



Víctor Lidio Jara Martínez
(September 1932 – September 1973)

Chilean teacher, theatre director, poet, singer-songwriter, and political activist. A distinguished theatre director, he devoted himself to the development of Chilean theatre, directing a broad array of works from locally produced Chilean plays, to the classics of the world stage, to the experimental work of Ann Jellicoe. Simultaneously he developed in the field of music and played a pivotal role among neo-folkloric artists who established the Nueva Canción Chilena (New Chilean Song) movement which led to a revolution in the popular music of his country under the Salvador Allende government. Shortly after the U.S.-backed September 11, 1973 Chilean coup he was arrested, tortured and ultimately machine gunned to death—his body was later thrown out into the street of a shanty town in Santiago. The contrast between the themes of his songs, on love, peace and social justice and the brutal way in which he was murdered transformed Jara into a symbol of struggle for human rights and justice across Latin America.



Jara was deeply influenced by the folklore of Chile and other Latin American countries; he was particularly influenced by artists like Violeta Parra, Atahualpa Yupanqui, and the poet Pablo Neruda. He published his first recording in 1966 and, by 1970, had left his theater work in favor of a career in music. His songs were drawn from a combination of traditional folk music and left-wing political activism. He supported the Unidad Popular ("Popular Unity") coalition candidate Salvador Allende for the presidency of Chile, taking part in campaigning, volunteer political work, and playing free concerts.

On the morning of September 12, Jara was taken, along with thousands of others, as a prisoner to the Chile Stadium (renamed the Estadio Víctor Jara in September 2003). In the hours and days that followed, many of those detained in the stadium were tortured and killed there by the military forces. Jara was repeatedly beaten and tortured; the bones in his hands were broken as were his ribs. Fellow political prisoners have testified that his captors mockingly suggested that he play guitar for them as he lay on the ground. Defiantly, he sang part of a song supporting the Popular Unity coalition. After further beatings, he was machine-gunned on September 15 and his body dumped on a road on the outskirts of Santiago, and then taken to a city morgue.

Jara's wife, Joan Turner, was allowed to come and retrieve his body from the site and was able to confirm the physical damage he had endured. After holding a funeral for her husband, Joan Jara fled the country in secret. Joan Turner Jara currently lives in Chile and runs the Victor Jara Foundation. The Chile Stadium, also known as the Victor Jara Stadium, is often confused with the Estadio Nacional (National Stadium). Before his death, Victor Jara wrote a poem about the conditions of the prisoners in the stadium, the poem was written on a paper that was hidden inside a shoe of a friend. The poem was never named, but is commonly known as Estadio Chile.

In June 2008 Chilean judge Juan Eduardo Fuentes re-opened the investigation into Victor Jara's death. Judge Fuentes said he would examine 40 new pieces of evidence provided by the singer's family.

“The cultural invasion is like a leafy tree which prevents us from seeing our own sun, sky and stars. Therefore in order to be able to see the sky above our heads, our task is to cut this tree off at the roots. US imperialism understands very well the magic of communication through music and persists in filling our young people with all sorts of commercial tripe. With professional expertise they have taken certain measures: first, the commercialization of the so-called ‘protest music’; second, the creation of ‘idols’ of protest music who obey the same rules and suffer from the same constraints as the other idols of the consumer music industry – they last a little while and then disappear. Meanwhile they are useful in neutralizing the innate spirit of rebellion of young people. The term ‘protest song’ is no longer valid because it is ambiguous and has been misused. I prefer the term ‘revolutionary song’.

Report of the Chilean
National Commission on
Truth and Reconciliation

PART THREE
Chapter One (A.2)

Victor Lidio JARA MARTINEZ, 40, a popular singer and theater director who was a member of the Central Committee of Communist Youth. A statement by the Foreign Ministry dated March 27, 1974, in response to a note from the OAS (Organization of American States) Interamerican Human Rights Commission, said, "V́ctor Jara: Dead. He was killed by snipers who, I repeat, were firing indiscriminately on the armed forces and on the civilian population."

This Commission received many credible reports refuting this official story and leading to the conclusion that what actually happened was quite different. V́ctor Jara was arrested on September 12 on the grounds of the State Technical University where he was working as a theater director. He was taken to the Chile Stadium, where he was separated from the other people with whom he had been arrested, and detained high up in the stands together with other people considered to be dangerous. Between September 12-15, he was interrogated by army personnel. The the last day V́ctor Jara was seen alive was September 15. During the afternoon he was taken out of a line of prisoners who were being transferred to the National Stadium. In the early morning of the next day, September 16, shantytown dwellers found his body, along with five others, including that of Littré Quiroga Carvajal, near the Metropolitan Cemetery. As the autopsy report states, V́ctor Jara died as a result of multiple bullet wounds (44 entry wounds and 32 exit wounds).

The Commission came to the conviction that he was executed without due process of law by government agents, and hence in violation of his fundamental human rights. The grounds for that conviction are that he is known to have been arrested and to have been in the Chile Stadium, that it is attested that he died as a result of many bullet wounds, thus indicating that he was executed together with the other prisoners whose bodies appeared alongside his. The overview to this period provides an account of the various kinds of torture to which V́ctor Jara was subjected while under arrest.