

Heartfelt Film Captures the Emotional Experience of the Singing Revolution

The Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival's opening film, a documentary testimonial to the *Singing Revolution* by the American couple James and Maureen Tusty, is extremely moving. The film is both a summary of Estonia's dramatic history and a hymn to its culture...a culture that in the authors' own words "saved a nation from extinction".

The story of how Estonians fought, sang and survived is told with great empathy and shows how, through the centuries, the force which has bound Estonians together has been its unified voice raised in song.

Estonia's fairy tale heroes are not noble and brave knights, who fight dragons, but rather ordinary, simple, reserved peasants, who sit by the fire and wait, choosing to act only when the time is right. Patience is the Estonians' weapon, and knowing when to hold one's peace a preferred virtue. This is the way James and Maureen Tusty characterize Estonians.

The film gives a year by year review of Estonian history, the Soviet occupation, and Russification. Key events covered are the 100th Anniversary Song Festival of 1969, the reclamation of independence period, and "Eestimaa laul" ("Estonia's song").

What distinguishes the Tustys' film from other documentaries made in Estonia about the Singing Revolution and recent historical events is its emphasis on the drama of Estonia's history and the unique spirit of Estonians. In this film, we really do appear to be greater than what we, against a backdrop of domestic wrangling, are often capable of seeing.

The editing is precise and powerful, both in its alignment of factual details as well as in its dramatic accents (i.e. the bloodbath in Vilnius). A suspenseful melody is used in its background music composition, while historical footage is accompanied throughout by "Beautiful Is The Land That I Love" written for joint choruses by Rein Rannap to Hando Runnel's lyrics.

Another powerful song central to the film is Ernesaks'/Koidula's "Land of my Fathers, Land that I Love", which became Estonia's new national anthem during the Soviet occupation era. This song affirmed faith, hope and love – and through this song we sensed that the Estonian spirit still survived.

There are many breathless moments in the film, especially for those who personally lived through or participated in the awakening era events. There is no doubt -- this film has successfully captured the very nature and emotions of the Singing Revolution.

Equipped with subtitles, this film could be included in school citizenship

education programs, as well as Estonian Consulate gift lists. That others have written about us so empathetically and produced a film certainly has a more convincing impact than if we had done it ourselves.

[VIEWER COMMENTS FROM FESTIVAL WEBSITE](#)

- The film was earth shatteringly good. Praise for its authors. Really powerful, even the men cried...
- Absolutely a wonderful film. A love letter to Estonia.
- It was a very good film! I really liked it! Yes, it even brought tears to my eyes! I'd happily give it 10 points!
- The film was super!!! I have never seen anything this good, tears flowed of their own accord. Unbelievably good!
- An obligatory film – a history lesson for every Estonian youth. It's a shame, that we cannot see it again during this festival, but perhaps later on Estonian television. A distant observer's view often sees that which one who is here is not able to. And puts it all together in a fitting and impressive movie.
- "As late as 1991, hundreds of peaceful demonstrators were killed or wounded by Soviet troops in Lithuania and Latvia, and the possibility that this could happen next in Estonia was very real." Thank-you for highlighting this historical fact.

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