There is something irrepressibly good-natured about Arlo Guthrie and he’s been like that for forty years. Nothing seems to have bothered him - not the overbearing reputation of his father Woody, the celebrated dust bowl populist, not the competition with Bob Dylan, Woody’s acolyte in the folk scene of the early 1960s, not even the threat of inheriting Huntingdon’s Chorea, the degenerative disease which afflicted his father and caused his early death.

Arlo has always ridden his own road and it has always been the high one. Just when the folk world of the mid-sixties was at its most sanctimonious, along came Arlo Guthrie’s comic talking blues with its maddeningly catchy little riff. Alice’s Restaurant Massacree, his zany account of getting arrested for littering and then finding this felony exempted him from the draft for Vietnam, became not just an anthem for the anti-war movement but a welcome breath of fresh satire.

On stage, with his son Abe on keyboards and pedal steel player Gordon Titcombe, Guthrie still carries the world lightly in his hand. His thick hank of hair is now as silver as a senator’s but he is as much fun as ever. Opening with Chilling of the Evening, one of his earliest folk rock songs, he follows with a string band ditty from the Oklahoma hills. Guthrie, ever the raconteur, is also historian to the great days of American music. Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee, Josh White, the Weavers, they all visited the Guthrie house where Woody and his wife Marjorie, herself famous as a bohemian dancer with the Martha Graham troupe, held court. Without affectation, Arlo recalls singing St James Infirmary with Cisco Houston as a kid of thirteen.

The ample set is a mix of the old and the very old. Bob Dylan’s When the Ship Comes in, Darrell Adams’ version of Portland Town, Arlo’s own hits such as Coming into Los Angeles and City of New Orleans, The Motorcycle Song with its fabulously banal rhymes and a subtle and witty account of not remembering the words to Alice anymore. He talks politics and about his life, his family and the musicians he has known. He plays guitar with a lovely light ragtime touch and his fellow players give him all the room he needs.
It is a powerful moment when he sings Woody’s *This Land is Your Land*, with a sardonic sense of the empire it also describes. “I’m nowhere near the threat I hoped to become,” he says, reminiscing about his brush with security in LA, way back when he was caught with some grass in his pocket. But Arlo Guthrie has done OK. He has managed his own little non-violent revolution, and it still ticks over, just like that refrain in *Alice’s Restaurant*. In its good humour, its sense of fairness and its fidelity to some last century American progressive values, it remains welcome - at Alice’s Thanksgiving dinner, or any time.