

Introduction

Corey Dolgon¹

The Power of Dust! The Power of Words! The Power of Song!
From the dust
from the mud
from the fields
the voices will rise
the voices of challenge

--Dennis Brutus, Voices of Challenge

On May 3rd, 2009, tens of thousands of fans and fellow travelers filled Madison Square Garden to celebrate Pete Seeger's 90th Birthday. It was a night filled with poignant speeches and sparkling musical performances that chronicled the career of a national hero. But more notable was how the evening also chronicled the history of a nation's most fundamental music and the social movements it inspired.

Seeger himself has been an activist of the highest order, indefatigable in his support for equal rights, peace, environmental preservation, etc. He not only sang the songs of inconvenient truths—documenting our nation's cruelty, folly and greed—but he remained steadfast and uncompromising in his commitments regardless of personal slanders, professional attacks, and even physical intimidation. In the face of censorship and blacklists, witch hunts and death threats, Seeger was, in the words of Bruce Springsteen, "A creature of stubborn, defiant, nasty optimism...a stealth dagger through the heart of our country's illusions about itself...inside him he carries a steely toughness that belies his grandfatherly facade, and it won't let him take a step back from the things he believes in...He will look like your granddad, if your granddad could kick your ass."

More important, though, Seeger's birthday concert was a reminder that his work and music have never been about himself or the music itself,

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