



For More Information:

Polly Wells, Director
info@songkeepers.ca

Wells Production Associates Inc.
112 Admiral Road
Toronto, ON M5R 2L6 Canada

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**ACTIVISTS CARRY ON PETE SEEGER'S LEGACY
IN NEW DOCUMENTARY, *WE BEGAN TO SING***

Singing as a tool for social change is the focus of a timely new documentary film, ***We Began To Sing***, featuring the late **Pete Seeger**. The film follows activists **Annie Patterson** and **Peter Blood** as they lead community singing events in the US and Canada and share stories and songs about peace, immigration, and racial justice.

We Began to Sing was directed by **Polly Wells** and co-produced by Wells and **Candida Paltiel**. Wells, a Canadian-American filmmaker, became captivated with informal group singing while visiting a family that often sang together around the dinner table. "That never happened in my family," Wells recalls, "and it stirred something in me, a longing to sing."

Wells left that family armed with several copies of the songbook they used, not knowing the book was produced by Blood and a collective of activists and singers. Over time, Wells grew to understand the impact of singing on building community and encouraging social change.

At a young age, Blood experienced the power of singing and Pete Seeger became an early hero. Blood learned freedom songs during the Civil Rights era while volunteering to get out the vote in Mississippi. Later, he sang anti-war songs as an activist against the Vietnam War. The film shows Seeger in 1969 leading 500,000 protesters in song on the Washington Mall, an event Blood attended.

In the early 1980s, Blood met Patterson, a fellow musician and activist. Both had grown up in families that sang together. Together, they began to lead community singing, finding in their audiences a deep hunger for connection that sharing songs satisfied. Soon they found a supporter in Seeger, who helped them create and publish two popular anthologies of progressive songs, *Rise Up Singing* and *Rise Again*. The books are enduring tools for enabling group singing and activist organizing.

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We Began to Sing features footage of Seeger encouraging singing throughout the years, from the concert stage to the intimacy of his own living room. Seeger remained an active advisor and friend to Blood and Patterson for thirty years until his death in 2014.

The film chronicles Blood's arrest in 2017 outside ICE headquarters in Springfield, Massachusetts, where, with his fellow detainees, he sang freedom songs behind bars. Through Blood and Patterson, ***We Began to Sing*** explores today's atmosphere of divisiveness and conflict, and the power of song to bring people together.

We Began to Sing

USA/Canada

Directed by Polly Wells

Documentary, 24 minutes

Featuring Pete Seeger, Peter Blood and Annie Patterson and communities of singers

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Annie Patterson and Peter Blood at the Beacon (NY) Sloop Club's monthly sing
Photo credit: Polly Wells



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