

A Brief History

Often, the greatest art is born of the greatest suffering, such as suffering at the hands of political oppression. The people of Chile suffered such oppression for nearly two decades under the rule of General Augusto Pinochet. Today, the song of Chile emerges in a voice that understands what it has survived and rejoices in what it is now free to create. The musicians of Petroglyph Records are the artists who are leading Chile in creating this new voice.

On September 4, 1970, Salvador Allende Gossens was elected President of Chile. Allende's victory marked the first free elections in the history of the country. But this victory was short-lived. On September 11, 1973, Pinochet took office by means of a bloody coup, deposing the democratically elected Allende. Later, Allende's abbreviated term would be called by many the "1,000 Days of Spring" for the time of great hope it had represented, however brief, and for the promise of individual freedom.

The nostalgia for such a time persisted for the duration of the 17-year rule of Pinochet's regime. A retaliatory wave of persecution against the leftist parties of Chile was Pinochet's first order of business upon installing himself in office. During this period of dictatorship, much of the Chilean culture was wounded. Pinochet is credited with imprisoning, torturing and "disappearing" thousands of Chileans who dared to speak against him.

As in every society, the Chilean artists served as conscience and unifying force of the people. Music in particular stirred feelings of shared struggle, patriotism, and frustration. Chile's musicians did not disappoint. Beloved songwriter Victor Jara, for example, battled injustice with lyrics and celebrated in song the life of the working class. He was a primary force behind the movement known as "Nueva Cancion" or New Song. This movement was an integral part of revolutionary activity throughout Latin America, and was clearly considered a threat by the Pinochet regime.

Along with many other Chileans who had supported President Allende, Jara was taken prisoner and tortured by the military forces of Pinochet with special zeal. The general belief is that his hands were cut off but facts seem to indicate they were in fact badly broken, a symbolic equivalent to their removal. Either way, though he could not play his guitar, he continued to sing songs of the left political party, which quickly led to his brutal execution at the age of 38.

The countless acts of brutality are not all that impeded the musical arts. Destruction of the vinyl industry brought an abrupt end to the production of vinyl records and effectively prevented any new work from reaching the radio. An additional impediment arrived in the form of a strictly enforced 9 p.m. nightly curfew, dissolving any efforts for live music activity.

Today, with a Democratic government supporting the arts, there is a huge rebirth of music in Chile, offering the world a breath-taking array of talent, masters of their instruments and a powerful desire to be heard. Years of forced silence are now broken in such stirring and beautiful ways, releasing songs that are born of suffering but rejoice in freedom. As Chile rediscovers its musical roots and integrates them with influences from around the world, a cultural identity is being redefined.

Spring has come again to the long-suffering land of Chile. This is a modern renaissance.

Petroglyph Records' musicians are the generation of talent that is leading their country in re-establishing this musical identity. Their work reflects influences from around the globe but also the indelible imprint of living in a brutal dictatorship. They are rediscovering the songs and rhythms from the past and blending them with contemporary jazz, rock, blues and electronic music to create something uniquely Chilean. This music crosses genre boundaries and its spirit captures wide audience attention.

The talent in Chile runs deep and is virtually undiscovered. Chile's government offers some financial support for artistic endeavors from its Fundart project. Petroglyph Records artist Francesca Ancarola is currently working on a tribute to Victor Jara, recording several of his most powerful songs and some he was unable to record before his brutal death. However, despite the government support and depth of talent, there is little infrastructure in place for these artists to move their music into the world market.

The recording industry has never fully rebounded from the devastation of Pinochet. After the destruction of the vinyl industry in the 70s and with the huge advances in recording technology, Chile has not been able to keep up. What is more, distribution outside of the country is crippled. This means that many talented artists do not have the resources available to disseminate their works. Chilean record labels have a tremendous supply of quality music that has not found an outlet beyond its borders.

Sales of music CDs among Chile's 15 million citizens average at 2.5 million annually, in comparison to nearly 500 million CD sales per year in the US. Most of Chile's CD sales are imports from North America and Europe. The general Chilean population has not fully recognized the tremendous musical talent within their own borders and they still look outside of Chile for music, just as they were forced to do during the silent years of Pinochet. There is an extensive influence of European and North American tastes upon this re-emerging culture.

Often, Chilean artists that are not promoted by large labels lack the recognition they require to hit a mainstream marketplace. Unless they achieve recognition in Europe or the US first, many artists are forced to leave Chile in order to achieve their career goals. Finding more available opportunities to break into the larger markets in Europe and North America, these musicians seek recognition and career advancement in Spain, Portugal, Germany and the US.

Petroglyph Records is working hard to change that. Their efforts are aimed at Marketing Chilean music worldwide and telling the story of Chile's rich musical history and cultural rebirth. After nearly three years of developing relationships with music professionals on three continents and earning the trust of their musicians, these goals are nearing fruition. Petroglyph Records has formed a partnership with Berlin based Be1Two to distribute their CDs in Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Japan and they are working to bring a concert tour to the US and possibly Europe in 2006. Petroglyph is bringing a long overdue spotlight to shine on some very talented musicians for the whole world to see.