

American MASTERS

thirteen
WNET NEW YORK

450 West 33rd Street
New York, NY 10001-2605
thirteen.org

press information



AMERICAN MASTERS
is produced for PBS
by Thirteen/WNET
New York

THIRTEEN/WNET NEW YORK'S *AMERICAN MASTERS* CELEBRATES A SINGER WHO BECAME A LEGEND FOR TAKING A STAND AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN *PETE*

SEEGER: THE POWER OF SONG, PREMIERING IN FEBRUARY ON PBS

Features Joan Baez, Arlo Guthrie, Natalie Maines, Tom Paxton, Bonnie Raitt, Toshi Seeger, Tommy Smothers, Bruce Springsteen, Mary Travers, And Peter Yarrow; Rarely-Seen Clips, Personal Footage From A 1960s Around-The-World Tour, And Numerous Classic Songs

As early as August 18, 1955, folk singer Pete Seeger set himself apart as a “true American” when he appeared before the House Un-American Activities Committee and refused to name names, stating, “I am not going to answer any questions as to my association, my philosophical or religious beliefs or my political beliefs, or how I voted in any election, or any of these private affairs. I think these are very improper questions for any American to be asked, especially under such compulsion as this.” As a target of the communist witch hunt of the 1950s, Seeger was picketed, protested, blacklisted and, in spite of his enormous popularity, banned from American commercial television for more than 17 years. Throughout his ordeal, and his life, he never stopped singing out – and speaking up. “I look upon myself as a planter of seeds,” the legendary artist and political activist says in *AMERICAN MASTERS Pete Seeger: The Power of Song*.

AMERICAN MASTERS Pete Seeger: The Power of Song premieres Wednesday, February 27 at 9 p.m. (ET) on PBS (check local listings). Directed by three-time Emmy Award-winner Jim Brown (*We Shall Overcome, The Weavers: Wasn't That a Time!, The Three Pickers*), *The Power of Song* is the first and only authorized biography of Seeger. The film is produced by Jim Brown, Michael Cohl and William Eigen and executive produced by Norman Lear and Toshi Seeger. Susan

- more -

Lacy is the creator and executive producer of *AMERICAN MASTERS*.

“*AMERICAN MASTERS* is the perfect venue for showcasing this brilliant film,” says Lacy. “Our audiences expect authenticity and demand intellectual integrity in every one of our profiles – the very qualities that also make Pete Seeger a genuine American Master.”

Michael Cohl, chairman and chief executive officer of Live Nation Artists, said, “Pete has had a lasting influence on the fabric of America’s music – and its history – but he has always shunned self-promotion. It is a true honor that he agreed to allow us to document his life’s work. This honest, intimate film serves as a testament of his belief in the power of song above all else and his conviction that every one of us can make a difference.”

Now 88, Pete Seeger was the architect of the folk revival, writing some of its best known songs, including “If I Had a Hammer,” “Turn! Turn! Turn!” and “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy.” In the film, anthems including “We Shall Overcome” and “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” underscore music’s importance to the civil rights and peace movements and show how Seeger used songs to drive the clean-up of the Hudson River, one of many issues still close to his heart.

The 90-minute film illuminates Seeger’s belief in the ultimate power of song and his conviction that individuals can make a difference. While a member of the American Communist Party, he used music to organize labor unions and was blacklisted as a result. Musicians such as Joan Baez, Bruce Springsteen and Bonnie Raitt appear in the film to discuss Seeger’s numerous contributions.

“He’s a living testament to the First Amendment,” says the Dixie Chicks’ Natalie Maines in *The Power of Song*. Arlo Guthrie adds, “He really does believe that everybody has some kind of unique value.”

Producer-director Jim Brown said, “Pete Seeger got a whole generation singing together and helped introduce America to its own folk heritage, while using music as an instrument for social change. He has no interest in personal gain and works tirelessly with his wife, Toshi,

because he believes we are blindly destroying the world. There are lessons to be learned by exploring his life and music.”

The film is also a love story, an homage to his wife, who helped inspire “Kisses Sweeter Than Wine.” While on leave from the Army during World War II, Seeger married Toshi Ohta, a Japanese activist, and their marriage has endured for more than 60 years. *The Power of Song* includes first-ever family interviews and remarkable personal footage of the Seegers and their three young children shot in the early 1960s during a world tour to document music in such far-flung locales as Ghana, Tanzania and Czechoslovakia. The Seegers continue to live simply, in the woods, in a cabin Pete built himself.

To take *AMERICAN MASTERS* beyond the television broadcast and further explore the themes, stories and personalities of masters past and present, the companion Web site (www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters), created by Thirteen/WNET New York, offers interviews, essays, photographs, outtakes, and other resources.

AMERICAN MASTERS is produced for PBS by Thirteen/WNET New York. This acclaimed series, now celebrating its 22nd year, has become a cultural legacy in its own right. The *AMERICAN MASTERS* film library is one of the most highly honored in television history with profiles of more than 140 artistic giants. In addition to eight Peabodys, an Oscar, two duPont-Columbias and two Grammys, *AMERICAN MASTERS* has won 19 Emmys, including Outstanding Primetime Non-Fiction Series for 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, and 2004.

AMERICAN MASTERS is made possible by the support of the National Endowment for the Arts and by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Additional funding for *AMERICAN MASTERS* is provided by Rosalind P. Walter, The Blanche & Irving Laurie Foundation, Jack Rudin, The Marilyn M. Simpson Charitable Lead Trusts, The André and Elizabeth Kertész Foundation, and public television viewers. More information about *AMERICAN MASTERS* can be found at: www.pbs.org/americanmasters.

.....

Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Secrets of the Dead*, *NOW With David Brancaccio*, and *Cyberchase* – as well as the work of Bill Moyers – to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as *The Ethnic Heritage Specials*, *The Thirteen Walking Tours*, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. Thirteen extends the impact of its television productions through educational and community outreach projects – including the Teaching and Learning Celebration – as well as Web sites and other digital media platforms. More information can be found at: www.thirteen.org.

.....

Press Contacts:

Lisa Batchelder

Thirteen/WNET New York

212.560.2074

batcheld@thirteen.org