



AP

Mary Jo Guthrie Edgmon, sister of the late Woody Guthrie, right, dances in her wheelchair as she is serenaded by Larry Long at the History Center in Okemah, Okla.

## Woody Guthrie finds more fame after death

The Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Folk singer and native Oklahoman Woody Guthrie was “probably not one of the favorite sons” when he was alive, a state senator said. But Guthrie’s legacy has inspired a celebration in honor of his 100th birthday this Sunday at the annual festival in his hometown of Okemah.

Guthrie, perhaps best known for his song “This Land is Your Land,” was hotly political, speaking out against fascism and aligning himself with working class, influenced by his time in the Dust Bowl. Guthrie had a silly side, too, in ditties such as “Car Song.” And his seemingly simple songwriting inspired countless musicians, among them Bob Dylan and Pete Seeger.

Guthrie’s son, singer Arlo Guthrie, said in a telephone interview Friday that he believes

Folk Festival, referred to by fans as WoodyFest.

“We’re living in a very divided time (politically), I think everyone would agree with that,” Guthrie said from his home in Massachusetts. “I think he would have had some fun with that. His hero was Will Rogers, who was able to traverse between political ideologies and he did it very deftly and everybody liked him.

“And I think that’s what my dad tried without surrendering his own ideals,” Guthrie said.

He performed Wednesday during the opening night of the festival, which runs through Sunday and also features singer-songwriter Judy Collins and British folk singer Billy Bragg, who set three albums’ worth of Woody Guthrie’s lyrics to music with Wilco in the late 1990s.

State Sen. Roger Ballenger,

talking about what he saw happening to those who were struggling.

“His popularity rose, as many do, after he passed away,” said Ballenger, D-Okmulgee, noting that the Okemah festival began in 1998, 31 years after Guthrie’s death in 1967.

Guthrie would probably still be a polarizing figure in Oklahoma, Ballenger said.

“He would be seen as an extreme left political thinker, I’m sure. I’m not sure how political he was, he just had a passion for people that were struggling and he called it like he saw it and that came out in his music.”

Rep. Steve Kouplin, D-Beggs, whose district also includes Okemah, also noted that Guthrie wasn’t a favorite of Oklahomans.

“A lot of people thought he was communist-influenced.