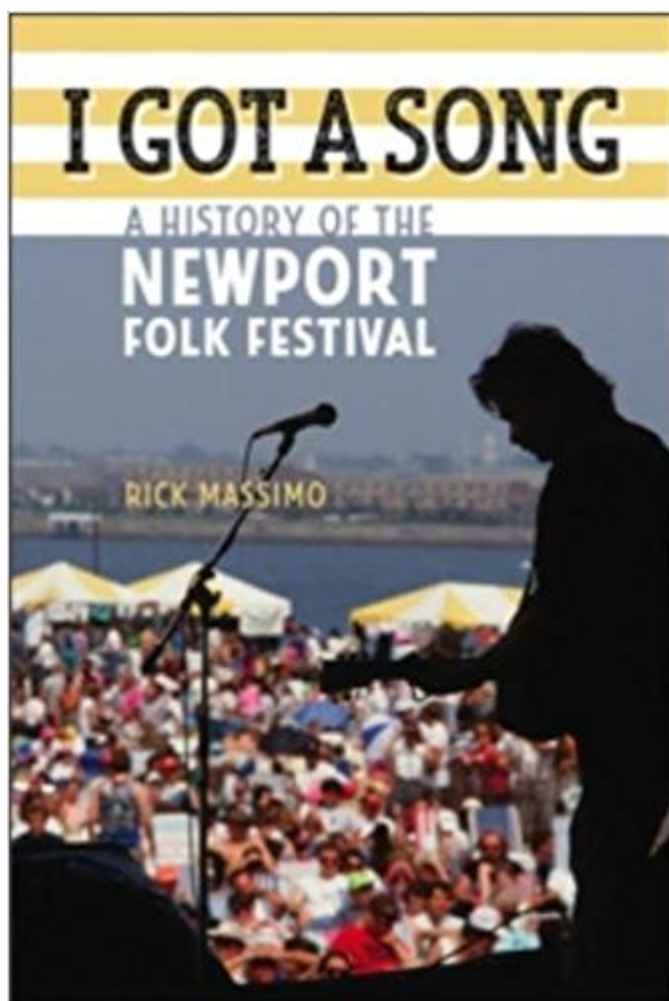


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# I Got A Song: A History Of The Newport Folk Festival (Music/Interview)



## Synopsis

The first-ever book exclusively devoted to the history of the Newport Folk Festival, *I Got a Song* documents the trajectory of an American musical institution that began more than a half-century ago and continues to influence our understanding of folk music today. Rick Massimo's research is complemented by extensive interviews with the people who were there and who made it all happen: the festival's producers, some of its biggest stars, and people who huddled in the fields to witness moments like Bob Dylan's famous electric performance in 1965 that live on in musical history. As folk has evolved over the decades, absorbing influences from rock, traditional music and the singer-songwriters of the 1960s and 1970s, the Newport Folk Festival has once again become a gathering point for young performers and fans. *I Got a Song* tells the stories, small and large, of several generations of American folk music enthusiasts.

## Book Information

Series: Music/Interview

Paperback: 260 pages

Publisher: Wesleyan (June 6, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0819577030

ISBN-13: 978-0819577030

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #560,647 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #121 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Ethnic & International > Ethnic #264 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Folk & Traditional #265 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Country

## Customer Reviews

"Written by historian and journalist Rick Massimo, *I Got A Song: A History of The Newport Folk Festival* explores the festival's complex 58-year history.

Massimo's research included many interviews and first-person testimonials from artists, producers and audience members across different generations. A few of the most notable interviewees include Pete Seeger, *My Morning Jacket*'s Jim James, Wilco's

Jeff Tweedy, Judy Collins, Peter Yarrow (of Peter, Paul, and Mary) and The Decemberists. Colin Meloy. EC Flamming, Paste Magazine. “Our final verdict, yes, this is a fantastic book for us. We came into *I Got a Song* expecting a light beach read, and left with a heady brew of history and excitement in the country’s premier music festival. Matthew Keefer, *Music Ravings* “Rhode Island’s Newport Folk Festival is the place where Bob Dylan famously decided to buck the all-acoustic rules and go ‘electric’ in 1965. But there’s so much more history and heritage to the Newport festival than that, as author Rick Massimo details in *I Got a Song: A History of the Newport Folk Festival*...filled with interviews and photos of the many performers who’ve been a part of the event over the past six decades, including Pete Seeger, Judy Collins, Wilco’s Jeff Tweedy, and Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary. Neil Pond, *Parade* “Vibrantly tells good stories that bring to life the personalities involved in the festival, as well as stories that offer perspectives on the significance and endurance of a folk festival. Henry Carrigan, *No Depression* “Massimo, who covered the Folk Festival for nine years with *The Providence Journal*, is an old school reporter but the Dylan-Goes-Electric chapter reads like deconstructed poetry. Eschewing editorial in favor of juxtaposition, Massimo tells the story of [the] folk fest. Fallon Masterson, *Vanyaland* “Massimo grapples with the ‘what is folk’ question throughout the book, contextualizing it against the original folk boom, counterculture rock, the songwriting ‘70s and the eventual near-death of the genre as electronically informed genres popped up in the ‘80s. Gillian Turnbull, *National Post*

“The Newport Folk Festival has been at the center of all sorts of changes in American life for more than fifty years, and Rick Massimo tells it all. Through all of these changes he never loses his focus on festival producer George Wein, who never loses his focus on the vision that Pete Seeger had that this music was a joint creation between artist and audience. It is a story that needs to be told in this fragmented, divided time, and we owe Rick Massimo a debt of gratitude for telling it so well. (Jim Rooney, former Newport board member, record producer, and author of *In It for the Long Run*) “This entertaining book is not just a history of the Newport Folk Festival but of folk music itself and how it has evolved from the ironclad acoustic era of Pete Seeger to the more rocking singer-songwriters of today. (Steve Morse, instructor of music history at Berklee College of Music and former *Boston Globe* music critic) “Rick Massimo’s *I Got a Song* is an entertaining historical account of the Newport Folk Festival (and peripherally the

Newport Jazz Festival) that will certainly appeal to the folk music aficionado. Academics may find the quick-paced interviews of particular interest more for what they say about the fallibility of memory and history as mythology than as unassailable first-person narratives. (Thomas Gruning, author of *Millennium Folk*)

This book seems clearly the definitive history of its subject. It's as easy enough to read, without sacrificing historical complexity. The most entertaining part of the book is its first half, which covers the early years of the festival, the time when it was most culturally and musically important. The earliest chapters, setting up the historical context for the Newport Folk Festival, are insightful and make a number of surprising and believable claims. Chapters 6 and 7 especially do a great job of covering the most famous and controversial moment in the history of the festival, the day that Bob Dylan "went electric" (a "fact" which turns out to be partly mythology). Massimo shows how multiple viewpoints on what happened and what it meant don't keep the truth a mystery but are, in fact, what the truth actually is, since the day was experienced differently by, and meant different things to, the people who were there or who became involved in the controversy afterwards. Later chapters on the struggles to revitalize the festival and keep it going, among its various controversies and cash flow problems, felt somewhat less exciting to me. That's probably just because that history IS less exciting, since the festival had moved past its ground-breaking role in American culture. Still, Massimo does a fine job of covering the history of the festival in its later years, and noting the different kinds of things it has meant for different people. A minor quibble: Massimo doesn't seem quite as informed on the history and context of the blues musicians who became involved with the festival and who had complex, not always satisfying involvements with the predominantly white folk movement of the 60s. Massimo isn't an expert on the blues, and although he's hardly ignorant on the subject, his descriptions of blues musicians feel a little bit more like regurgitated information than the rest of the book. and contain a few minor misrepresentations. For anyone wanting to know about the Newport Folk Festival, this book is essential reading. It does a great job of detailing exactly what the folk movement in the U.S. meant in the 1960s and what its legacy has become.

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