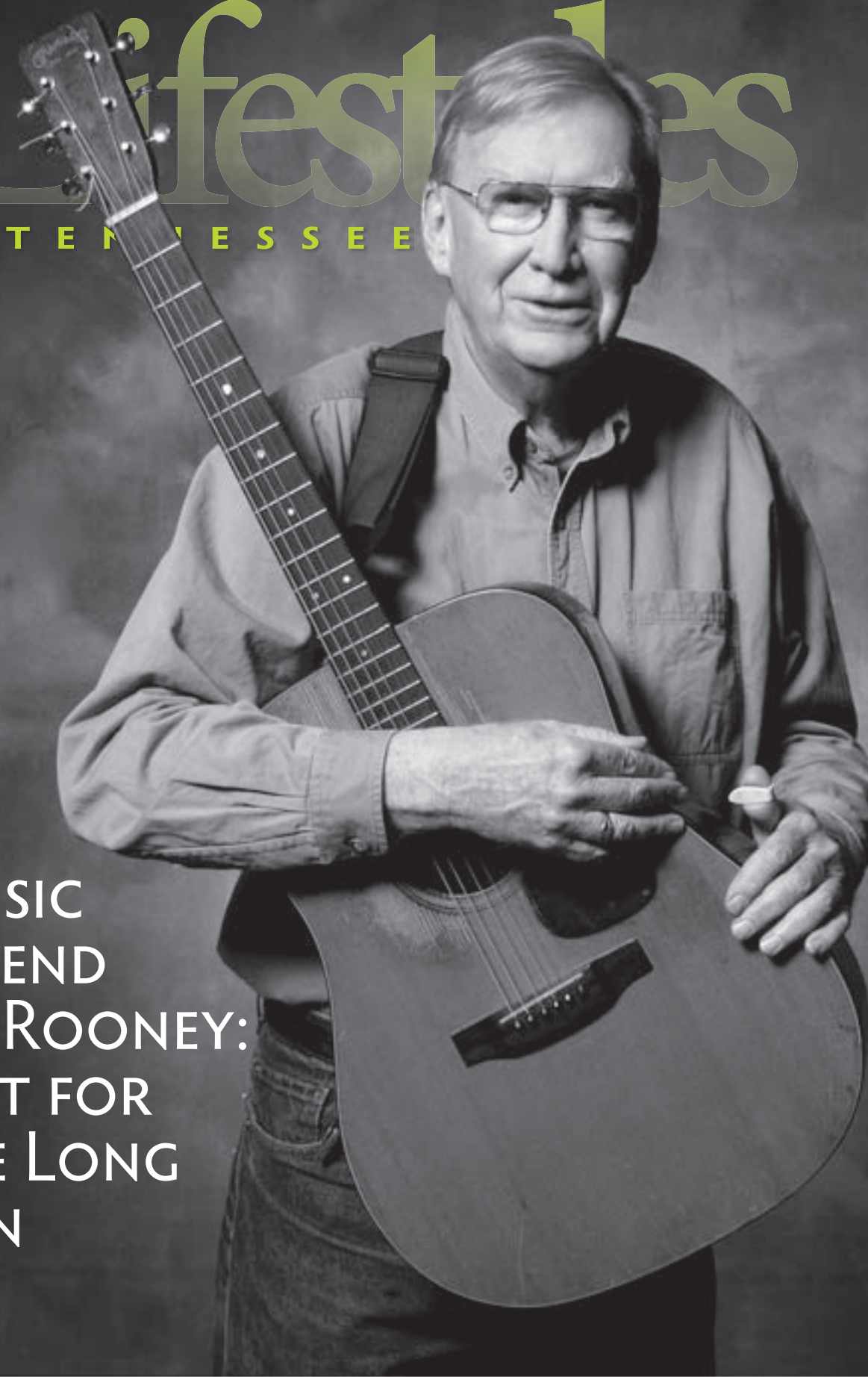


# MATURE Lifestyle OFTEN UNSEEN



MUSIC  
LEGEND  
JIM ROONEY:  
IN IT FOR  
THE LONG  
RUN

Spring  
Allergies  
101



Parting is  
Such Sweet  
Sorrow:  
Ginger Manley's  
Farewell Column

FiftyForward's  
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# Voices of Experience: Jim Rooney is in it for the Long Run



By Deborah Wilbrink

Sixty years in the music biz -- for Jim Rooney it was never about the money. The former classics scholar followed his heart

after studying in Greece in 1963.

"The Greeks enjoyed the creativity of having to make up your life day by day. They were highly original thinkers," Rooney said. He applied the philosophy to his own life. "You don't know where it's going to take you. Follow the crazy ideas and lay the groundwork to make it happen!"

His crazy ideas meant playing country-western guitar (left-handed and backwards) live on Boston's *Hayloft Jamboree*; managing Cambridge's Club 47 and bringing Muddy Waters, Odetta, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan and Bill Monroe to new audiences; managing the stage for the Newport Folk Festival; and producing the first New Orleans Jazz Festival in 1968.

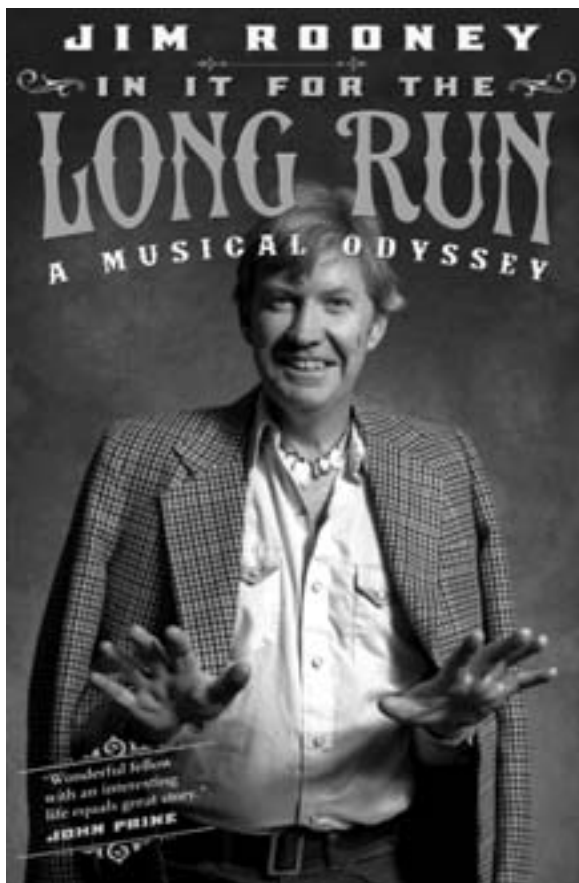
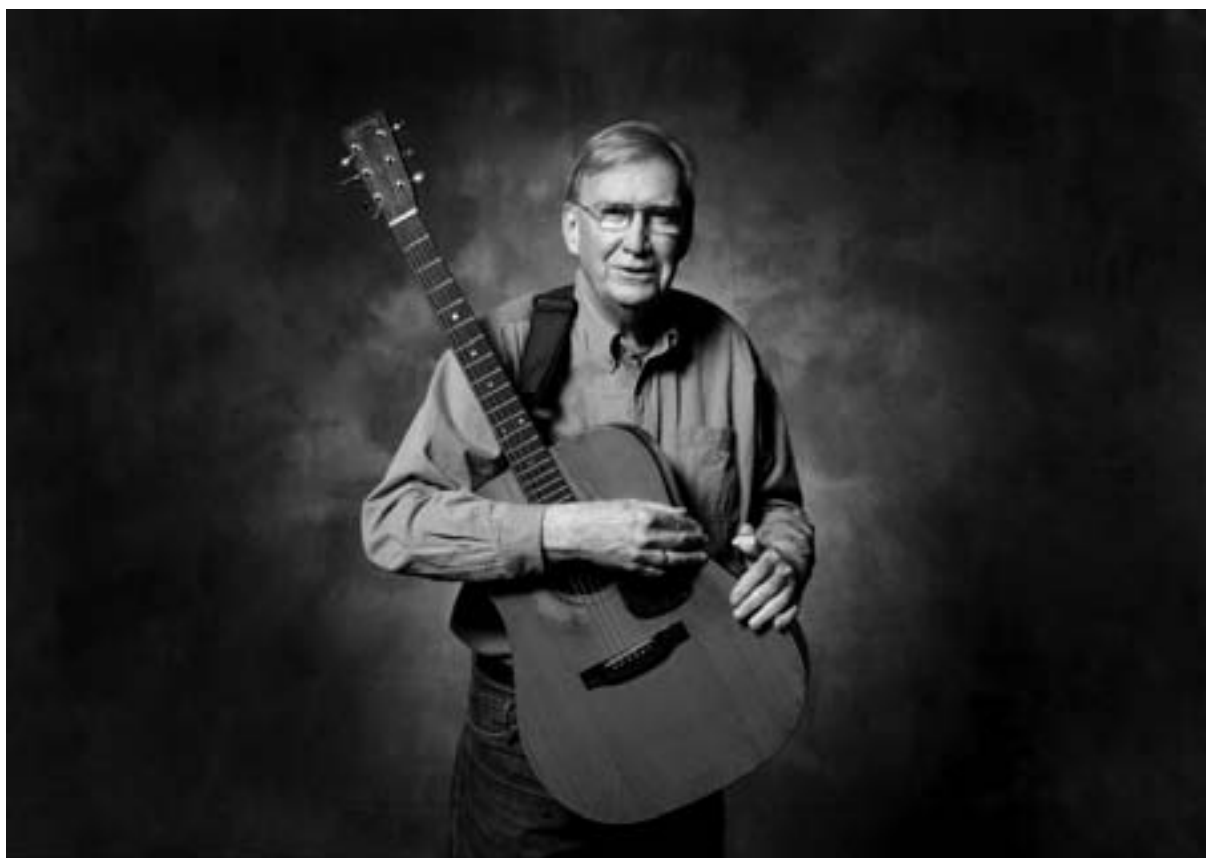
Eventually, Rooney found Nashville's musical milieu. Soon he was engineering for Cowboy Jack Clement at Jack's Tracks, which "isn't that hard if you have good ears. I was a seat-of-the-pants engineer out to capture the performance." He went on to produce Alison Krauss, John Prine, Guy Clark, Iris DeMent and Nanci Griffith, winning Grammys.

Digital technology presented new challenges. Rooney sold his successful publishing company, Forerunner, in 2000 and watched as downloads and the auto-tuner forever altered popular music.

"Making everything perfect digitally takes the life out of the song," he opines. "Hank, Cash, Haggard were selling emotion, not perfection. Run Ernest Tubb through a tuner and see what you get!"

Rooney has never been afraid to say what he thinks, and maybe because of that, he has been a strong influence, receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Americana Music Association in 2009.

Rooney was the right person in the right place at the right time for many of the important movements in American music. He had just joined the board of the Newport Folk Festival when Dylan pulled out his electric guitar! Rooney's latest book is a memoir, *In It for the Long Run: A Musical Odyssey*. Like the Greek sailor-prince Odysseus, Rooney's life ship wanders among the stars of



his time, with solid observations rowing and the winds of opinion and time filling its sails.

"You have to really love what you do. If your health is good, you can go on and on and on," he says.

At age 77, Rooney has just produced an album for legendary folk singer-songwriter Tom Paxton, the forthcoming *Redemption Road*. Still using Nashville studios, Rooney and his wife Carole, a choreographer, spend more time now in Galway, Ireland, or in rural Vermont, where Rooney splits wood daily to stay warm. He'll be playing with his sometime band, Jim Rooney's Irregulars, once again at the Station Inn on March 5.

"Time comes and goes, and my time is going," says the creative spirit. "You wrap things up and look back after 60 years -- it was all fun. Some of it's good, and some of it stands the test of time."

*In It for the Long Run* is, like its author, a classic.

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