



ARTS & SCIENCE COUNCIL
Charlotte-Mecklenburg

GRANT RECIPIENT

Fifty Years of Folk: The History of the Newport Folk Festival by Naka Productions

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At a glance

- A documentary film in production about the history and people of the legendary Newport Folk Festival, founded in 1959

Highlights

- Project launched by Naka Productions partners Beverly Penninger and Alyson Young after they attended the Newport Folk Festival in 1996
- Filmed interviews with Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Arlo Guthrie, Odetta, Pete Seeger, Doc Watson and others
- Other award-winning films by Naka Productions: "The Spirit of Sacajawea (2006)," "Moving America's Lighthouse (2000)," "Wild in Corolla (1996)"

ASC Regional Artist Grant Project

To create a trailer that will attract investors for a finished documentary film to be made from 80 hours of interviews and festival footage completed since 2001



Sound check

A documentary on the Newport Folk Festival captures social history and musical traditions

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Realtor® Reflections* regularly features an artist or agency affiliated with the Arts & Science Council (ASC) as a way for Realtors® to help educate their clients about our cultural community. CRRA is an annual contributor to ASC.

By Louise Barden

When Bev Penninger and Alyson Young, partners in video company Naka Productions, first attended the Newport Folk Festival (Rhode Island) in 1996, they were simply avid folk-music fans.

By the end of their third festival, the pair asked producer Robert L. "Bob" Jones if they could record its history. This was the event that introduced Joan Baez and Bob Dylan as well as Arlo Guthrie, Janis Joplin, Joni Mitchell and James Taylor.

"Folk music never goes away. It changes and evolves, but it is an inevitable progression," Penninger says. "People speak their truth through their art. The music is a reflection of social awareness."



HISTORIC PHOTOS OF FOLK SINGERS COURTESY OF SMITHSONIAN CENTER FOR FOLKLIFE AND CULTURAL HERITAGE



From left: Pete Seeger, Odetta and Mother Maybelle.

From top: Arlo Guthrie on stage.
Bev Penninger and Alyson Young at festival.

Approval of the proposed film, however, was not automatic. Two more years passed before the pair received backstage passes, and then, finally, in 2001, permission for on-camera interviews. Jones, in explaining why Naka Productions was chosen over higher-profile companies, says, "You are the ones out there in the front row year after year, obviously loving the music."

History caught on camera

Since Penninger and Young's first interview in 2001 with Joyce Wein, wife of the festival founder, Naka has filmed dozens of performances and backstage events. More important, they have attempted to capture the festival's 50-year history through the eyes and voices of people who were there in its first years.

Naka has interviewed scores of performers, organizers and people behind the scenes. Penninger explains the film can "remind people how broad the world of folk music is and how important it is to recognize and preserve the country's musical traditions."

A trailer to draw investors

Now with about 80 hours of field tapes, and permission to use documents and photos from the Smithsonian, plus additional old festival footage, Naka needs financial backing to make a finished film.

But, Penninger says, "There is no way to complete the project without investors and sponsors. I can't attract those people without showing them the gold mine we have on film, through a well-edited and produced trailer. An Arts and Science Council (ASC) grant is giving me the freedom to bring on the creative partners and to do the graphics and editing I need for that trailer."

The grant also means more than financial support, she says. "Most of us in the arts do what we do because we care really about that. But passion alone won't get you what you need anymore. To have an organization like ASC recognize and support your art is very meaningful. It's important for our community."

Penninger feels certain this film can remind people of folk music's role in social change, especially during the 1960s. "That's powerful to me. I would love to have people watch this documentary and rediscover the country's musical legacy and artists." **RR**