



After her history-making journey along the Lincoln Highway in 2013, An American Songline® creator Cecelia Otto embarks on her next adventure: a program of songs commemorating America's involvement in World War I.

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News Hook: With the 2018 centennial of the end of World War I, 21st-century vaudeville singer Cecelia Otto commemorates the anniversary with an album and concert tour of songs from the era, endorsed by the United States World War I Centennial Commission.

Portland-area singer and composer Cecelia "Cece" Otto is recreating the music that entertained America as it went to war. Otto has commemorated the 100th anniversary of America's entry into World War I with an album of standards (titled *An American Songline: Songs of World War I*) popular in the mid-teens, now available on CD or as a digital download.

In addition to releasing an album, Otto is performing a series of concerts aimed at helping modern-day audiences remember a time before television and computers, when Americans largely entertained themselves and when popular songs played a vital part in communicating their longings, hopes and dreams.

An American Songline is an ongoing project dedicated to preserving and sharing the story of America through unique, experiential musical performances. American Songline performances entertain, educate and delight thanks to Cece's unique ability to engage



About Cecelia Otto

Cecelia Otto (AKA "Cece") is a classically trained singer, composer, and author who performs and lectures around the country. In 2013, she completed her cross-country musical journey *An American Songline*, performing 30 concerts of vintage music along the Lincoln Highway. She wrote a book and recorded an album based on her travels in 2015. She released her latest album, *The Songs of World War I*, early in 2017, and is touring through 2018 to mark America's participation in the conflict. She's also an in-demand crowdfunding consultant and the author of *The 10 Commandments of Crowdfunding*.

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modern audiences with the songs and stories of a simpler time. “Bringing history to life through music is my calling,” she says. “You can learn so much about a place and time through its songs, and the songs people sang during World War I really speak to the patriotism, the determination and the fears everyone felt at the time.”

A 21st-Century Vaudeville Star Is Born

Singing vintage music is nothing new to Otto. In 2013, she created *An American Songline*, an outlet for the singer to perform, travel, write and share historical

What Is a Songline?

A songline is a trail followed by Australian Aborigines, who follow these paths singing songs that they believe bring their ancestors back to life. Cecelia Otto learned of songlines and wanted to adapt the idea for America. She created *An American Songline* in 2013 and in 2016, was granted a trademark for the term.

music across the country. That year, the classically trained vocalist and composer celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Lincoln Highway, America’s first cross-country road, by traveling it from one end to the other, performing concerts in every state along the way.

Recording Her Travels

Her album, *An American Songline: A Musical Journey Along the Lincoln Highway*, was released in March 2015. The album included many of the standards enjoyed by audiences on her tour, including “Secondhand Rose,” “Out Where

the West Begins” and her crowd-pleasing singalong, “In My Merry Oldsmobile.”

She also put her compositional talents to work writing several new songs inspired by her journey, including the jaunty “I Always Wear My Amber Shades” and the elegiac “Land of Lincoln.”

Following the album’s release, Otto published her book *An American Songline*, a detailed, vivid account of her six-month journey along America’s first transcontinental road.

“This isn’t a travel diary; it’s not, ‘I ate a sandwich and then played a concert,’” Otto jokes. “It’s about the journey and the people. My time on the road was something lots of people dream of doing and I wanted to give them that experience through my book.”

A New Project

Once her book and album were complete, Otto cast her sights about for her next project. It didn’t take her long to come up with the right idea. “The songs of World War I just fit perfectly,” she says. “I learned a lot about singing the music of that era for the original *American Songline* project, so it was right up my alley. There was the anniversary of America entering the war coming up, so I knew there’d be an audience out there that was ready to hear it. And I’ve really come to see myself as someone who uses music to bring history to life, and I think the story of World War I is something all Americans should know about.”

Otto has chosen a wide range of songs for the live concerts. “Of course, there are a lot of patriotic songs that encouraged people to join up and fight,” she notes, “songs like ‘Keep the Home-Fires Burning’

America in World War I

Sparked in 1914 by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, World War I pitted the Allied powers of France, Russia and Great Britain against the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. While the United States attempted to maintain neutrality, the country was pulled into the conflict in April 1917 and fought with the Allies until the Armistice in November 1918.



and ‘It’s a Long, Long Way to Tipperary.’ Some songs poked fun at military life, like ‘Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning’ and ‘How Ya Gonna Keep ‘em Down on the Farm.’

“Something else I noticed when I was researching the music of this period,” says Otto, “was this note of melancholy and longing in the songs people sang. Sure, there were the usual patriotic numbers, like ‘You’re a Grand Old Flag,’ and those are great tunes. But there were also a lot of songs about absence and separation, about not knowing what the future was going to bring. There’s a lot more to the songs of that time than just ‘Over There.’”

A Grassroots Effort

To raise the money needed to finance the recording of the

album, Otto used crowdfunding platform Indiegogo. “When I traveled across the country in 2013 for the original American Songline tour,” she explains, “I wanted it to remain a grassroots effort. So I used Kickstarter and was able to raise more than \$15,000. I want to maintain those close ties with my audience and involve them in this new project.”

But crowdfunding for her is about more than the money. “Since my first campaign,” she says, “I’ve actually embarked on a second career as a crowdfunding consultant, and have published my second book, *The Ten Commandments of Crowdfunding*. I love the opportunity to help other people launch their businesses or turn

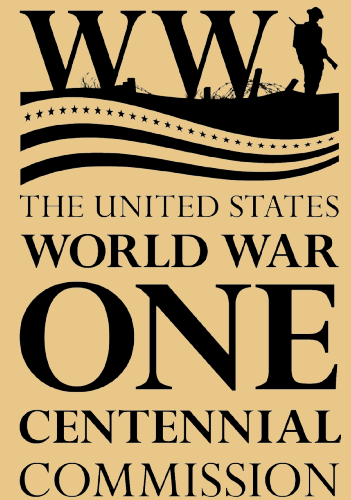
their dreams into reality, which is what crowdfunding is really all about.”

Cross-Country Performances

With the album now released, Otto is returning to the road. Clad in a custom-made uniform of the kind worn by female contract surgeons in World War I, she kicked off her national tour on April 5, 2017, in Lake Oswego, Oregon. Her program was recently endorsed by the United States World War I Centennial Commission and she is currently in talks with museums and veterans’ associations across the country, accepting bookings for 2018–19 performances.

Learn more about Cece and American Songline at
www.americansongline.com

Centennial Commission Endorsement



In March 2018, Cecelia’s “Songs of World War I” project was officially endorsed by the United States World War I Centennial Commission as part of its ongoing efforts to commemorate America’s involvement in the conflict.

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— Cecelia Otto

