



## P.O.V.'s "Lomax the Songhunter"

By Rogier Kappers

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### Filmmaker's Statement

When I'm on my own and listening to a certain kind of music, I have to cry. Not always, of course, but it happens often. It wells up from deep down inside and there I am, walking through my home in a kind of ecstatic melancholia. Even if I don't know the lyrics, I know for sure what the song is about. And although I can't sing, I'm roaring with the music. I don't know exactly what happens, but I'm sure it happens to people the world over and that you can catch it sometimes, even if just for a moment.

Alan Lomax tried to catch this passing moment in his recording trips. Lomax is my hero, a Robin Hood figure who stood up for the music of poor people and passed it on to the world through radio programs and LPs. He gave a stage to the butcher boy with the blues in his body, to the greengrocer woman with that haunting voice, to the postman who was also a guitar virtuoso—all well known in their own villages but not to the world outside. He gave them a stage so they would not be forgotten.

I think Lomax's recordings are wonderful. They have an intense and open atmosphere. Crickets, barking dogs and murmuring voices in the background serve to augment the pure and original character. Listening to these CDs, I see Lomax in front of me, trekking from village to village in his old bus, dragging a heavyweight tape recorder. I see the parade of bakers, knife grinders and washerwomen passing his microphone to one another and playing their most beautiful songs. This image and mood was what I wanted to recreate in the film. That's why I went looking for the remains of this music.

I wanted to make a film with Lomax alive in it. Although he hardly could talk anymore, he was definitely clear in his mind and for sure, he did not lose his love of music. We could still listen to all these wonderful songs with him while he was gesturing enthusiastically or singing along in strange words.

I'm fascinated by old people: a whole life is hidden by their creased faces. A life—and aspirations—filled with desire, disappointment, joy, sorrow, boredom, fury, despair and resignation. What is left? Some photos, memories of next-of-kin. Some temporarily win the battle against oblivion and live on briefly by leaving something: a book, a work of music, a film or a deed that is remembered. Most are rapidly forgotten. And eventually little more is left than a street name. What will be left of Alan Lomax?

The battle against oblivion is the *leitmotif* of the film, and gives the documentary its mood and direction. **Lomax the Songhunter** is not a biography. It's a portrait of Alan Lomax and it sketches, through him, the battle against oblivion that every person fights and eventually loses.

In the person of Alan Lomax and in “his” music, I see the battle against oblivion gaining momentum. I see it in the young Lomax, in his fight to preserve folk music in all possible ways. I see it in the old Lomax, who can hardly talk and walk. I see it in the ways in which Lomax fought to leave his mark on history. Travelling in his footsteps, I saw this theme deepened as we find out what remains of the music and meet old people who are fighting oblivion in their own way—by remembering, preserving and passing on these unforgettable songs to a new generation.

- Rogier Kappers

