



BIO:

Chris Vallillo is a singer/songwriter and roots musician who makes the people and places of “unmetropolitan” America come to life in song. Having spent the last 30 years in the rural Midwest, he has a natural affinity for American roots music. Performing on six-string and bottleneck slide guitars and harmonica, Vallillo weaves original, contemporary, and traditional songs and narratives into a compelling and entertaining portrait of the history and lifestyles of the Midwest. Dirty Linen magazine described the music as, “vivid, original story songs” delivered with an “eye for detail and a sense of history” while Folk Wax Magazine Editor, Arthur Wood said “Vallillo’s guitar playing flows like warm honey and is a true aural delight.”

Vallillo’s music has a timeless quality about it, with one foot in the past and one foot in the future. Perhaps the archaeology degree Vallillo earned at Beloit College (BA Anthropology, 1976) helped him see the important little details of life which imbue his songs with a sense of history. His prairie poet style has been compared to Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay and you can hear the strains of the Carter Family and Jimmy Rogers reflected in his writing. It’s roots based original and contemporary folk with the rich acoustic textures of bottleneck slide, finger style and flatpicked guitars that echo the influences of Mississippi John Hurt, Norman Blake, Doc Watson and John Fahey.

A recipient of a 1986 Illinois Arts Council Artist Fellowship Award for music composition, Chris was a nominee for the Illinois Arts Council’s 1987 Governor’s Award for Individual Artist. In 1987 he conducted the Schuyler Arts Folk Music Project to document the last of the pre-radio generation. These recordings were accepted into the American Folklife Collection at the Library of Congress. From 1990 through 1998 he served as the performing host and co-producer of the nationally distributed, award-winning public radio performance series *Rural Route 3* where he performed next to (and with) a virtual who’s who of contemporary and traditional folk musicians.



Always a project oriented artist, in the early 2000’s Vallillo began creating one man shows using music as the vehicle to explore a subject or theme. His 2008 project, *Abraham Lincoln in Song*, received the endorsement of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and the accompanying CD of music reached **#10 on Billboard’s Bluegrass Album Chart**. In 2016, his latest recording, *Oh Freedom! Songs of the Civil Rights Movement* charted at # 6 on the folk charts and 2018 the show was produced as a fully theatrical performance featuring a band and a live choir.

He twice served as the Illinois State Scholar for the **Smithsonian Institution’s** traveling exhibit on roots music *New Harmonies*. In 2013 he released *The Last Day of Winter*, (#14 on the Folk DJ Charts) and produced the double CD set “Midwest Folklife Festival” for the Illinois Arts Council. He also scored and recorded the music for the documentary film “Witness to History” all while maintaining a full touring schedule. In 2016, his latest recording, *Oh Freedom! Songs of the Civil Rights Movement* charted at # 6 on the folk charts. He produced the sound track for a series of videos for the *The Illinois Freedom Project* for the Lincoln Home National Historic Site and the music for the nationally syndicated radio program *Lincoln in Words and Letters* for the WFMT radio network. He is currently touring the theatrical version of *Oh Freedom!*, most recently performed at the *Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum on Juneteenth of 2019*. In 2020 the video of the WIU performance of *Oh Freedom!* was syndicated on Illinois Public Television. In 2021 Vallillo took his Hickory Ridge Concert Series live stream and became the co-producer and host of the live stream/podcast *Lincoln Conversations* for the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area.