

# Festival artist plays a Thompson Guitar

By Ceili Cornelius  
Correspondent

Peter Rowan, one of the headliners at this year's Sisters Folk Festival, has a special connection to a local Sisters business: Preston Thompson Guitars.

Late in the 1970s Rowan began a solo career writing and performing songs in the old bluegrass style.

"I no longer had to play terrible bluegrass gigs when I went out solo because of what I had been involved with and was able to record my own music," he said.

Internationally, Rowan often performs as a solo singer-songwriter, while state-side, along with solo appearances, he plays in three bands: The Peter Rowan Bluegrass Band, Big Twang Theory and its Texas cousin Twang an' Groove, and rock band The Free Mexican Air Force.

Peter Rowan's connection to Preston Thompson Guitars is a special, longstanding one. Rowan has been writing and performing on the same guitar that the late Preston Thompson built for him in the 1980s.

He met Thompson through the guitarist of bluegrass band Hot Rize, Charles Sawtelle.

"He introduced me to this guitar, and believed in the ability of Thompson to build high-quality guitars," said Rowan.

The instrument is a vintage guitar that he has played and taken with him on his travels.

"The whole joy has been

its adaptability to bring bluegrass culture around the world. I brought this guitar to India and taught and wrote songs on it. It is my writing guitar and performing guitar, making it a special vintage guitar," said Rowan.

The Preston Thompson Guitars workshop sits next-door to The Belfry and there, craftsmen create vintage guitars for musicians and artists.

Thompson died earlier this year, after a year-long illness. During Thompson's illness, luckily for the business, he had trained and created skilled craftsmen to carry on the work of creating these vintage guitars.

Thompson started building guitars in the 1970s, leading to a lifetime friendship and a passion for capturing a vintage tone based on the sound of old Martin guitars. Thompson studied 1930s Martin guitars hoping to learn the craft of creating the sound of those golden-era, big-bodied guitars. Some of the wood that he sourced was actually wood from those same guitars that inspired his building: Brazilian rosewood cut in 1936 and lost in a shipwreck in 1937.

Preston had access, and thoroughly studied Sawtelle's collection of rare and famous pre-war vintage instruments, and built Charles a guitar that became one of his most treasured and the one he introduced Peter Rowan to.

For three years in a row during the 1980s, his instruments were selected as a prize by the winners of the National Flatpicking Championships at the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas.

As recalled by Rowan: "It was at Winfield, Kansas, the big festival. Hot Rize were performing and their guitarist, Charles Sawtelle, had lent his Martin 00045 to Preston to make a copy. That copy is the 00042 Thompson guitar that I play. I bought the guitar from Preston at Winfield where I was playing with fiddler Mark O'Conner."

In the guitar shop in Sisters sits a picture of Rowan with this guitar, honoring his friend and guitar builder, Preston Thompson.

Rowan has played at the Sisters Folk Festival and at The Belfry.

"I love it there and look forward to being back," he said.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Legendary bluegrass musician and singer-songwriter Peter Rowan purchased one of the very first Preston Thompson guitars in the 1980s. Preston Thompson Guitars in Sisters carries on the tradition.

Rowan will be performing with his band Free Mexican Airforce alongside Grammy award-winning TexMex band Los Texmaniacs, who have themselves performed at the Sisters Folk Festival. Rowan

will also be performing a few solo sets throughout the weekend.

Tickets and day passes are still available on the Sisters Folk Festival website, [www.sistersfolkfestival.org](http://www.sistersfolkfestival.org).

## Oregonians to see record 'kicker' refund

SALEM (AP) — It's official: Oregonians will see the largest-ever "kicker" tax refund next year.

OPB reported Wednesday that with all tax receipts for the just-ended biennium counted, state economists say more than \$1.57 billion will flow back to personal income taxpayers in 2020, when they file their 2019 taxes. That compares to a "kicker" refund of a little more than \$1.4 billion projected in May, when officials last forecast overall revenues.

The final tally, delivered to lawmakers in a hearing Wednesday morning, continued a consistent trend over the last two years, as state tax revenues consistently outpaced economists' expectations.

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