

MUSIC

Peter, Paul and Mary still singing for the future

By Joan McKenna
Scottsdale Life

Say the name "Peter, Paul and Mary" and people tend to get nostalgic. They think back to the socially conscious '60s, when the group's mind-mannered music threw more than a few good political punches.

Today, the trio still includes "Blowin' in the Wind" and "If I Had a Hammer" in concerts. But singer Peter Yarrow says they're far from being stuck in the past — too many critical problems face the future.

"We're in a different era startlingly because we have kind of come to the end of our rope. The environment is irreversible. We're dealing with equations so volatile that in 20 years the whole world could change.

"We all have children. We're all very concerned about whether the world is going to pull itself together."

Yarrow, 54, was telephoning recently from a Boston TV station while the group was waiting to do an interview. He had called earlier and talked for a few minutes before his plane flight to Boston interrupted

the conversation.

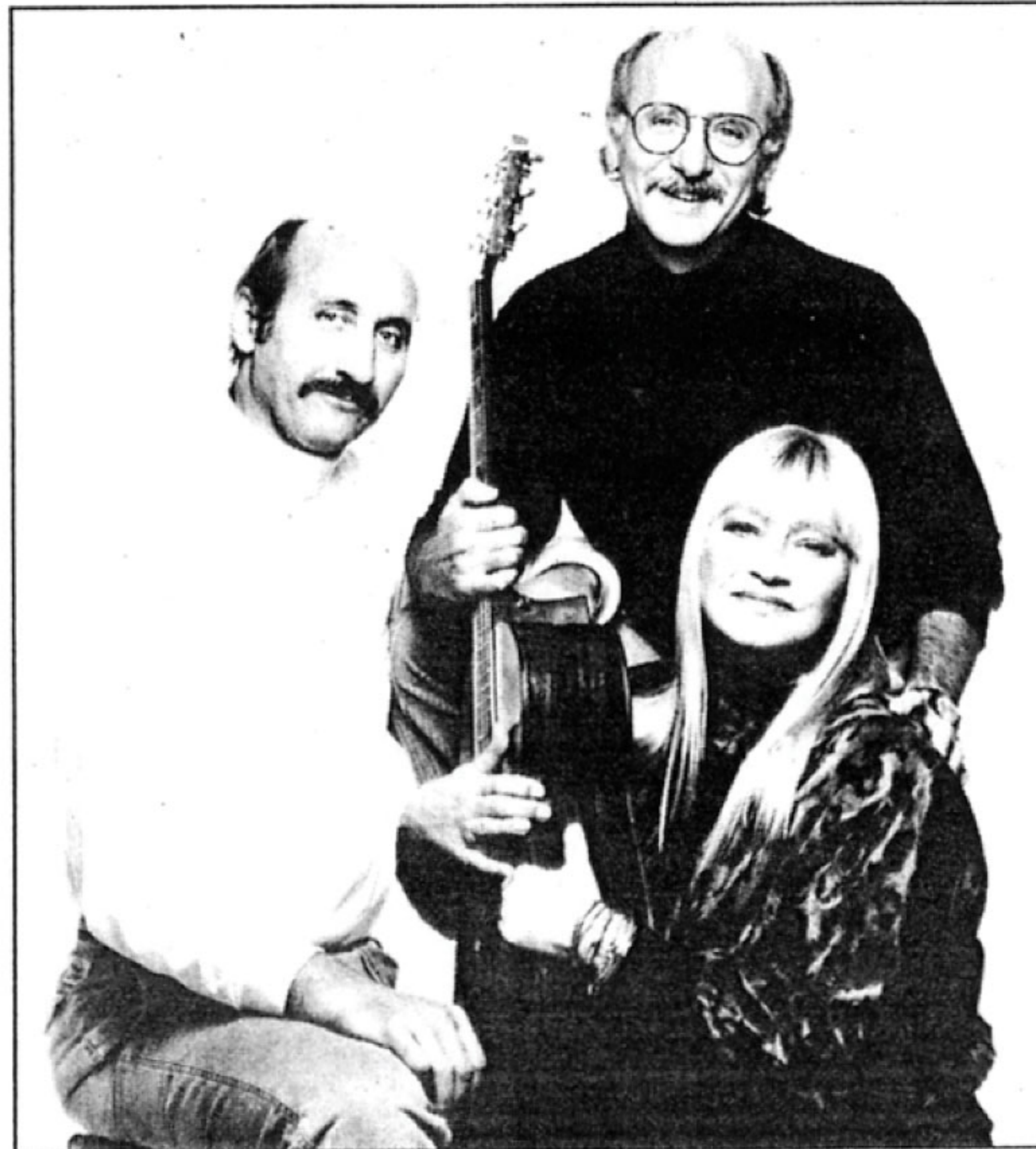
During the second call, he apologized for the delay, not seeming to notice that he was going out of his way to call twice. Not seeming to notice he was a living legend.

He talked about how Peter, Paul and Mary hoped to go down in history: "As part of a long train ride, a sustaining voice that called out through folk music with their message for a just society, people who were part of a proud tradition."

Yarrow's own background is steeped in proud tradition. His parents were "both musical, both very progressive Bohemian iconoclasts," he says. "They lived in Greenwich Village with cardboard boxes for furniture." His mother was a teacher; his father, a powerful political activist. Both, Russian Jewish immigrants from the Ukraine.

Yarrow's career began as a painter at Cornell University. He later switched to design, then majored in physics. Ultimately, he wound up with a degree in experimental psychology.

Meanwhile, he had many musical talents, was president



Noel Paul Stookey, Peter Yarrow and Mary Travers bring their folk music to the Desert Sky Pavilion Saturday.

PETER, PAUL AND MARY

When: 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Desert Sky Pavilion, 2121 N. 83rd Ave., Phoenix
230-9112.

Tickets: \$25, \$21.50 and \$17.50

Information: 784-4444

of the campus Folk Song Club and was chosen as an undergraduate instructor for a class titled "Folk Ballads, Folk Stories."

"Thousands of kids were trying to audit the class," he says. "I saw these people were very deeply affected in ways that just would not be the case with ordinary speech. Music could coalesce their hearts in a very special way. Then and there, I knew that folk music and this kind of sharing would have a dramatic effect on altering the world. By that I mean it would play a part in re-examining our culture in

See PETER on Page 5

PETER

Continued from Page 4

our society.”

In Greenwich Village, Yarrow met up with Noel Paul Stookey, then a fledgling stand-up comic from Michigan State University. And Stookey met up with Mary Travers, already known for her work in the Song Swappers, a group that had recorded with Peter Seeger.

The three decided to join forces and, after rehearsing for seven months in Travers' apartment, premiered at the Bitter End coffee house in 1961. Other club dates were followed by a national tour that was to last 10 years.

In 1962, they made their debut on Warner Brother Records with *Peter, Paul and Mary*, an album that remained on *Billboard's* Top 10 chart for 10 months, Top 20 for two years and Hot 100 for three and a half years.

Peter, Paul and Mary had taken the national spotlight and intended to speak their minds while they had it.

In 1963, they stood with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma and Washington, D.C. Throughout the decade, they performed at anti-Vietnam War demonstrations and fundraisers. And in 1969, Yarrow co-organized the March On Washington, which drew a

half-million people to the landmark event.

But a year later, they were ready to pursue personal interests and headed their separate ways. Yarrow continued to concentrate on political activism, plus wrote songs and created three animated specials for CBS television based on “Puff, the Magic Dragon,” which earned him an Emmy nomination.

Then in 1978, he was helping organize Survival Sunday at the Hollywood Bowl and asked his former partners to join him onstage.

The chemistry and comraderie were rekindled and they decided to try a limited reunion tour. They're still touring, performing about 60 dates a year.

The group's present concerns include homelessness, world hunger, apartheid, the sanctuary movement and just about anything else that has an underdog facing increasingly poor odds.

So what about “Puff, the Magic Dragon,” a song that the group repeatedly has had to defend against accusations of being inspired by nothing more than drugs?

“‘Puff’ is a song about believing in dragons and fanciful things when we're young,” Yarrow says. “‘Puff’ is about the innocence of childhood lost.”

Sounds a lot like the 90s.