



## Press Release

### A SINGLE NATION. A MILLION VOICES. THE FALL OF AN EMPIRE.

#### Documentary Tells the Story of One Nation's Nonviolent Path to Independence

Most people don't think about singing when they think about revolutions. But in Estonia song was the weapon of choice when, between 1986 and 1991, Estonians sought to free themselves from decades of Soviet occupation. During those years, hundreds of thousands gathered in fields to sing forbidden patriotic songs and to rally for independence. James Tusty and Maureen Castle Tusty's *The Singing Revolution* documents how the Estonian people regained their freedom and helped topple an empire.

"The young people, without any political party, and without any politicians, just came together ... not only tens of thousands but hundreds of thousands ... to gather and to sing and to give this nation a new spirit," remarks Mart Laar, a Singing Revolution leader featured in the film and the first democratically elected prime minister of Estonia since the Soviet occupation. "This was the idea of the Singing Revolution."

First occupied by the Soviets in 1939, then by the Nazis, and then by the Soviets again, Estonia had lived through decades of terror. By the end of World War II, more than one-quarter of the population had been deported to Siberia, been executed, or had fled the country. Music sustained the Estonian people during those years, and was such a crucial part of their struggle for freedom that their successful bid for independence has become known as the Singing Revolution.

*The Singing Revolution* is the first film to tell this historically vital tale. "This is a story that has not been told outside of Estonia," said filmmaker James Tusty, who is of Estonian descent. "We felt it was time the rest of the world knew of the amazing events that happened here."

To make the film, Tusty and his wife Maureen interviewed more than forty movement leaders, Estonian statesmen, and citizens. They also combed through archives, unearthing rare, forgotten footage of life under Soviet rule. The film reflects the indomitable human drive for personal freedom, political independence, and self-determination.

Response to the film has been phenomenal. *The Singing Revolution* is the most successful documentary film in Estonian box-office history, receiving an unprecedented fifteen-minute standing ovation at Estonia's prestigious Black Nights Film Festival. Statesmen and leaders from around the world also recognize the importance of the film. Outside of Estonia the film's screenings have been restricted to the European Union Parliament, The U.S. Congress and other private screenings.

When Milton Friedman—a Nobel Laureate and Presidential Medal of Freedom winner—saw *The Singing Revolution* in November 2006, he pronounced it "a wonderful film," observing that it "will unquestionably have the effect of strengthening the belief in freedom on the part of anybody who watches it."

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In 1999, James Tusty and Maureen Castle Tusty lived in Tallinn while teaching film production at an Estonian University. The experience sparked their interest in the Singing Revolution, and in 2001 they returned to Estonia to teach and also to begin the meticulous archival research that would anchor their stunning documentary. *The Singing Revolution* is a moving, intensely human testament to the sustaining power of hope and the motivating strength of song.

*The Singing Revolution* was produced by Sky Films Incorporated, then known as Mountain View Productions, Ltd. The film was edited by Mike Majoros and written by Majoros and the Tustys. The executive producers are Steve and Karla Jurvetson. The producer/directors are Maureen Castle Tusty and James Tusty.

**TAG LINE: (9 words)**

A Single Nation. A Million Voices. An Unstoppable Dream.

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### **LONG SYNOPSIS (249 words)**

Most people don't think about singing when thinking about revolutions. But in Estonia song was the weapon of choice when Estonians sought to free themselves from decades of Soviet occupation. Few people know the crucial role one of the world's smallest nations played in bringing about the downfall of the Soviet Union.

Soviet forces invaded Estonia in 1939, at the beginning of World War II. By the end of the war, more than a quarter of the Estonian population had been deported, been executed, or had fled the country. During the turbulent decades that followed, music became a powerful unifying force, a means of preserving the country's national identity, and a tool for political resistance in the face of cultural genocide.

*The Singing Revolution* documents how, between 1986 and 1991, Estonians courageously and peacefully demanded that the Soviets recognize their country's right to self-government. During these years, hundreds of thousands of Estonians gathered publicly to sing forbidden patriotic songs and to listen to protest speeches, risking their lives to proclaim their desire for independence. The revolutionary songs they created anchored Estonia's struggle for freedom, which was ultimately accomplished without the loss of a single life.

Combining interviews of movement leaders and Estonian citizens with rare archival footage from the period of Soviet occupation, *The Singing Revolution* is an inspiring account of one nation's dramatic rebirth. It is also an evocation of the sustaining and liberating power of hope and humankind's irrepressible drive for freedom and self-determination.

### **MID-LENGTH SYNOPSIS: [125 words]**

Most people don't think about singing when thinking about revolutions. But in Estonia song was the weapon of choice when, between 1986 and 1991, Estonians wanted to end decades of Soviet occupation.

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*The Singing Revolution* is an inspiring account of one nation's dramatic rebirth and an evocation of the sustaining and liberating power of hope.

### **SHORT SYNOPSIS: [47 words]**

The Singing Revolution was Estonia's dramatic, non-violent struggle for independence from the USSR. Hundreds of thousands gathered in public to sing forbidden patriotic songs and to cheer demands for liberty. This moving film documents how a people helped topple an empire while singing their way to freedom.

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## FILMMAKERS

**Maureen Castle Tusty** and **James Tusty** founded Sky Films Inc. in 2008 in order to produce documentary films that inform, uplift and inspire. Their first film, *The Singing Revolution*, was released theatrically in over 100 North American markets and was compared to *Casablanca* in its *NY Times* film review, which also made the film a coveted "Critic's Choice." *The Singing Revolution* told the little-known story of how the country of Estonia played a critical role in the collapse of the Soviet Union by using singing as a weapon of resistance.

Subsequent documentaries such as *India Awakes*, *To Breathe As One*, *Trailblazers: The New Zealand Story*, *Sweden: Lessons for America?*, and *Corporate Welfare: Where's the Outrage?* have all aired nationally on U.S. Public Television.

### JAMES TUSTY

James Tusty is an independent filmmaker, speaker, and entrepreneur. He is Co-Owner and Co-Filmmaker of Sky Films Inc, along with his wife/business partner, Maureen Castle Tusty.

In 1981, Jim founded Mountain View Group, Ltd. and built it into a high-level filmmaking and communications consulting firm that serviced some of the largest companies in the world, including GE, Coca-Cola, and The Home Depot. While helming Mountain View, he developed *WorkForce Instinct™* (WFI), an organizational communications process that drives corporate missions into the gut of the entire organization. Working with senior management, WFI was a communications and motivational tool primarily used during major periods of change, such as CEO transitions.

Jim sold his company in 2008 to two long-standing employees, and established Sky Films Incorporated with Maureen. Returning to his filmmaker roots, Sky Films released its first feature film, *The Singing Revolution*, in 2008, which was compared to *Casablanca* by the *New York Times*, and later was cited by the *Times* as one of five "maverick" films that were changing the independent film industry due to their creative distribution plan.

### MAUREEN CASTLE TUSTY

Maureen (Mo) Castle Tusty is co-owner and the primary creative director and film director for Sky Films Inc. She was co-filmmaker with her husband/partner, James Tusty, on *The Singing Revolution*, which was the first project they produced together. Her documentary films have been seen in theaters, on Public Television, and in classrooms across the country.

Previously, as Senior Producer, Maureen was responsible for many of the award-winning corporate and educational films at Mountain View Group, Ltd., their former company. She has produced films in more than 50 countries around the world, resulting in a particular expertise in international production. She continues to occasionally produce and direct high-profile corporate and commercial work for Mountain View Group.

Maureen was the primary director on the Sky Films productions of *To Breathe as One*, *India Awakes*, *Trailblazers: the New Zealand Story*, *Sweden: Lessons for America?*, and *Corporate Welfare: Where's the Outrage?*.

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## ESTONIAN FACTS

**Capital:** Tallinn

**Population:** 1.33 million

**Location:** A Baltic country located on the Shores of the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland.

**Area:** 18,370 square miles (equal to Vermont and New Hampshire together)

**Ethnicity/race:** Estonian 69%, Russian 25% Democracy

**Language:** Estonian (similar to Finnish)

**National Currency:** The Euro

**Major Products:** oil, phosphorite, chemicals, mineral fertilizers, fishing, wood products, agricultural products, computer software

**President:** Alar Karis

**Prime Minister:** Kaja Kallas

**Type of Government:** Parliamentary

### ALSO OF NOTE:

- From 1940-1990 the percentage of ethnic Estonians in Estonia dropped from 94% to 61% as a result of Soviet programs of deportation, execution and a mass exodus of those under threat of arrest.
- The United States never recognized the legality of the Soviet occupation under international law, and therefore continually recognized the diplomatic representatives of the Republic of Estonia, even after the Soviet occupation. One such diplomat, Ernst Jaakson, served as an official Estonian diplomat living in the U.S. for 69 years (1929-1998).
- Estonia declared independence from the Soviet Union on August 20, 1991. the next day, Iceland became the first country to recognize Estonian nationhood, followed closely by Denmark. On August 24, Boris Yeltsin and Russia recognized Estonian independence. The U.S. recognized Estonia on September 2, the 32<sup>nd</sup> country to do so. UN membership followed on September 17, 1991.
- Since Estonia's re-establishment of independence in 1991, it has thrived under a free-market system. In international business circles, it is called the Baltic Tiger and has one of the fastest growing economies in the West.
- Over 26,000 Americans of Estonian descent live in the United States.
- Estonia is a member of the United Nations, NATO and the European Union.

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**Key Roles**

**Producer/Directors**

Maureen Castle Tusty and James Tusty

**Writers**

Mike Majoros, James Tusty, Maureen Castle Tusty

**Editor**

Mike Majoros

**Music**

John Kusiak

**Narrator**

Linda Hunt

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