

# Abe Lincoln, In Lyrics

*Chris Vallillo uses folk music to show the legacy of our 16th president*

**By Jamie Greco**  
*Daily Herald Correspondent*  
 February 9th, 2006

Chris Vallillo's first career in anthropology isn't as far removed as it seems from his current vocation as singer/songwriter.

Touring the Midwest presenting "Abraham Lincoln in Song," a program of music and narrative meant to give fresh insight into the life of Lincoln, Vallillo has put his first career to work for him within his second.

"(The program) traces the life of Abraham Lincoln using folk music that he knew, or was directly associated with him - even songs specifically written about him in the Civil War era and a few contemporary songs written about him today," Vallillo explained.

"These will be performed on a variety of instruments, primarily guitars. And I will tie the whole program

together with a narrative of his life and a number of stories he used to tell," he said.

"He (Lincoln) was a very famous storyteller."

Vallillo's previous career in anthropology comes into play when rooting out these stories and songs.

"I've located and documented a number of actual Lincoln stories as part of the narrative," he said.

Vallillo, a resident of Macomb, in western Illinois, expected that traditional anthropology, defined as the study of humanity, would be the direction his life's work would take after he graduated from Beloit (Wis.) College with a degree in that subject.

But his passion for music would soon redefine his studies.

"After about three years of struggling to make a living as an anthropologist, I decided if I was going to struggle making a living I'd rather do something I truly love, which is music."

He ended up blending the two careers in an innovative way, mining the musical memories of southern Illinois with a process called music collecting, an effort to record songs that were popular in the time before

recording devices were available.

This twist on anthropology has resulted in a body of work that Vallillo has organized into an historic record of music that might otherwise be lost.

"I've incorporated a fair amount of the material I've collected and researched into a body of music that I perform that illustrates Midwestern history."

Much of what Vallillo has learned has been filtered through his interest in Lincoln and will be presented at the Old Main Museum in Elgin on Feb. 12, Lincoln's birthday.

"This was a remarkable man, a self-made man who had very strong beliefs of a moral nature, even though he was not outwardly religious," Vallillo said.

Vallillo believes that what makes Lincoln one of the most beloved figures in history has more to do with his commonality than the lofty heights he achieved. He never lost his innate sense of humanity, his very strong touch with the common man.

"Those are values you rarely see in people that achieve that level of office."

Vallillo created the program under



COURTESY OF FRED ZWICKEY, PERIA JOURNAL STAR

**Musician and historian Chris Vallillo will present a program featuring songs and stories of Abraham Lincoln from Lincoln's era on Sunday at the Old Main Museum in Elgin**

the sponsorship of the Illinois Humanities Council's Road Scholars, a speakers bureau of the council.

"I would think someone like Lincoln could be elected today," Vallillo said.

"The politics of today are so bitter

and divisive.

Here was a man who really avoided that and stayed to the issues at a time when there was every bit as much mud-slinging as there is today.

I think people thirst for that."