



**For Immediate Release**

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## **P.O.V.'s "Lomax the Songhunter" Captures Spirit of Man Who Chased the World's Vanishing Folk Music, Aug. 22 on PBS**

**Dutch Filmmaker Retraces Alan Lomax's 60-Year Journey from Texas Prisons  
To Scottish Highlands to Preserve Traditional Music**

*"It still remains for us to learn how we can put our magnificent mass communications technology at the service of each and every branch of the human family." - Alan Lomax, 1960*

Alan Lomax earned a singular place for himself in American culture and arts. Building on the pioneering work of his father, John, whom he accompanied on folk-song recording tours of the American South and Southwest in the 1930s and '40s, Alan set out after World War II to do no less than draw the folk music map of the world. Sensing that the world's indigenous music was on the point of being swept away by mass commercial culture, Lomax brought considerable energy and urgency to his awesome task. He also brought an infectious love for the varied homespun musical traditions, especially the songs passed mouth to ear for generations.

When Dutch filmmaker Rogier Kappers set out to make a documentary about Lomax in 2001, he found the once-tireless traveler and talker, having suffered a stroke, in the care of his daughter, Anna, in Florida. Lomax, 86, could no longer make himself understood, though he was delighted to hear his recordings and essays. Kappers had access to experts, friends, and archival footage and recordings. But wanting something essential that might have come from Lomax's own recollections, Kappers decided to add a more offbeat tactic. He retraced some of Lomax's journeys to remote places in pursuit of the vanishing folk song—and he found living testimony to the lasting impression Lomax and his bulky tape recorder made some 60 years earlier. Lomax died on July 19, 2002.

Rogier Kappers' **Lomax the Songhunter** has its national broadcast premiere **Tuesday, Aug. 22, 2006** at 10 p.m. on PBS, as part of the 19th season of public television's P.O.V. series. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, P.O.V. is public television's premier showcase for point-of-view, nonfiction films.

Being the son of the man who discovered Leadbelly (in fact, got him out of jail) and who helped introduce Woody Guthrie to the American public might have daunted most men. But Alan Lomax, born in Austin, Texas, inherited his father's determination as well as his passion for folk songs. He joined his father on tours of cotton fields in the South, rock quarries in Oregon and prisons in Louisiana and Texas, where they recorded and wrote down for the first time such American classics as "Rock Island Line," "John Henry," "Home on the Range," and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." These songs were, as Lomax says in archival footage, simply the most beautiful music he'd ever heard. His quest eventually led him to towns and villages in Scotland, Spain, and Italy to discover and preserve the folk songs of those regions.

For the Lomaxes the music was beautiful because it was created by ordinary people as part of their everyday lives—songs sung to make the work go smoothly, to entertain one another, to preserve stories, to pass on news, to express popular opinions. Folk music recorded their history and feelings in highly localized, popular language—in stark contrast to the pop music made by professionals for mass consumption. It was the shared genius of father and son to use the very instrument, the tape recorder—only 50 years old when John Lomax started his work—to preserve the old musical life that the new recording industry was wiping out.

**Lomax the Songhunter** includes interviews with Alan Lomax's friends and colleagues, among them renowned banjo-picker and singer Pete Seeger, who catalogued records for him; Pete's half-sister, singer and activist Peggy Seeger; British folksinger and writer Shirley Collins; and Jean Ritchie, who landed in New York fresh from Kentucky in 1947 and was promptly drafted into recording her family's entire repertoire of folk songs for the Lomax Archive at the Library of Congress. Lomax associates and collaborators, such as Peter Kennedy, one of England's leading folklorists; world-renowned ethnomusicologist Henrietta Yurchenco; and Vittoria de Seta, who met Lomax in Italy, testify to his intensity, ego, energy, and engaging ability to get often-suspicious people to sing into his recorder. Michael Taft of The Lomax Archives, which contains over 30,000 field recordings, a third of them by the Lomaxes, shows us a similar recorder Alan used—a heavy, trunk-encased machine that recorded straight to acetate and aluminum disc. Daughter Anna speaks of her father's warmth, but also of his domineering nature.

They all credit Lomax with helping to bring about the folk revival of the 1960s and for seeing the preservation of folk music as a world challenge decades before. Said Yurchenco in the mid-1930s: "We have the learned society of books and authors and a snobbish upper class that really thought that all of culture had to be according to their design. And Alan is the one who really makes the nation as a whole conscious of the fact that poor people . . . not only have a culture but a culture that is worth everything."

But it is Kappers' inspired trip in a beat-up Volkswagen over some of the same back roads that Lomax traveled—in search of memories of the folklorist's visit, and maybe even to discover an old folk song himself—that provides some of the film's most delightful and revelatory moments. On the road from the Hebrides Islands, some 50 miles off the Scottish coast, to small villages in Spain's interior to mountain villages in the poorest region of Italy, Kappers and crew go looking for the singers and players discovered and beguiled into performing for Lomax's recording machine. There is the inevitable tedium of fruitless search, when people are gone, dead, or just don't remember, that begins to parallel Lomax's experience on these same roads, as related in the diary he kept.

But there is also, as in Lomax's diary, the thrill of genuine discovery when Kappers and crew track down Jack Means in Aberdeen, who was a boy of 10 when Lomax recorded his dad singing a heartbreakingly sad song; Flora McNeal on the island of Barra on the Scottish Hebrides, who remembers Lomax's surprise at her youth when she came to sing for him; Jose Iranzo from Aragon, Spain, who enjoys his prowess with herding dogs and singing songs as much now as he did 50 years ago; and Concession and other villagers of Canizzo in Spain. All have vivid memories of Lomax and, without much prodding, soon break into marvelous impromptu performances.

Kappers' musical road movie becomes a half-century feedback loop that rediscovers something of Lomax's own restlessness and wonder. It also validates the urgency of the songhunter's quest; the elderly musicians and singers whom Kappers finds are often the last generation for whom the old music has come down as a living legacy and not as a preserved artifact.

"Alan Lomax was my hero, a Robin Hood-like figure who traveled around the world with a tape recorder, recording music of poor people," says director Rogier Kappers. "I wanted to talk to him about his passion for folk music and his fear that it would disappear. When I found that he could understand but not respond to my questions, I knew I had to find another way.

“During my travels and my stay with Lomax and his daughter, my fascination only grew stronger. I feel truly lucky to have met Lomax and to now be able to tell some of his story.”

In 2004, the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress acquired the original recordings, papers, and other documentation in the Alan Lomax Archive, uniting it with the material Alan Lomax collected from 1933 through 1942 for the Library’s Archive of American Folk Song. The Alan Lomax Collection is presently being arranged and cataloged at the Library of Congress by its curator, Todd Harvey.

**Lomax the Songhunter** is a production of MM Filmprodukties.

#### **About the filmmaker:**

##### **Rogier Kappers Director/Writer**

Dutch-born Rogier Kappers' other credits include the shorts **The Secret of War** (1995), **Sand** (2000), and **A Refuse Collector in Istanbul** (2002). He has also worked as a cameraman, soundman and editor for several Dutch television networks. He studied at the University of Amsterdam.

#### **Credits:**

Director/Writer:	Rogier Kappers
Producer:	Joost Verhey
Cinematographer:	Adri Schrover, NSC
Editor:	Jos Driessen
Sound design:	Harold Jalving

**Running Time:** 56:46

#### **Awards & Festivals:**

- *Best Dutch Documentary, Dutch Film Festival* (2005)
- *Impact of Music Award: Honorable Mention*, Nashville Film Festival (2005)
- Official Selection, Sao Paolo Film Festival (2005)
- Official Selection, Melbourne International Film Festival (2005)
- Official Selection, TV & Film Festival Cologne (2005)
- Competition Program, IDFA (International Documentary Festival Amsterdam) (2004)
- Official Selection, Portland Film Festival (2006)
- Official Selection, Rio de Janeiro Film Festival (2006)
- Cinequest Film Festival (2006)

#### **Original Online Content on P.O.V. Interactive ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))**

The **Lomax the Songhunter** companion website ([www.pbs.org/pov/lomax](http://www.pbs.org/pov/lomax)) offers exclusive streaming video clips from the film and a wealth of additional resources, including a Q&A with filmmaker Rogier Kappers, ample opportunities for viewers to “talk back” and talk to each other about the film, and the following special features:

- Additional Scenes: “The Songhunter's Trail”

Filmmaker Rogier Kappers retraced Alan Lomax's European travels for **Lomax the Songhunter**. The result is part road trip, part homage. Watch several scenes from his journey not included in the television broadcast version of the film.

- **Book Excerpt: *Alan Lomax: Selected Writings***  
In 1950 Alan Lomax set sail for Europe with "a new Magnecord tape machine in my cabin and the folk music of the world as my destination." He landed in London and stayed there until 1958, using the intervening years to travel extensively and document the folk music traditions of Ireland, Scotland, Spain and Italy.
- **In Depth: Folklife and Field Recording**  
Michael Taft, head of the Archive of Folk Culture at the American Folklife Center, talks about the state of folklife collecting and archiving, and milestones in field-recording technology.
- **Playlist: Alan Lomax Radio**  
In 1997, Rounder Records introduced The Alan Lomax Collection, a multi-CD set of recordings spanning the folklorist's six-decades of recording in the U.S., Haiti, the Caribbean, and Europe. Listen to a streaming radio sampler from Rounder's anthology.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and in its 19th season on PBS, the award-winning P.O.V. series is the longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's best contemporary-issue independent filmmakers. Airing Tuesdays at 10 p.m., June through October, with primetime specials during the year, P.O.V. has brought over 230 award-winning documentaries to millions nationwide, and now has a Webby Award-winning online series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. Since 1988, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information about P.O.V is available online at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

#### ***P.O.V. Interactive*** ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))

P.O.V.'s award-winning Web department produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *P.O.V.'s Borders*. It also produces a Web site for every P.O.V. presentation, extending the life of P.O.V. films through community-based and educational applications, focusing on involving viewers in activities, information and feedback on the issues. In addition, [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov) houses our unique *Talking Back* feature, filmmaker interviews and viewer resources, and information on the P.O.V. archives as well as myriad special sites for previous P.O.V. broadcasts.

#### ***P.O.V. Community Engagement and Education***

P.O.V. provides Discussion Guides for all films as well as curriculum-based P.O.V. Lesson Plans for select films to promote the use of independent media among varied constituencies. Available free online, these originally produced materials ensure the ongoing use of P.O.V.'s documentaries with educators, community workers, opinion leaders and general audiences nationally. P.O.V. also works closely with local public television stations to partner with local museums, libraries, schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness of the issues in P.O.V.'s films. *Youth Views*, P.O.V.'s youth engagement initiative, expands these efforts by working directly with youth service organizations.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Ford Foundation, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for P.O.V.'s Community Engagement activities and the *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and Thirteen/WNET New York.

**American Documentary, Inc.** ([www.americandocumentary.org](http://www.americandocumentary.org))

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on line and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback, to educational opportunities and community participation. Cara Mertes is executive director of American Documentary | P.O.V.

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**TAPE REQUESTS:** *Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.*

