

Wells Production Associates Presents

We Began To Sing

A DOCUMENTARY FILM

Directed by
Polly Wells

Produced and Written by
Polly Wells and Candida Paltiel

PRESS AND DISTRIBUTOR CONTACTS

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As a young woman I found myself on a Pennsylvania farm with a family who sang spontaneously around the dinner table. My own family never sang together, and the sound of these voices stirred something deep within me, a longing to sing with others, freely, informally, without judgment.

And why not? This is how people sang for most of human history. In many cultures they still do. I wondered why, in North America, most of us had lost that enveloping routine, that marvelous habit of singing together. After more than a century of recorded music, millions of us have become mere consumers of other people singing. Perhaps we've persuaded ourselves that we can't sing.

The current revival of communal singing is giving the lie to that notion, aided by the efforts of Pete Seeger, Annie Patterson, Peter Blood, and many others. When we sing with other people, we feel a palpable sense of belonging. Our spirits are nourished, our hearts are lightened. Singing seems to satisfy an itch that springs from deep inside our soul. Making this film convinced me that we are all wired to sing. All of us are singers.

Polly Wells



Director Polly Wells in Philadelphia
Photo credit: Susan Snipes-Wells



Annie Patterson and Peter Blood with the Beacon Sloop Club monthly sing in Beacon, NY
Photo credit: Polly Wells

ABOUT THE FILM

Singing as a tool for social change is the focus of *We Began To Sing*. The film follows two New England activists as they lead community singing events in the US and Canada and share stories and songs about peace, immigration, and racial justice. Their lives are committed to the revival of communal singing, what their friend and mentor Pete Seeger called the ‘people’s music.’ Today, as deep cultural fissures threaten our social compact, their work takes on new urgency. The film features Patterson, Peter Blood, and the late folksinger.

FILM SUBJECTS

Annie Patterson & Peter Blood

Peter and Annie each grew up in families that sang together. When they met, they began to realize how rare and wonderful that experience was and how much it had informed their lives. Together they were inspired to create song books that would help revive the lost tradition of informal group singing. The success of *Rise Up Singing* and *Rise Again* changed the face of community singing in North America. The couple has led hundreds of group singing events and workshops throughout the world.

Annie, performs as a song leader, vocalist extraordinaire, a folk and jazz musician, and multi-instrumentalist. She also sings with two swing bands, Girls from Mars and The O-Tones. **Peter** sang and learned to play the guitar in his teens, continuing to do so as an activist for civil rights, nonviolent direct action, and in ongoing efforts to end the war in Vietnam. He edited Pete Seeger’s autobiography, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone: A Singalong Memoir*.

Pete Seeger

Pete was the iconic folk singer of the 20th century. For seven decades he inspired people from all walks of life to sing with each other. As a tireless activist, Pete had an impact on the major social change movements of his era. A prolific songwriter, he recorded more than 40 albums and influenced generations of fellow musicians. Millions of people were personally touched by his life, his integrity, and his music, including Annie and Peter with whom he collaborated on *Rise Up Singing* and *Rise Again*. Pete died in 2014 at age 94.

More information on Annie, Peter and Pete Seeger is available at: riseupandsing.org

FILMMAKER BIOS

Polly Wells: Director, Co-Producer, Co-Writer

Polly learned the craft of filmmaking during a two-year apprenticeship in a barn in upstate New York. She pursued a career in journalism and documentary in Philadelphia, New York, Washington DC, and Toronto. Her work has aired on CBS, PBS, CBC, HBO, National Geographic, and Discovery. Polly is the author of *Freking Out: Real-Life Stories about Anxiety*.

Candida Paltiel: Co-Producer, Co-Writer

Candida is a producer, director, and writer who has worked on public affairs documentaries commissioned by the CBC, CTV, TV Ontario, TFO, National Film Board, UN, Vision, Medicos del Mundo, and Al Jazeera English. She was the artistic director of Planet in Focus, Canada's environmental film festival. She has an MFA in Film from Columbia University School of the Arts.

Deborah Palloway: Film Editor

Deborah is an award winning documentary editor of noteworthy works for CBC, CTV, NFB, ARTE, TVO, History, and Bravo. Many have garnered Emmy and Gemini awards and international festival accolades over the course of three decades.

WELLS PRODUCTION ASSOCIATES, INC

Wells Production Associates (WPA) is a documentary production company in Toronto, Ontario owned by Polly Wells. Current projects include an anthology of short films about singing, particularly the evolution and reinvention of communal singing traditions. *We Began To Sing* (2019) is the first film in that series.

Website: songkeepers.ca
Email: info@songkeepers.ca



Pete Seeger at his home in Beacon, NY
Photo credit: Polly Wells

PRIMARY FILM CREDITS

Director

POLLY WELLS

Producers and Writers

CANDIDA PALTIEL, POLLY WELLS

Editor

DEBORAH PALLOWAY, CCE

Featuring

ANNIE PATTERSON, PETER BLOOD, PETE SEEGER, TERRY LEONINO, GREG ARTZNER, REGGIE HARRIS, CHARLIE KING, PAT HUMPHRIES, SANDY O, SARAH PIRTLE

Cinematography

ANTHONY FORMA, CHRISTOPHER MCKAY, RAWN FULTON, DAN KELLER, HERBERT FORSBERG, JEREMIAH MURRAY, PATRICK CODY

Additional camera

KITAMA CAHILL-JACKSON, ALDO MAURO, POLLY WELLS, CANDIDA PALTIEL

Sound recordists

ROGER PHENIX, KLONDIKE SOUND, CHRISTOPHER MCKAY, JOHN MARTY, DAVE DRAPER, DAN MAZUR

Production coordination (Beacon)

KITAMA CAHILL-JACKSON

Additional editors

MARY KOMECH, PAUL SALTER

Assistant editors

KENNETH ROBINSON, ELYSE SALEY

Story consultants

KAREN EVERETT, TOM SCHLESINGER

Graphic design

ISABELLE HÉMARD

Music supervisor

AMY FRITZ, RADAR MUSIC GROUP

Sound design

MIKE PALOZZI

Colourist

MARIO BAPTISTA

Legal services

STOHN HAY CAFAZZO DEMBROSKI RICHMOND LLP

Insurance

ARTHUR J. GALLAGHER CANADA LIMITED

Post-production facilities

MEDIA FUSION, 90th PARALLEL PRODUCTIONS

Featured Songs and Songwriters

A PLACE IN THE CHOIR by Bill Staines

A SONG OF PEACE

Music by Jean Sibelius, lyrics by Lloyd Stone

ALL AROUND MY HAT (Traditional)

CAN'T TAKE IT by Ian Hanchet

CHOOSE LOVE by Ian Hanchet

DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE (Traditional)

GIVE LIGHT

by Greg Artzner and Terry Leonino

HOLD ON (Traditional)

LADY OF THE HARBOR by Joe Jencks

MUSIC IN THE KITCHEN by Rick Speyer

NOBODY'S HOME by Ian Hanchet

RED IS THE ROSE (Traditional)

THE BLACKSMITH (Traditional)

THIS LITTLE LIGHT (Traditional)

WELL MAY THE WORLD GO by Pete Seeger

WOKE UP THIS MORNING by Robert Zellner

