

speaker's bureau that continues the long tradition of the itinerate teacher scholar, Vallillo has traveled the roads of Illinois to address community groups. During the course of his year and a half preparation, he estimates that he has read at least 25 books on the subject and spent six months of intensive research uncovering musical pieces that were directly tied to Lincoln. There were probably 200 songs written about Lincoln during his lifetime," Vallillo said. "The two I used from that era are 'Lincoln and Liberty' which is a real obvious choice, by the Hutchinson Family Singers, who used it as a campaign song.

And the other one, 'We Are Coming Father Abra'm', was supposedly sung by soldiers under his window the night before the Gettysburg Address. There are some really powerful connections that you can draw on, and that's basically what I was trying to do, find the magical combination."

That magical combination weaves its way through the course of the program. Though several songs do not reference Lincoln directly, they do connect with some aspect of his life. "Shawneetown", for example, was a flatboater's work song that is tied to Lincoln's life because he worked as a ferryboat operator in 1826. Two years later, he made a trip to New Orleans while working as a flat boat hand. "Supposedly, that is when he saw the first vestiges of slavery, when he was down in New Orleans," Vallillo said. "And that figures in strongly later in his feelings towards that."

Additionally, Vallillo uses song to relay what life was like in that era, as evidenced by 'Shaneetown'. "If you look at the lyrics of the song, there is a tremendous amount of information about the business of being a flatboater: how it worked, what they were hauling and such. So they can be a very enlightening window into the past if you want to use it that way."

Another song from Vallillo's show, "Darling Nellie Gray," composed by Benjamin Russel Hanby, is based on the true story of runaway slave Joseph Shelby. In the song, the protagonist laments that they've taken his beloved Nellie away to work in the cottonfields of Georgia. Ironically, Vallillo first encountered the song when he was doing his field work for the Illinois Arts Council. "They were still singing a song that was written in 1856 in 1986, just to show you how long some material was in circulation," and incredulous Vallillo said. "And ultimately, that was basically written as an abolitionist song, and then they dropped the abolitionist part [the third verse referencing the white man's chains] and moved it into a general folk music format."

Other selections such as "El-A-Noy" and "Dixie's Land (Dixie Land)" were personal favorites of Lincoln's. Interestingly enough, the latter, "Dixie's Land," came from the minstrel tradition, in which white performers put on black-face makeup to pretend to be African Americans performing music and song. "Ironically enough, Lincoln loved that music," Vallillo says. Here is a man who fought for emancipation and brought it through the Civil War, and yet, you have to step back and look at that time. For then, he was being particularly liberal and that was as far as it had gotten.

Obviously, Lincoln is the focal point, but the ghost of Elvis Presley also sneaks in, albeit momentarily, on "Aura Lee". Though the song was first published in 1861, as a minstrel song, the greased back pompadour and poodle skirt set will recognize it as the melody used for "Love Me Tender", Elvis Presley's 1956 chart topping mega seller.

Towards the end of the show, Vallillo performs "Lincoln's Funeral Train," one of only two modern era songs, which was written by Grammy nominated performing songwriter and instrumentalist Norman Blake. The song recounts how literally millions came to view the passing train bearing the President's body as it wended its way to Illinois, retracing the 1,651 mile route that Lincoln had taken to Washington four years before.

Through the course of the program, Vallillo plays a variety of vintage guitars, slide guitars and mandolins. Vallillo says his weirdest instrument is a 1927 Gibson tenor lute that has a very thin, reedy sound, which gives it an old timey texture. "I am rather anal about trying to capture accurate acoustic sounds and then combining those sounds, much like an artist would combine paint on a palette to get the tone and texture that you want."

When I recorded "Abraham Lincoln in Song", I was working with some folks out of Nashville, Ross Sermons on the bass in particular," Vallillo said about the disc which entered *Billboard's* Top Bluegrass Albums at #10. "And he kept saying, 'Wow this is really cool music.' To myself, I am thinking, 'Well it's not any different than Bluegrass music or a lot of other folk music.' The stories are a little bit older, but the music is still the music."

"Music has been a way of documenting events for generations. The protest song of the 60s is really an outgrowth of the labor song of the 30s, which is an outgrowth of the folk songs of the 1800s; it goes back a long, long way. It changes and it evolves, but it is still the same process."