

New Song Film Project
August 2, 2006

A Documentary Film Proposal:

The Power of Their Song:

The Untold Story of Latin America's
New Song Movement

-Produced & Directed by John Summa & John Travers

John Summa, Writer & Co-Producer, Co-Director

Burlington, Vermont

Tel: (802) 865-2558

Email: jsumma@newsongfilmproject.org

John Travers, Co-Producer, Co-Director & Cinematographer/Editor

Los Angeles, CA

Tel: (323) 874-7138

Email: johntravers@earthlink.net

New Song Film Project Homepage

www.NewSongFilmProject.org

I.	SYNOPSIS & BACKGROUND	3
II.	DOCUMENTARY OBJECTIVES	4
III.	AIRING & DISTRIBUTION	6
IV.	PRODUCTION TIMETABLE	7
V.	BUDGET	8
VI.	KEY PERSONNEL	9

I. Synopsis & Background

The Power of Their Song is a 90-minute documentary film (currently in production) about beloved, Latin American folk-based musicians, most notably **Victor Jara**, who sang moving songs of freedom during times of dictatorship.

Their powerful songs, composed largely during the 1960's and 1970's, blend beautiful, and at times haunting, melodies with passionate and poetic lyrics expressing the hopes and fears of a generation of Latin Americans.

Known as *Nueva Cancion*, or **New Song**, this largely rural folkloric music tradition has continued to evolve, absorbing many different regional influences and taking on new creative forms. Well-known musicians from around the world have covered some songs in the tradition.

While its roots lie deep in Latin American culture and history, **New Song** music was first brought to the attention of the world when totalitarian military regimes seized power in South America during the 1970s.

Torture and death or disappearance became the tragic fate of thousands of citizens during this period, including the now legendary (but not well known in the USA) **Victor Jara** of Chile, a popular and talented singer-songwriter who was executed for his songs of justice and freedom. Other **New Song** artists were driven into exile to avoid a similar fate.

Later, during the 1980s, a second, deadlier wave of terror swept through Central America in genocidal proportions. Again, **New Song** artists urgently sang about these horrific human rights violations, denouncing the perpetrators of this violence and telling the story of the struggle of people resisting.

Weaving together moving interviews and rare archival footage (of artists' lives, performances, political events, and historic festivals), *The Power of Their Song* will portray, for the first time on film, the individual journeys of **New Song** musicians, their legacy, and the enduring power of the music.

Today, with the lifting of censorship and the gradual return of democratic rule in many countries of Latin America, the tradition of **New Song** is experiencing a major resurgence, particularly among younger musicians. Young musicians are again producing songs directly addressing social and political conditions.

Many of these musicians are inspired by the traditional music of **New Song** and its first generation of musicians, who are now being re-discovered after years of cultural banishment in their own countries.

The Power of Their Song will take a look at this growing contemporary musical scene, interweaving the often volatile **New Song** history with its young, current successors: musicians as committed to social justice as those who came before them.

Although the **New Song** movement reflects the turbulent history of Latin America in particular, *The Power of Their Song* will explore protest music as a universal force that crosses the barriers of language and culture.

In addition to interviews with Latin American New Song musicians and key persons involved in the movement, testimony will be sought from well-known North American artists such as **Pete Seeger (already conducted)**, **Jackson Browne (being scheduled)**, **Bruce Cockburn**, **Joan Baez**, **Arlo Guthrie**, **surviving members of The Clash**, **Bono**, and **Peter, Paul & Mary**. They all were strongly inspired by, and in some cases sang about, Latin American **New Song** artists, such as **Victor Jara** of Chile. These interviews will reveal an important connection across two cultures in the form of music and shared values.

Through an insightful look at **New Song** music, *The Power of Their Song* will illuminate Latin America's troubled past and hopeful present. Ultimately, the film will testify to the ability of music to sustain and improve our lives, as well as help us make sense of the uncertain world in which we live.

II. Documentary Objectives

Through interviews and the use of rare (and largely unseen) historical film footage, photos and other archival material, *The Power of Their Song* will depict the defiant lives of the first generation of musicians who formed the tradition of *Nueva Cancion* and the watershed events into which they were swept.

Following a brief overview of the roots of protest music, dating back to the 1930s, the story of **New Song** will be told through the testimonies of those who lived through this promising yet violent era in Latin America's modern history.

Using interviews to be filmed across South and Central America, the film will document the remaining major artists of this period, including: **Roy Brown** of Puerto Rico, **Daniel Viglietti** of Uruguay, **Silvio Rodriguez** of Cuba, **Leon Gieco** and **Mercedes Sosa** of Argentina, **Chico Buarque** of Brazil, **Gabino Palomares** of Mexico, as well as musicians from Venezuela, Nicaragua and other Latin American countries.

These interviews will lend extra power to historical footage of political events of this period and biographical material of the musicians (both living and deceased) comprising *Nueva Cancion*. Those no longer alive -- such as **Victor Jara** and **Violeta Parra** of Chile, **Alfredo Zitarrosa** of Uruguay, **Atahualpa Yupanqui** of Argentina, **Chabuca Granda** of Peru, among others -- will be given special attention through the use of archival footage, audio recordings of their songs, and commentary by those who knew them and were profoundly influenced by their music and commitment to social justice.

Journalists, writers and historians of Latin American political history will also be interviewed to provide sufficient context and discussion of the issues engendered by -- and events surrounding -- the development of *Nueva Cancion*. Among others, acclaimed authors **Eduardo Galeano** and **Guillermo**

Pellegrino of Uruguay will discuss the political and historical impact of the **New Song** movement.

From North America, two key interview subjects -- folk music legend **Pete Seeger** and pop-rock singer/songwriter **Jackson Browne** -- both intimately involved with *Nueva Cancion* -- will be asked to shed light on the **New Song** movement.

To address present-day issues, *The Power of Their Song* will also include key testimony from several folk and rock musicians throughout Central, South and North America (from Latin backgrounds). These artists represent the new generation of musicians carrying on the **New Song** tradition, in particular: **Tao Rodriguez-Seeger**, grandson of Pete Seeger. Tao grew up in Nicaragua during the years of the devastating *Contra* war. In preliminary interviews conducted in February 2006, Tao has provided powerful testimony on the tradition of **New Song** and folk music overall, offering a valuable, contemporary context in which to view *Nueva Cancion*.

The Power of Their Song will also bear witness to this inspirational and emotion-filled music by presenting the music itself: in archival performance footage, in audio recordings, and in new performances to be filmed in both North and South America. Already photographed in February 2006 are: Roy Brown, **Tito Auger** from Puerto Rico, Tao Rodriguez-Seeger and **Jose Gonzalez**, all documented during electrifying performances in New Haven, Connecticut, as part of a recent east coast concert tour, which included a performance at the Poet's Café in New York City.

By focusing on individual artists and their specific feelings about music, *The Power of Their Song* will capture the universality of their experiences, and illustrate the many ways in which music was -- and remains -- a powerful medium for social change. This documentary will ultimately reveal the ability of music in general and folk music in particular to express the shared hopes and dreams of people everywhere striving to make the world a better place.

III. Airing & Distribution

The producers of *The Power of Their Song* will self-distribute the completed motion picture to film festivals, independent television networks and public television stations. Due to the recent popularity and success of theatrically-released documentaries -- and because of the state-of-the-art film and digital formats which will comprise the film -- *The Power of Their Song* will also be considered as a 35mm theatrical motion picture release, with a portion of proceeds going to selected **New Song**-related musical foundations and charities. Additionally, the film will be made available to third parties interested in educational use.

To enable wider, cross-cultural distribution, both English and Spanish language versions of the film will be made available, with Latin America being an additional key targeted area for release. Because many of the interviews will be conducted in Spanish, a Spanish language version will utilize Spanish subtitles for the English language interviews and Spanish narration. For domestic release, Spanish-speaking interviewees will be subtitled.

IV. Production Timetable

The following is the anticipated production schedule for the film (provided funding will keep the project in motion throughout each phase).

	Description of Work	Start and End Dates
Phase One	Pre-Production	January 2006 - August 2006
Phase Two	Production	Sept. 2006 - March 2007
Phase Three	Post Production	April 2007 - August 2007
Phase Four	Airing and Distribution	Fall 2007

V. Budget

The following is a preliminary budget for all anticipated, necessary costs of production, travel, supplies, director and editor salaries and support personnel during the pre-production, production and post-production periods of the proposed film.

PRE-PRODUCTION	Research, initial interviews, project consultants, networking, trailer/advertising	\$55,000
PRODUCTION	Domestic and international travel (airfare/hotel/food/car rentals)	\$40,000
	Equipment rentals, tape and film stock and misc. supplies	\$15,000
	Director salaries, crew salaries, insurance.	\$155,000
POST-PRODUCTION	Digital and video editing, tape duplication, post-production sound, licensing of archival footage, music rights, titles and visual effects.	\$70,000
	Editor's salary, sound mixer's salary	80,000
TOTAL BUDGET = \$415,000		

VI. Key Personnel

The following are the key persons involved in the production of *The Power of Their Song*.

John Summa – Writer & Co-Producer, Co-Director

John was born in Bronxville, NY, raised in Connecticut, and later attended the Graduate Faculty at the New School for Social Research in New York City, where he earned a PhD in political economy. He is a documentary film producer, author, journalist and former co-producer of an AP-award winning weekly radio magazine, *Between the Lines* (aired at and syndicated from WPKN-89.5 FM, Bridgeport, CT).

Throughout the past 25 years, John has remained passionately devoted to educating North Americans about social, political and cultural issues in Latin America, where he frequently travels. He speaks fluent Spanish and Portuguese.

John's first trip to Latin American as a journalist was to Nicaragua in 1981 to report on the Sandinista Revolution. Then in 1986, following several more visits to Nicaragua, John produced his first documentary film, *The Contra War*, a critical look at a U.S.-sponsored insurgency against the popular Sandinista government.

In 1987, **Herbert Mitgang** of *The New York Times* wrote that the documentary, well before the Iran-Contra scandal, references the "same names that (eventually) turned up during the (Congressional) hearings as supporters of the Contras against the Sandinista Government."

Following the 1995 Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, meanwhile, John traveled inside the rebel zones to cover Mexico's national elections, where voting was allowed to take place.

John has also reported from Asia and Europe, and is a former contributor to the Washington, DC-based publication *Multinational Monitor*. His articles on media, culture, politics, economics, the environment and Third World development have appeared in the *New Haven Advocate* and *Fairfield County Advocate*, as well as in the publications *Extra!*, *Toward Freedom*, *The Guardian* (no longer publishing), *Dollars & Sense*, *Business Digest*, and *E/The Environmental Magazine*.

Listening to **New Song** artists for over 25 years, John became inspired to make *The Power of Their Song* 6 years ago following several visits to Uruguay, South America. John discovered during his trips how extremely popular **New Song** music remains for a new generation, not just in Uruguay but across Latin America. He hopes *The Power of Their Song* will offer the rest of the world an opportunity to experience **New Song** music and its universal message.

John Travers - Co-Producer, Co-Director & Cinematographer/Editor

Born in New Orleans and raised in Westport, CT, John Travers has devoted his life to the art and craft of filmmaking. Inspired by his father's (novelist Robert Travers) passion for writing and his half-sister's (**Mary Travers of Peter, Paul & Mary**) love of music, John began making movies at the age of eleven, many of them music-related.

At 15 John studied documentary filmmaking with Westport filmmaker **William Jersey**; at 16 he was directing, photographing and editing his own Super 8 sound documentary and experimental films.

While earning his BFA in Cinema at the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut, John was selected as one of three national finalists by **A.C.E.** (American Cinema Editors) in the student editing competition. Flown to Beverly Hills, California, he was awarded the first-place trophy, beating out such highly regarded film schools as the University of Southern California.

For his 16mm, 45-minute thesis film, *Jenny*, John was awarded the coveted national Student Academy Award -- the highest honor attainable for a student film produced in the United States.

After graduation he was hired by documentary filmmakers **Bill Buckley** and **Tracy Sugarman**, editing such PBS-aired films as *Never Turn Back: The Fannie Lou Hamer Story* and the documentary, *The Time Has Come*, about the dangers posed by nuclear weapons.

In the early 1990s John relocated to Los Angeles, where he began working as editor and cameraman for independent filmmaking legend **Roger Corman**, assisting future Academy Award-winning editor **Zach Staenberg** (*The Matrix*). In 1995 he edited prize-winning short films for **Sasha Stallone** and *The Usual Suspects* storyboard artist **John Coven**; in 2001 he photographed the well-received documentary, *Creature*, broadcast nationally on HBO.

Recently John has photographed and edited both documentaries and concert films, working with such notables as **Madonna, Sally Kellerman, Peter, Paul & Mary, Bill Haley's Comets, Jennifer Stills, Leslie Costa, Iron Butterfly, Happy Chichester** and many others.

John looks forward to combining state-of-the-art digital technology with his three decades worth of photographic and editorial skills to help bring *The Power of Their Song* to life.

####