

PRESS RELEASE

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FREEMUSE AWARD WINNER 2009:

PETE SEEGER – ACTIVIST, LEGEND... AND STILL FIGHTING



Pete Seeger is Freemuse Award Winner 2009

American singer, songwriter, activist, environmentalist, and peace advocate Pete Seeger has been nominated by the award committee for his *“commitment to musicians' freedom of expression in an illustrious career which spans over sixty years. His voice has been one which has constantly been on the side of the oppressed and which has refused to remain silent in even the darkest hours. He remains an inspiration to those musicians who seek to use their work for the greater benefit of mankind.”*

Although Seeger does not believe in awards, he accepted the Freemuse Award. In a statement Pete Seeger quotes an old Arab proverb:

‘When the king puts a poet on his payroll, he cuts off the tongue of the poet!’

Pete Seeger adds: *“But throughout history, songwriters have found ways to get around this problem by putting together songs that people like to sing and teach to their friends.”*



Grandson to attend award ceremony

Pete Seeger does not like to travel far these days, so he has requested his grandson Tao, an established artist in his own right, to travel to Stockholm and receive the Freemuse Award on his behalf.

The Award Ceremony will take place on 3 March at Stockholm's Concert Hall marking the Music Freedom Day.

The concert includes performances by Chiwoniso from Zimbabwe, Ferhat Tunc from Turkey, and Mahsa Vahdat from Iran – artists who have experienced censorship and repression in their home countries.

Blacklisted

Pete Seeger faced censorship for decades in his music career for promoting peace, justice, and equality in his music. In 1955 Seeger was blacklisted from work when he was subpoenaed to testify before the *House Un-American Activities Committee* and he refused to testify citing his guarantee to freedom of expression.

Boycotted by commercial venues and media, Pete Seeger continued performing for young people at universities and rallies and created a boom of folk music. His songs played an essential role in the civil rights movement. It was his variation of an old spiritual, which Seeger called "We Shall Overcome," that has become an anthem of the crusade for equality in America.

Cut by network censors

The Vietnam War deeply and personally offended Seeger, who used his network television return on the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour to air a scathing attack on Lyndon Johnson's war policies, "Waist Deep in the Big Muddy."

The song was cut by network censors, but Pete Seeger made a second appearance on the program and sang the song without interruption. When folk-rock band The Byrds recorded his legendary song '**Turn! Turn! Turn!**' Seeger's music reached millions of young people all over the world.

Co-operation with Bruce Springsteen

Seeger has never stopped. He recently joined his grandson Tao-Rodriquez Seeger and old friend Bruce Springsteen at president Obama's inauguration performing for hundred of thousands.

In 2006, Bruce Springsteen recorded *'We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions'*, reinterpreting 13 songs from Seeger's songbook.

Inspire artists

World-renowned Swedish glass designer Göran Wärff has created the Freemuse Award statuette. The Award is sponsored by BAIK – *the Björn Afzelius International Culture Foundation*, which was initiated in memory of Swedish rock singer Björn Afzelius who died 1999. Afzelius was a political activist and a strong spokesman for suppressed people.

"At Freemuse we deal daily with the horrors of music censorship. We document how artists are being harassed, jailed and even killed. Pete Seeger continues to inspire artists and human rights activists all over the world", says Marie Korpe, Freemuse executive director.

Last year exiled Ivorian reggae-artist Tiken Jah Fakoly received the Freemuse Award. Fakoly has been forced into exile being a strong critic of political corruption in his home country.

Seminar on music censorship

At a seminar open to the public Chiwoniso, Tunc and Vahdat will talk about their experiences of censorship. The seminar will take place at Stockholm's Concert Hall on 3 March from 1-3 pm.

Press contacts

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Press photos in high resolution:
www.freemuse.org/sw14180.asp

Note to media

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FREEMUSE – THE WORLD FORUM ON MUSIC AND CENSORSHIP is an independent international organisation which advocates freedom of expression for musicians and composers worldwide. www.freemuse.org - is the world's largest database on music censorship.