “Utah” Phillips** was her close friend for over 55 years and collaborated with her on many projects, including *The Long Memory*, an album they released together on Red House Records that features obscure union songs and stories of the working class.

In recognition of her role as a creator of and collaborator in the American culture of the second half of the twentieth century, the **University of California at Santa Cruz** has set up a **Rosalie Sorrels Archive** as part of its **Beat Generation Archives**. The **University of Idaho** awarded her an **honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts degree** in 2000, and the next year **The Boise Peace Quilt Project** presented her with a peace quilt, adding her name to the distinguished list of workers for peace and justice who have been presented with quilts.

Despite a bout with cancer and a cerebral aneurysm that nearly killed her, Rosalie has recorded 24 albums and written three books, including *Way Out in Idaho*, published in honor of the Idaho centenary, a monumental collection of songs, stories, pictures, and recipes gathered in the course of three years spent traveling around her home state and listening to its people. Her 2004 album *My Last Go Round* was nominated for a **Grammy** for Best Traditional Folk Album and was a musical journey through her 40-year career in folk music, featuring some of her favorite friends including **Jean Ritchie**, **Christine Lavin** and **Loudon Wainwright III**.

Although the self-described “travelin’ lady” has officially retired from touring, she returned to the studio in 2007 to make an album to benefit her friend **Utah Phillips**, who had congestive heart failure. Although he died on May 23, 2008, his songs are given a new life on Rosalie’s new album *Strangers in Another Country: The Songs of Bruce “Utah” Phillips*. Known as one of the foremost interpreters of Utah’s songs, Rosalie remembers songs even he had forgotten. This new collection features some of his lesser known, rarely performed classics, many of which have only been available on obscure recordings and are only now available on CD. Produced by **Roma Baran** and featuring special guests **Kate & Anna McGarrigle**, **Peggy Seeger** and others, this album is an instant classic and represents Rosalie’s finest singing, full of the beauty, strength and honesty that has made her one of this century’s most important American voices.

RED HOUSE DISCOGRAPHY

Strangers in Another Country: The Songs of Bruce “Utah” Phillips – 2008

My Last Go Round – 2004

No Closing Chord: The Songs of Malvina Reynolds – 2000

The Long Memory (with U. Utah Phillips) – 1996

QUOTES

“Rosalie Sorrels is as far from the misty-eyed ‘folkie’ stereotype as good bourbon whiskey is from pink lemonade.”

— *Chicago Reader*

“An authentic living legend.”

— *Folk Roots*

“Her shows feel like an evening spent with a close friend around a living-room fire, as she sprinkles her reflective ballads with classic folk songs and droll, sage tales she’s picked up—and lived—during her 40-odd years as one of America’s genuine folk treasures.”

— *Boston Globe*

“[Rosalie Sorrels] has a way of getting inside the essence of a song and bringing it to life like few others.”

— *Sing Out!*

“Sorrels offers a world-weary, hauntingly sweet-voiced tour of life’s brambles. Her vocalization is half a mother’s comforting lullaby, half a brisk October wind wafting down Idaho’s Bitterroot Mountains foreboding winter.”

— *Billboard*

“Rosalie Sorrels sings songs the way you’ve always hoped they’d be sung. Deeply, effortlessly, and altogether lovely.”

— *Studs Terkel*

“Her voice was glorious... a clear rich alto that could surge with ardor, or subside to a fragile but fully controlled quaver of sadness or tenderness.”

— *Los Angeles Times*

“Sorrels doesn’t just give a concert, she holds court—storytelling, pontificating, imparting the wisdom of someone who’s been there and done that.”

— *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“When you leave a Rosalie Sorrels concert, you carry away haunting little pieces of her life. Sorrels dips into folk, blues and even a little jazz. Her songs can be sweet lullabies, 100-year old folk songs or sincere, emotional dramas that leave listeners drained.”

— *The Plain Dealer*

“Like Billie Holiday, Rosalie Sorrels grows on your soul and moves it to living.”

— *Victory Review*

“One hell of a songwriter...Rosalie’s songs are so close to the bone that I get nervous listening to them.”

— *Hunter S. Thompson*

May 27, 2008

U. Utah Phillips, Folk Troubadour, Dies at 73

By [JON PARELES](#)

Bruce Duncan Phillips, the itinerant folk singer, songwriter, storyteller and social activist who jokingly called himself U. Utah Phillips, “the Golden Voice of the Great Southwest,” died on Friday at his home in Nevada City, Calif. He was 73.

The cause was congestive heart failure, his family said in a statement.

An instinctively independent guitar-slinger and self-described anarchist with an affinity for history and a trove of one-liners, Mr. Phillips was a regular on the folk circuit from 1969 into the 21st century. “It is better to be likable than to be talented,” he often said.

His sets were monologues that interspersed anecdotes, political jabs and wry observations with songs — some traditional, some from the labor movement and some he had written, like “Green Rolling Hills,” “All Used Up,” “The Telling Takes Me Home,” “Goodnight Loving Trail” and “Rocksalt and Nails.” His songs were recorded by [Emmylou Harris](#), [Tom Waits](#), [Joan Baez](#), Waylon Jennings and [Ani DiFranco](#), who signed him to her label, Righteous Babe, and produced two albums for him in the 1990s. Mr. Phillips sang about workers, historical events, the West and his great love, trains; for a while he lived in a railroad caboose.

At a performance last year, he said: “It’s nice to know there are some things in early 21st-century post-industrial culture that don’t change very fast. I am one of those.”

Mr. Phillips was born in 1935 in Cleveland, the son of labor organizers who moved to Utah in 1947. He was an Army private in the Korean War. In an interview with Works in Progress, a newspaper in Olympia, Wash., he said about the war’s aftermath: “I was very angry and frightened by what I’d seen and what I had done there. I got on the freight trains, and I rode for quite a while to try to sort myself out. I think I was drunk most of the time.”

He returned to Salt Lake City and ended up at Joe Hill House, a homeless shelter run by a Catholic anarchist, Ammon Hennacy, who shaped Mr. Phillips’s lifelong perspective. Mr. Phillips joined the Industrial Workers of the World, also known as the Wobblies, the internationalist union. Mr. Phillips wrote songs influenced by [Woody Guthrie](#) and [Pete Seeger](#) and country singers like T. Texas Tyler (after which he modeled his U. Utah Phillips name). He worked at Joe Hill House and then for the State of Utah as an archivist. But after he ran for the [United States Senate](#) in 1968 on the independent Peace and Freedom ticket, he lost his state job and decided to try to make a living as a performer.

Encouraged by the singer Rosalie Sorrels, he moved to Saratoga Springs, N.Y., and found his way onto the circuit of coffeehouses, clubs and festivals that would sustain him for the next 38 years — “learning how to make a living, not a killing,” he said in a 2007 podcast. “I discovered a dignified, ancient, elegant trade, one where I could own what I do and never have to have a boss again.”

He recorded his first albums for the Philo label and later recorded for Red House, including an album of duets, “The Long Memory,” with Ms. Sorrels in 1996. He was a straightforward folk singer throughout his career. But for “The Past Didn’t Go Anywhere” (Righteous Babe), Ms. DiFranco winnowed down a hundred hours of concert tapes and melded his songs and stories with electronic tracks influenced by hip-hop. “Fellow Workers,” a 1999 album with Ms. DiFranco and her band, was nominated for the Grammy Award for best contemporary folk album.

In the late 1980s, Mr. Phillips settled in Nevada City with his fourth wife, Joanna Robinson, who survives him along with his sons Duncan, of Salt Lake City, and Brendan, of Olympia, Wash.; his daughter, Morrigan Belle of Washington, D.C.; his stepsons Nicholas Tomb of Monterey, Calif., and Ian Durfee of Davis, Calif.; his brothers David, of Fairfield, Calif., Ed, of Cleveland, and Stuart Cohen, of Los Angeles; his sister, Deborah Cohen, of Lisbon, Portugal; and a grandchild, Brendan.

He started a series, "Loafer's Glory," on the Nevada City public radio station, KVMR-FM, which was syndicated nationally and collected on CDs on his own label, No Guff. In 2005 he opened Hospitality House, a nonprofit group that aids the homeless in collaboration with churches, in nearby Grass Valley, Calif. He learned he had heart disease in 2004, and health problems forced him to retire from touring in 2007.

"I don't need fame and I don't need power and I don't need wealth," he said last year. "I'm in need of friends, which I have found in abundance."

Sorrels sings to honor Utah

By JOHN BECK
Friday, June 27, 2008

Musical respect: A few days ago, folk singer Rosalie Sorrels celebrated her 75th birthday over martinis at the Hotel Mac in Point Richmond. Ramblin' Jack Elliott dropped by. A former mayor of the town was there. But one friend was sadly missing: her good buddy of 55 years, Utah Phillips.

"I know he would have had a few martinis with me," she said.

Phillips -- one of America's greatest storytellers and protest artists -- died Memorial Day weekend, right around the same time Sorrels was channeling his song "Ashes on the Sea" in a live radio broadcast.

"It was almost eerie when I got the call the next day," she said. "I was singing it about the time he died."

This weekend at the Kate Wolf Memorial Music Festival -- where the Revival Tent will be renamed "Utahpia" -- she'll roll out a batch of his songs, many straight off her new Phillips tribute album, "Strangers in Another Country." "It was not easy to choose the songs, believe me," she said. "I told everybody when they asked me to do this that I wouldn't do it if he didn't like it, so I left out things I recorded on other albums that he didn't like."

Sorrels and Phillips met over a half a century ago at a four-day going away party in Salt Lake City before he took off for the the Korean War. At the time, long before he was crowned "The Golden Voice of the Great Southwest" and wrote classics like "Green Rolling Hills of West Virginia," "Rock, Salt and Nails," "If I Could Be the Rain" and "The Goodnight Loving Trail," he was dabbling in song parodies, one of them a take-off on "Casey Jones."

"He wrote some calypso songs I'm not going to tell anyone about because he'd come back and haunt me," she said.

One writer once compared Phillips to "an apt cross between Santa Claus and Karl Marx."

"He was nothing like that when I met him," Sorrels remembered. "He invented that character when his hair went white."

Phillips took Sorrels to her first war protest and over the years Sorrels covered his music -- along with the likes of Kate Wolf, Tom Waits and John McCutcheon -- more times than she can remember, giving his music a big push before he was a household name in folk circles.

"We were friends like men are friends," Sorrels said. "We were never romantically involved, although some people think I was some old girlfriend of his, but I'm not."

In some ways, they were the most unlikely of collaborators. "Sometimes we were mad at each other for a year at a time because he nailed me on the stage when he thought I was getting too personal."

She loved his timing -- although "his was more like Laurence Olivier and mine is more like Lenny Bruce," she said.

Looking back on his legacy, "I think he was an alchemist," she said. "I believe he took those words from poets and writers that he admired and made them into things that people he was writing about could understand. He gave it back to them in their own language. I think he was as good at it as Woody Guthrie."

Sorrels will hardly be the only Utah Phillips admirer to take the stage at this weekend's Kate Wolf Memorial. Ani DiFranco was a huge champion of his work, teaming up with Phillips for the album "Fellow Workers" that yielded a Grammy nomination in 2000 for best contemporary folk album.

