

Victor Jara - Memoria del Cantar Popular (2003)

Written by bluelover

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The facts of Victor Jara's tragic death are well documented. Arrested in the aftermath of a military coup d'état, Jara was one of many political prisoners led to the National Football Stadium where many were tortured, beaten, and executed. Although his hands were broken or, as many have claimed, amputated, Jara continued to sing a song supporting the ousted Popular Unity Party. After receiving many brutal blows, Jara stopped singing only when a machine gun fired by a military officer took his life. In the nearly three decades since, Jara's songs and spirit have been celebrated by numerous politically minded folksingers including Pete Seeger and Tom Paxton. Arlo Guthrie set Adrian Mitchell's words to music for the ballad "Victor Jara," recording the song on his album *Amigo*. Undoubtedly, although Jara's heart may have been forcefully stilled, his music has lived on.

The youngest of four children born to a ploughman (Manuel) and a semi-professional folksinger (Amanda), Jara grew up in severe poverty. Raised on a feudal-like farm, he lived on the bags of flour and occasional fruit that his father earned from his labors. By the age of six or seven, he was already accompanying his father to work in the fields. Family life was extremely difficult as his father increasingly began drinking to escape his woes. When a pot of boiling water fell on his sister, he joined his mother and moved to Santiago, the site of the only hospital equipped to treat his sister's burns. While in Santiago, his mother took a job at a food stand at an open market, but in March 1950, Jara received word that his mother had died from a stroke suffered while she was at work.

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For the next three years, he struggled through school while sleeping at the homes of friends. At the age of 15, Jara left school and entered the Redemptist Order in San Bernardo, a small village south of Santiago. His quest to become a priest, however, lasted only a year. In 1952, he left the seminary and enlisted in the Chilean army. The following year, he was dismissed with honors. Jara's interests in theater and music soon became the dominant force in his life. Enrolling in the school of theater at the University of Chile, he studied acting. After completing his degree, he continued on to begin studies in theatrical directing. While at the school, he met his future wife, Joan Turner, a teacher from Great Britain. A turning point in Jara's musical career came when he met Violeta Parra, a traditional folksinger and artist and the owner of a small café in Santiago. Taken under Parra's wing, Jara began to sing more and more in the cafe. In 1966, he released his self-titled debut album. Four years later, he left the theater to devote his attention full-time to music.

From the beginning, Jara used his songwriting skills to supply a voice for Chile's working class and peasantry. Strongly supportive of the Communist Party, he was thrilled when Dr. Salvador Allende, the head of the Popular Unity Coalition, became the first socialist to be elected president of a Latin American country. Under Allende's leadership, the Popular Unity Coalition planned to strengthen educational support, increase low-income housing, and furnish free socialized medical care. Jara's dreams began to crumble, however, when on September 11, 1973, a military junta headed by Admiral Toribio Merino and Army General Augusto Pinochet, assisted by the United States via the Central Intelligence Agency, overthrew Allende and launched a brutal coup. Thousands of Popular Unity Coalition leaders and supporters were imprisoned with hundreds being subsequently executed. Jara was working at the State Technical University when it was surrounded by the military. Taken prisoner, he spent five days in a cold, dirty cell without adequate food or water, before being taken to the National Football Stadium. Although he was initially buried in a mass grave, his wife was permitted to provide him with a decent funeral and burial. She later left Chile in secret, taking many unreleased tapes of Jara's songs. --- Craig Harris, Rovi

Víctor Jara Martínez; La Quiriquina, Chillán Viejo, 1932 - Santiago, 1973. Cantautor chileno. Fue también director teatral, investigador del folclore y de los instrumentos indígenas, actor, dramaturgo y libretista, pero alcanzó la mayor trascendencia como compositor y cantante popular.

De origen campesino, heredó de su madre la afición por la música. Al ser abandonados por el padre, la familia se trasladó a Santiago, a una cité en la población Los Nogales. A los 15 años

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quedó huérfano e ingresó en el Seminario Redentorista de San Bernardo. Allí permaneció dos años. En 1957 entró en la Escuela de Teatro de la Universidad de Chile. En esa época conoció a Violeta Parra, que lo acogió como discípulo.

En 1960 recibió el título de director teatral y pasó a formar parte del directorio del Instituto del Teatro de dicha casa de estudios. Dirigió varias obras de teatro y obtuvo el Premio Laurel de Oro como mejor director del año. En 1967 fue invitado a Gran Bretaña, donde recibió otro premio por su dirección teatral. Estando allí compuso una de sus canciones más conocidas, Te recuerdo Amanda, dedicada a sus padres Amanda y Manuel.

En 1968 pasó a ser el director artístico del conjunto de música popular Quilapayún. En 1967 publicó su primer álbum musical, titulado Víctor Jara. Su segundo álbum, Pongo en tus manos abiertas (1969), coincidió con el respaldo que prestó a la candidatura de la Unidad Popular de Salvador Allende como militante de las Juventudes Comunistas. En 1970 publicó Canto libre, El derecho de vivir en paz y La población, creaciones de gran belleza y fuerza poética que lo convirtieron en uno de los máximos exponentes del resurgimiento y la innovación de la canción popular en Latinoamérica.

Sus canciones trataban sobre su pueblo y sus problemas, en la línea de los cantautores de la época; con todo, su éxito internacional las llevó más allá de su Chile natal para ser cantadas en cualquier manifestación progresista o concentración universitaria de otros tantos países, particularmente en la España de la transición.

Durante el período de gobierno de Allende fue nombrado embajador cultural del gobierno, en cuyo cargo desarrolló una amplia labor hasta la fecha de su muerte. Estaba casado con la bailarina inglesa Joan Turner, quien había sido su profesora de expresión corporal en la Universidad de Chile.

Fuertemente comprometido con su entorno político, su compromiso acabó costándole la vida. Tras el golpe de estado del general Augusto Pinochet, acaecido el 11 de septiembre de 1973, se encerró con otros universitarios en la Universidad Técnica del Estado, en Santiago, para mostrar su repudio y voluntad de resistir; sin embargo, el ejército tomó pronto las instalaciones y llevó prisionero a Jara al Estadio Nacional de Santiago de Chile, donde fue brutalmente torturado y asesinado el 16 de septiembre.

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En septiembre de 2003, al cumplirse treinta años del golpe militar, el gobierno chileno rebautizó al estadio con el nombre de Estadio Nacional Víctor Jara. A mediados de 2008 se reabrió la investigación judicial sobre su asesinato; el teniente coronel Mario Manríquez fue acusado del homicidio. --- biografiasyvidas.com

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