

DVD★Reviews



Preacher of protest:
Pete Seeger

Pete Seeger

A Song And A Stone

★★★★

Wienerworld WNRD 2588

Vintage documentary on the father of folk protest

Following Seeger's death, aged 94, earlier this year, it's a safe bet that at least one career-spanning documentary is in the pipeline. This intimate portrait, however, was filmed over an 18-month period in the early 70s, during an especially controversial period in the folk singer, environmentalist and activist's life.

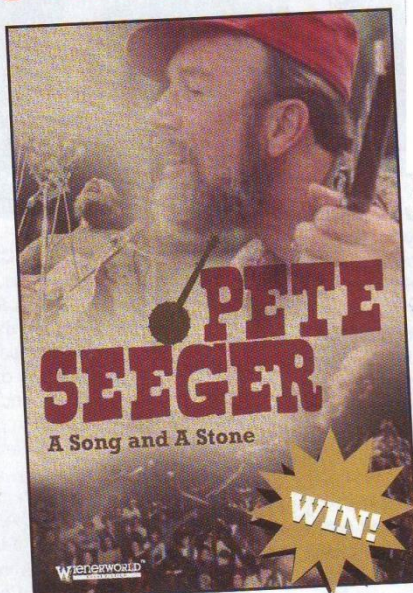
The Vietnam War was still raging, and Seeger's name was on an unwritten major media blacklist due to his ongoing opposition to the conflict, but director Robert Elfstrom focuses on how he continued to get his message across. Tellingly, Johnny Cash defies his own paymasters to feature Seeger on his prime-time TV show, and newsreel of Seeger leading an anti-war march on Washington is awe-inspiring.

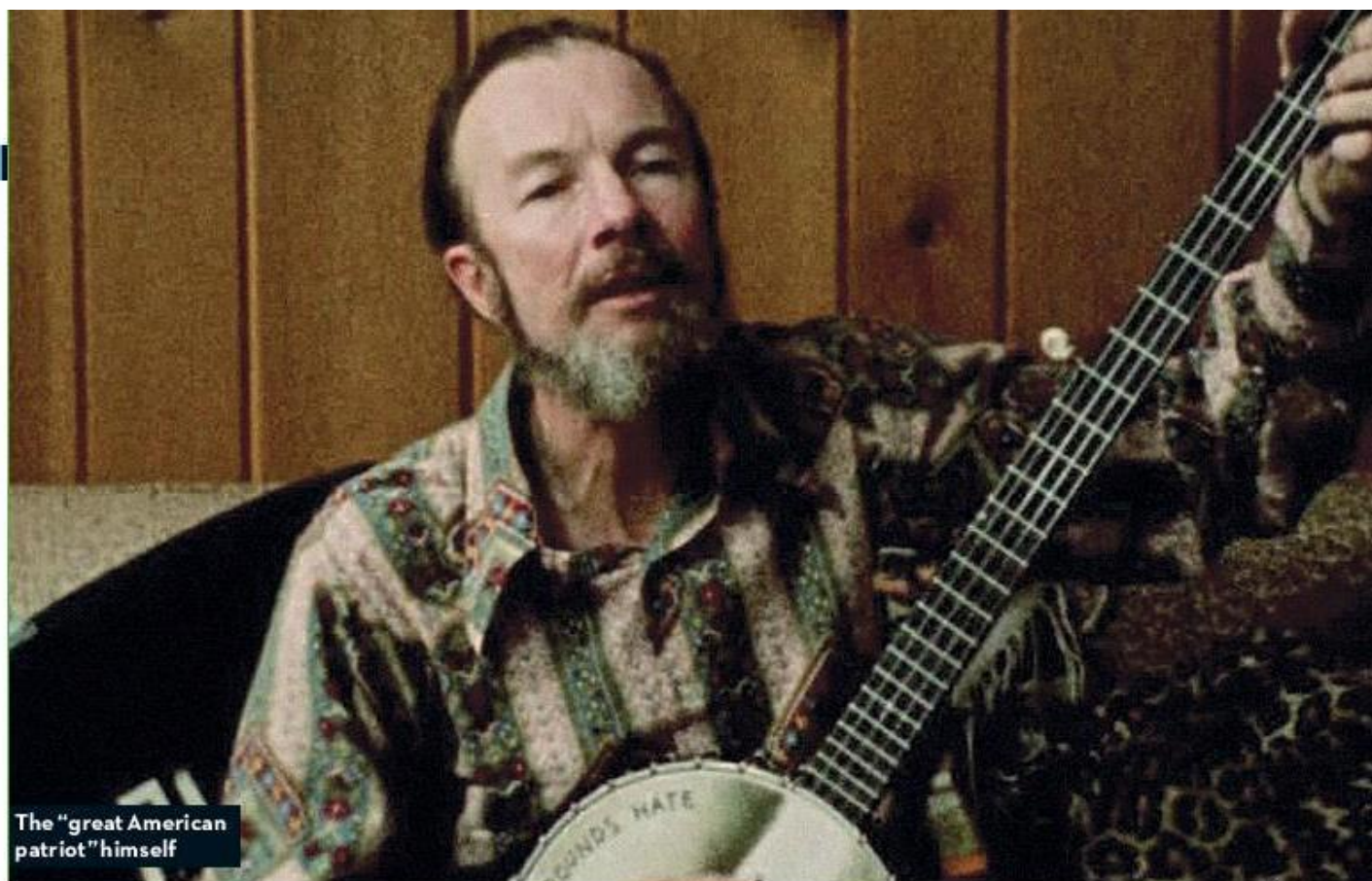
Concert footage finds the singer steering audiences to activism via protest songs such as *Where Have All The Flowers Gone?*, *We Shall Overcome* and *Walking Down Death Row*, while the articulate interview segments show a man unflinchingly committed to civil rights and human dignity. A passionate and important film throwing a spotlight on a genuine hero of the people, as well as documenting a turbulent time in a nation's history.

Terry Staunton

HEAT SEEGER

Robert Elfstrom's *A Song And A Stone* is the classic cinematic portrayal of Pete Seeger as musician, human rights campaigner, anti-war activist and environmentalist, documenting his struggles through hymn and deed. We here at RC are fortunate enough to have five copies of this inspirational DVD to giveaway. To have the chance of winning a copy, just tell us with which US folk quartet, blacklisted during the McCarthy era, did Seeger first come to notoriety?

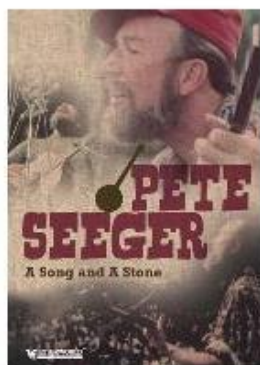




PETE SEEGER

A Song And A Stone

WIENERWORLD



7/10

Vintage doc following the folk hero for 18 months

1969 PROVED A vintage year for Pete Seeger. Marking his personal half-century, the year also witnessed Seeger's return from the wilderness imposed back in the mid-'50s, when he was blacklisted by Congress as 'Un-American'. He led a march of half a million people in Washington

demanding an end to the Vietnam War then, the following year, his appearance on Johnny Cash's TV show marked his rehabilitation on the airwaves. For the folk icon, it was sweet validation.

If Seeger's re-emergence owed something to the times – the Peace Movement was at its zenith – the championship of Cash was significant. As the film opens, Seeger is en route to Nashville for his TV spot, sore that he won't be able to sing about Vietnam but prepared to 'compromise' – "I have spent my whole life compromising," he smiles. The backstage scenes are among the most arresting here, the Man In Black playing gracious host, describing him to camera as

"one of the greatest American patriots I know". The duet on "It Takes A Worried Man" is anodyne, but the sense of triumph palpable.

The offstage Seeger proves a more freewheeling character than one might expect from his reputation as po-faced folk purist; more dapper, waggish, Billy Bragg-ish. Indeed, one problem is that Seeger the activist is more impressive than Seeger the musician with his rudimentary banjo licks and well-worn setlist – this was, after all, the year of Zeppelin's debut. He could perform, though, whether charming children clustered at his feet or leading the protesting thousands. He exudes genial certainty even when making statements that were toxic to the establishment: "The American nation is going to be judged as criminals after this Vietnam incident."

Seeger's energy was simply unstoppable. His 50th birthday coincided with the maiden voyage of Clearwater, a sloop built by Seeger and his wife Toshi, and he never looks happier than when helping to haul the boat's mainsail alongside young volunteers. When Seeger's father is asked to list his son's faults, he responds, "There nothing bad about Peter... except he's getting bald."

A Song And A Stone itself is no classic. It's often poorly shot, and its didactic tone now appears clumsy – the juxtaposition of Boy Scouts and marching troops, for example – but it's a fascinating time capsule, and a glimpse into the soul of a Great American.

EXTRAS: None.

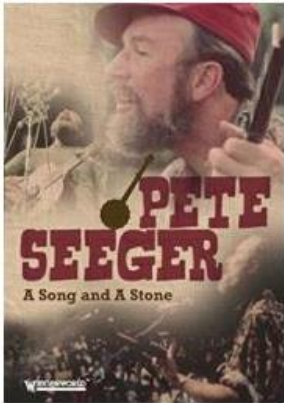
NEIL SPENCER

REVIEW

PETE SEEGER – A SONG AND A STONE (DVD)

🕒 WEDNESDAY 6 AUGUST 2014 🗣️ THE MOUTH MAGAZINE

A DVD FEATURING ROBERT ELFSTROM'S 1972 DOCUMENTARY ON FOLK SINGER PETE SEEGER (OUT NEXT WEEK) TIME-CAPSULES AN ERA OF SOCIAL DISCONTENT AND ACTIVISM IN AMERICAN HISTORY.



On 4th July 1776 the American Declaration Of Independence was drawn up. Amongst the admirable tenets by which all future generations were bound to live was: *"We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness; that to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it... ..that when a long train of abuses and usurpations evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government"*.

It's there on paper at the very formation of the United States of America – the Government merely custodians of the duty to govern, with the higher power and authority vested in the people by the Founding Fathers. Broadly speaking, history teaches us that all regimes become entrenched, spewing propaganda and keeping the governed distracted (the Roman Empire's 'bread and circuses' in degrees of action) while they continue about their often self-serving and dark business. In the modern age it's a far more sophisticated and precarious process but the idea is essentially the same – fast food and TV. Occasionally, there is an event which breaches the bubble of ignorance (or apathy) and so inflames the governed's sense of morality it becomes an axis for potential change. At this point the regime's motivation is defence of the status quo, and its method the use of agencies at its disposal to reject moves to be 'thrown off'. Made when Pete Seeger was still blacklisted by all major media organisations following McCarthyism, *A SONG AND A STONE* culminates with his involvement in one of the huge (12,500 were arrested in a single day) early 1971 marches on Washington DC to protest against the government over America's continued involvement in the war in Vietnam.

There is a sequence which puts any caricature of Johnny Cash as the mere self-inflicting wild man of country rock to the sword. Defying the television network which broadcast his popular weekly show, the Man In Black invites Seeger to perform and they duet on *WORRIED MAN BLUES*. His songs feature throughout – *A HARD RAIN'S A-GONNA FALL*, *WASN'T THAT A TIME* and *WE SHALL OVERCOME* amongst them. It's apparent how pivotal a figure Seeger (himself influenced by Woody Guthrie) was in the musical zeitgeist shifting away from pop inanity and towards social awareness and the sense of responsibility. Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen owe a particular debt.

At a human level *A SONG AND A STONE* reveals him to have been a reasonably gentle man of vivid conviction – a hands on environmentalist, navigating his Clearwater sloop in an effort to clean up the Hudson river (a programme he co-founded which continues to this day). He died in January, aged 94; a life well-lived in the name of peace, justice and dignity. In mid-2014, as the planet once again teeters on the brink, the forty year old *A SONG AND A STONE* is a timely reminder that Seeger's country was partly founded on the power of the people – the notion that it is the right, the duty, of the governed to throw off despotic Government. As friend and admirer Billy Bragg would later say, "wearing badges is not enough".

The Adobe Flash Player or an HTML5 supported browser is required for video playback.
[Get the latest Flash Player](#)
[Learn more about upgrading to an HTML5 browser](#)

Order *A SONG AND A STONE* [here](#).

THE LIVING TRADITION – OCT '14

PETE SEEGER

A Song And A Stone (DVD)

Wienerworld Ltd WNRD2588

This classic documentary was made in 1972 by director Robert Elfstrom, at a time when Seeger was still blacklisted by major media organisations – ostensibly because of his opposition to the war in Vietnam, but actually stemming right back to the McCarthy era. Rather than make any value judgements on this situation, instead the film focuses on portraying Seeger's positive personal qualities: his essential humanity and integrity and his life-celebrating, right-minded idealism, in the context of his status as a fighter for human rights.

The DVD begins with Seeger's famous appearance on the Johnny Cash TV Show, by way of a significant segment where Cash defends his decision to feature Seeger on the show in defiance of his network bosses, and concludes with a sequence filmed at a 1971 Washington DC peace rally, performing *We Shall Overcome*. In between these landmark appearances, the documentary darts about across Seeger's life not only in concert appearances and official interviews but also entertaining kids, interacting with his family and friends, engaging in informal hootenanny sessions with fellow-musicians and in his key role as passionate conservationist (*God Bless The Grass*) and enthusiastic environmentalist (navigating the Clearwater sloop during the campaign to clean up the Hudson River and even leading a shanty on board). There's plenty of music too, with extracts from strong performances of key songs, both of his own composition and by others (e.g. Dylan's *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall* and several by Guthrie including a particularly affecting *Hobo's Lullaby*) and if at times it seems a touch ragbag (and the end-effect is more like a kaleidoscope trip through Seeger's consciousness and preoccupations) the film is actually all the time emphasising the man's essentially gentle, caring nature and sincere humanity, his entirely genuine stance on all matters that count. And of course pointing up his major contribution to folks' awareness of their social responsibility, through intensely committed renditions of important songs such as *Where Have All The Flowers Gone?*, *Turn Turn Turn*, *I Come And Stand At Every Door*, *Walking Down Death Row*, *Peat Bog Soldiers* and *Waist Deep In The Big Muddy*.

Perhaps inevitably, the sound quality is quite variable (between above-acceptable and bordering-on-poor), but that's no reason not to celebrate the timely appearance of this documentary on DVD. Viewing it some 40 years on also provides a salutary reminder that the concerns Seeger so honestly and consistently espouses are still all too relevant to us today.

David Kidman

RETFORD TIMES NEWSPAPER – AUG '14

Pete Seeger, "A Song and A Stone" (Wienerworld WNRD 2588)- This absorbing new DVD from Wienerworld was filmed in 1972 and traces eighteen months in the life of American political activist and folk icon Pete Seeger, capturing a blend of live concert recordings and interview material from the period when the radical balladeer was still rather shockingly blacklisted by many major media organisations in the U.S. of A. Johnny Cash and Don McLean both make brief cameo appearances as Robert Elfstrom's rarely seen documentary offers a revealing insight into Seeger's life and work, including passionate performances of much loved protest anthems such as "Where Have All The Flowers Gone?" and "We Shall Overcome."