

"It's the holy grail for a television producer to win an Emmy."

—Paul Larson

# FACE of the *Arts*



By Meg LeFevre

**T**he trophy case at Mountain Lake PBS in Plattsburgh just got a lot shinier and a bit scarier too. Paul Larson, best known for anchoring the station's *Art Express*, recently received two major accolades for his work—an Emmy Award for the documentary *Songs to Keep: Treasures of an Adirondack Folk Collector* and a Rondo Award for his work on bonus features for the Shout!Factory Blu-ray release of the "Vincent Price Collection."

No explanation is needed for Larson's golden-winged Emmy statuette as it stands in striking display of television greatness, but the lesser-known "Monster Kid of the Year" Award, a stout, scowling bust of the late actor Rondo Hatton, is the highest honor given in an internationally known competition sponsored by the Classic Horror Film Board. The award celebrates accomplishments in research, creativity and film preservation. It's an impressive achievement, especially for a lifelong Vincent Price fan.

Known as "the face of the arts" at Mountain Lake PBS, Larson's "Spotlight" series has given him access to some of the most successful actors and musicians in the world. His *Songs to Keep* is a documentary featuring modern day folk singers recording and performing a collection of old folk songs gathered by Adirondack journalist and historian Marjorie Lansing Porter in the mid 1900s. For the program Larson landed one of the toughest interviews of his career. A sit-down with Pete Seeger last summer, a few months before the 94-year-old folk singer passed away, offered him a vital connection between Seeger and Porter. "Pete Seeger was integral to this project because he not only had the clout of a celebrity, was a New York State resident and someone who appreciated the Adirondacks, he had worked with Marjorie Lansing Porter and he had sung an album of songs that came entirely from her collection. She even wrote the liner notes for the album."

Another interview and a musical performance from Kevin and Michael Bacon in the superstar brothers' Manhattan studio gave Larson further Emmy-winning material for the documentary. "There's a definite reason the Bacon Brothers are in the piece. These guys live in New York. They have a camp in the Adirondacks and I think participating in this documentary was a way to pay tribute to the area they absolutely love," noted Larson.

Executive producer Dan Swinton (director of content and production at Mountain Lake PBS) knew the music-filled documentary would be a good fit for Larson. "He selected me to do this project because of my affinity for the arts and music. I had no prior knowledge of traditional folk songs,

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**Paul Larson on the set with Pete Seeger**  
Photo by Daniel R. Swinton



**Pete Seeger and Paul Larson**  
Photo by Daniel R. Swinton



**The Bacon Brothers (Kevin and Michael) with Paul Larson**  
Photo by Paul Frederick

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but I gained an appreciation for the history and the music of these delightful, infectious tunes while I was doing the project," said Larson, who admitted to frequently humming the catchy tunes throughout the hallways at Mountain Lake.

The Vincent Price project came about a little more organically, and it's been a lifetime in the making. On a tour of the Salisbury House mansion in his hometown of Des Moines, Iowa, a young Larson retraced the steps of his hero Vincent Price. The gothic Salisbury mansion was the perfect setting for Price to shoot introductions for several of his horror films and it was where Larson developed a passion for visiting places featured in film and literature.

"I was 11 years old when I was at the Salisbury House and I knew we weren't supposed to touch anything, but I absolutely could not resist just very lightly touching that book ("Tales of Edgar Allan Poe") because I knew Vincent Price had recently held it," said Larson. His lifelong interest in Price's work, and classic horror films in general, came full circle when he learned that Shout!Factory was releasing the Blu-ray "Vincent Price Collection."

"I just knew that I was the right person and I was in the right position to help salvage the footage because I remembered the little-known introductions from so many years ago," said Larson. Phone calls to Shout!Factory and the Iowa PBS station that originally aired the long-forgotten Price intros, a few weeknights worth of editing the content as he remembered it and a nomination from his colleague put Larson on the path to being named "Monster Kid of the Year."

"Classic movies give me a great deal of joy and inspiration and I am so thrilled that my work to preserve a part of my hero Vincent Price's legacy was so appreciated by an international community of film enthusiasts," said a grateful Larson.

And as for that Emmy Award, he said, "It's the holy grail for a television producer to win an Emmy." Larson had been nominated a few times before and didn't go to the event expecting to win. Still he managed to fill his 20-second acceptance speech with praise for Mountain Lake PBS, the singers



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who were in the show and the people who helped conduct the research.

"When they announced that *Songs to Keep* had won the Emmy I was at first surprised, then overjoyed and then humbled. The show was up against some tough competition, six other documentaries."

Larson's award-winning work at Mountain Lake PBS is ultimately in keeping with the station's mission to celebrate and strengthen the civic and cultural life of the region by providing programs that inform, educate, involve, and entertain. "One of the things that I like to do here at Mountain Lake is show how our local community relates to the wider world. Everybody is connected," he said. "I am all about the arts. I adore them. They are my lifeblood."

Larson's next project is a special program on the New York State Summer School of the Arts, highlighting high school students who excel in their chosen field of the arts such as dance, theater, orchestra, and visual arts.

*Songs to Keep: Treasures of an Adirondack Folk Collector* will re-air on Mountain Lake PBS Thursday, August 7 at 9 p.m. The Mountain Lake program is one component of a larger project, spearheaded by Traditional Arts in Upstate New York. This fall, PBS stations across the country will have the option of airing the program. **CS**



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