



**HARRY STAMPER (1944-2012): FOLKSINGER**  
by Nathan Moore

*“The woods are full of wannabe, wouldbe, and hopetobe songwriters who write songs that will never be sung because they are no good. I wasn’t holding my breath while I waited for Harry Stamper’s cassette. When it arrived and I got around to listening to it, however, I was blown over. Stamper was good, very good.” ~Joe Glazer (p261, Labor’s Troubador, 2001)*

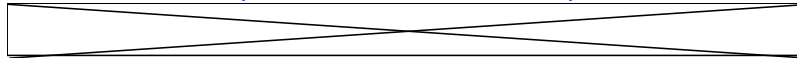
On Friday, March 9th, 2012 folksinger Harry Stamper passed away at his home in Charleston, Oregon. Harry Stanford Stamper, Jr. was born September 20th, 1944 to Harry and Viola Stamper in Roanoke, Virginia. Harry wrote prolifically on a range of subjects, although he was best known for his labor songs and his work with the ILWU, his union for 37 years..

Some of Stamper's songs have become classics among labor activists, folksingers, and workers. *We Just Come to Work Here*, a clever ode to occupational safety laws, is featured on [Classic Labor Songs](#) from Smithsonian Folkways alongside songs by Pete Seeger, Utah Phillips, and Hazel Dickens. The song has also been covered by bands in the Pacific Northwest as well as by performers in Canada.

His song *Harry Bridges* was a favorite of the influential ILWU leader to whom it pays homage, and his anti-war song *Anymore* has been performed by many Pacific Northwest artists including the prominent acoustic-activist outfit, [Citizens Band](#) from Olympia, Washington.



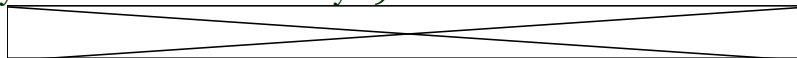
[We Just Come To Work Here](#)  
[\(We Don't Come To Die\)](#)



[Anymore](#)

Harry wrote on every subject: The last song he recorded, “[God, Guns and Gays](#)” is a perfect example of his political work—no topic is off limits. But Harry had an introspective side (what he called, “self-probing, old bat ramblings”), as we see in “Song for Cynthia.” Harry wrote, “It begins when you discover what you might like to be and it ends when you find out what you are.” Here’s what Harry had to say about himself: “I don’t consider myself a labor singer, but I think I have written some powerful labor songs. Others have referred to me as a labor songwriter, but I prefer folksinger.” Harry was generous with his songs. He was constantly sending Ds in the mail to anyone interested in his music at no charge. Harry said, “Do as you will with my songs. Copy, share change. It’s the folk process at work.”

Harry was perhaps at his most joyful in the songs he wrote for his grandchildren, like “Rockin’ Spider,” a rock’n’roll version of the “Itsy Bitsy Spider.” Stamper also authored a children’s book called, “Kevin Helps the Music Out” for his grandchildren and wrote numerous short stories about life on the docks in Coos Bay. His song, “Harry Bridges,” celebrated the life of the ILWU’s famous founder and was one of Bridges’ favorite songs in his last years. Stamper played at Bridges’ memorial held at Local 10 in San Francisco. Harry also performed at Pete Seeger’s Clearwater evival Folk Festival in New York with Arlo Guthrie and Sweet Honey in the Rock in the early 1980s.



[Harry Bridges](#)

Harry loved his family: his smart, capable wife Holly Hall Stamper, his daughters, Nell Stamper Ero and Anna Stamper Brown and his grandchildren, Kevin, Stephen and Jack. His siblings: Patricia Howard, Tom Stamper, Cynthia Turner, Diane Stamper, and Richard Stamper. His sons-in-law, Trevor Clark Brown and Phil Ero. Harry loved, and is survived by, his mother Viola. He loved his dogs: Roodie, Lilly and Maple. All the cats. Harry loved to feed the fish, birds, Douglas squirrels and other creatures in his back yard. And he loved his union.

Harry began playing music when he was 13 and he wrote and recorded music

until the end of his life at 67. He said: "I'm proud of the songs that work and delight in following the muse that suggests a topic or direction. My idea is to create something seful, fun and just as relevant down the road." But most importantly: "Stay cool nd always remember to staple your picket sign to a baseball bat."

*By Nathan Moore and Kate Downing*

*[Nathan Moore](#) is a freelance writer and musician who lives in Eugene, Oregon. He plays guitar, mountain dulcimer, and sings in the [Low Tide Drifters](#).*

*Please feel free to contribute memories, photos or comments about Harry at [www.rememberharry.wordpress.com](http://www.rememberharry.wordpress.com)*

*Harry's family has suggested that donations in his memory be made to the ILWU Auxiliary Fund: 064 Sherman Ave., North Bend, OR 97459 or the Waterfall Clinic: 1890 Waite St, North Bend 97459. 41-435-7002.*

*A musical tribute in Harry's honor will be held at the ILWU Local 12 Hiring Hall, 2064 Sherman Ave., North Bend, Oregon on Saturday, March 17th at 2 p.m. The family wishes to make it a party that Harry would have liked to attend. Holly says, "We want to pack the house." So come on prepared to play, sing and/or tell stories and celebrate a life well lived.*