

A Proposal For:

# RAISING UP THE ASHES

a documentary film about the legendary folk music club, The Ash Grove.

Producers

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Consulting Producer

Ed Pearl

*I can't think of a better lens through which to view such an important part of our cultural history than a documentary on this wonderful club."*

*—Bonnie Raitt*

## Film Summary

*Bob Dylan dreamed of playing there. Mick Jagger thanked the owner for the musical education he received there; and Bonnie Raitt called it crucial and legendary for its many political, social and musical connections.*

From 1958 to 1973 The Ash Grove was Los Angeles's premier roots music club. It championed some of the most obscure and talented performers from across the United States who became the legendary icons of blues, bluegrass, folk and R&B. A devoted group of aspiring musicians came to listen and learn, going on to become legends in their own right. The club fused its traditional music with the radical politics of that turbulent era. Then it was mysteriously burned down... three times.

*Raising Up The Ashes* will be a theatrical and/or broadcast documentary film that interweaves the history, legend and living legacy of the Ash Grove. The film will borrow from the styles of such successful documentaries as Wim Wenders and Ry Cooder's Academy-award-winning film, *Buena Vista Social Club*; Taylor Hackford's *Hail! Hail! Rock and Roll*; Martin Scorsese's PBS series, *The Blues*; Jim Brown's acclaimed feature film, *Pete Seeger: The Power of Song* and Aiyana Elliott's Sundance-winning, *The Ballad of Ramblin' Jack*.

The film will incorporate the 50th anniversary Ash Grove reunion weekend of concerts and celebrations to take place in April 2008. The reunion brings together original Ash Grove performers with a new generation seeking to carry on its mission.

## The Ash Grove: The Mission, The Music, The Reunion

In 1958 Ed Pearl turned a former furniture warehouse on the edge of Hollywood into a concert stage for folk music. **He wanted an antidote to the culture of the 50's and the bland pop music coming out of recording studios. If you lived in Los Angeles and you wanted more, Pearl wanted the Ash Grove to be the place to go.**

**During the next fifteen years he presented an astonishing mix of steadfastly non-commercial roots music with artists traveling from all corners of the country and across the oceans. For many it was their first performance on the West Coast.**

Pearl brought the known and unknown, including Doc Watson, Bill Monroe, Merle Travis, Flatt and Scruggs, Johnny Cash, Mother Maybelle Carter and **Miriam Makeba**. Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, Son House, Albert King, Albert Collins, **Joseph Spence**, Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Reverend Gary Davis and Big Mama Thornton.

A new generation of city kids, digging the earthy, raw sounds of Pearl's discoveries came night after night, sitting at the feet of the old masters, absorbing their musical licks and country wisdom. For Taj Mahal, Ry Cooder, Bonnie Raitt, Linda Ronstadt, Jackson Browne, Jerry Garcia, Mick Jagger, The Byrds, Canned Heat, The Chambers Brothers, Dave Alvin, and countless more, the Ash Grove became a major school and training

ground.

Pearl was never much of a businessman. He always operated on a shoestring and broke the accepted rules of running a profitable club. As Taj Mahal said the Ash Grove was "never about the money", but about presenting "the real source of music."

The era of the Ash Grove coincided with the great movements of the 1960's—Civil Rights, Peace, Anti-Poverty. Ed Pearl threw himself and the club behind the progressive causes he believed in. During the era that witnessed the assassinations of great American leaders and the destruction of many progressive forces, the Ash Grove was set on fire three times for its active role in the anti-war and civil rights movements.

Thirty-five years since the final fire, those who came to the club say the same thing, "There never was another place like the Ash Grove, then or now". It opened their minds, ears and hearts to the world.

L.A. bred singer-songwriter Dave Alvin is one of the many Ash Grove regulars still trying to recreate the magic on the road today. In his song 'Ashgrove' Alvin sings of being a "young boy who used to slip away, down to the Ash Grove to hear the old bluesmen play". In each club Alvin urges the audience to help him conjure up the spirit of the place that inspired him, "The Ash Grove, where I come from" and "where I belong."

Dave Alvin will do just that in April 2008 when he joins with original Ash Grove performers for three days and nights of concerts and workshops to take place at UCLA. The Ash Grove's founder, Ed Pearl has organized the event in honor of the club's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary to bring back the music and movements which Pearl feels is so lacking today.

Ry Cooder, Taj Mahal, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, the Freedom Singers, Michele Shocked and Dave Alvin will come together with other roots musicians, poets, professors and activists to reignite the Ash Grove mission—at the very moment that a national surge for change is gaining momentum.

## Film Themes and Style

One of the great universal themes relevant today is how real change can be accomplished under **overwhelming** pressure to keep to the broken course. **Whether it be for financial, political, social or artistic forces, *Raising Up The Ashes* dramatically addresses this subject.** It goes to the heart of what inspires people and **allows them to become creative. It will portray how the Ash Grove was a catalyst in changing their lives and the lives of those around them, often at great costs.**

*Raising Up The Ashes* will be distinctive from most music-themed films about artists, concerts or musical genres. **Its central focus is a home for talented souls from different generations and backgrounds** who felt culturally and spiritually homeless until they discovered the Ash Grove. **Few if any films have been made about a club with its own culture. Having this defined space concentrates the creative and conflicting forces at**

**work. Audiences are won and lost due to artistic decisions. Old acoustic musical traditions collide and fuse with electric rock. White segregationists and black civil rights advocates share stages and dressing rooms. The counter-culture arises; and matters of drugs, sex and politics play out.**

The Ash Grove is a story that must be told by those who were there, a rich fabric of voices recounting the excitement, the drama and the conflict inherent in both the Ash Grove club and the era. It will bring to screen the colorful characters, from eccentric impresario, Ed Pearl, his eclectic staff of ex-monks, musicians, artists, pugilists, radicals and 'girls of the Canyon'; the old masters, from Doc Watson to Muddy Waters and Ramblin' Jack Elliott; and the 'new' masters, from Taj Mahal and Ry Cooder to Bonnie Raitt.

Filmmakers Aiyana Elliott (daughter of Ash Grove regular, Ramblin' Jack Elliott) and Jerry Kay (former Ash Grove manager) will interview people who were close to the club. They will discover who and what made the club so unique and what political activities made it the center of controversy.

They will attempt to unravel the mystery behind the fires, uncovering who was responsible and why they did it. Thirty-five years after the final burning, they will pursue the club's legacy and how it lives on.

## Film Components

### INTERVIEWS

- **Shot** - To date fifteen Ash Grove performers and key people have been filmed including Dave Alvin, Taj Mahal, Ry Cooder, Pete Seeger, Bernie Pearl and Barbara Dane; film maker, Les Blank; former Ash Grove staff and club-owner, Anna De Leon; and the founder, Ed Pearl. Each gave impassioned accounts of their Ash Grove experiences.
- **To Shoot** -The filmmakers have contacted and are presently arranging interviews with: Doc Watson, Earl Scruggs, Ralph Stanley, Mavis Staples, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Linda Ronstadt, The Chambers Brothers; Luis Valdez (El Teatro Campesino, *La Bamba*), Elaine Browne (Black Panthers, *Seize The Time*), social activist Tom Hayden; and music writers such as: LA Time critic Robert Hillburn and Stanley Crouch.
- **The Fires** - There are many strange details surrounding the three fires that ultimately destroyed the Ash Grove. Leads never before publicly revealed, have been uncovered and will be explored regarding who was responsible for the fires. Just as the recent theatrical documentary *The U.S. vs. John Lennon* documented the FBI campaign against Lennon, *Raising Up The Ashes* will include previously unrevealed information relating to the fires.

### ARCHIVAL

- **Ash Grove:** The filmmakers have uncovered several films shot at the Ash Grove including a 1971 documentary concert and interview of Muddy Waters at the Ash Grove filmed by Academy-award winning director, Taylor Hackford (*Ray, La Bamba, An Officer and a Gentleman*). Additionally, Hackford has offered to make available footage and interviews he shot in the burned-down Ash Grove.
- **Performance:** The film will showcase dynamic archival performances of the original

Ash Grove roots artists—today's legendary icons.

- Audio Recordings: Over 500 hours of unreleased audio recordings of live Ash Grove performances, from which the filmmakers can choose the best songs and stage repartee to evoke the atmosphere of the club.
- **Ash Grove Performers in the World:** To show the influence of Ash Grove alumni, we may include: performances at Woodstock and Monterey Pop festivals with Canned Heat and The Byrds; **Bonnie Raitt's work with old blues masters and her activism;** Taj Mahal's excursions into Hawaiian, African, Caribbean and African roots to Ry Cooder's *Buena Vista Social Club* and Linda Ronstadt's mariachi concerts and recordings, *Canciones de Mi Padre*.

## PRESENT DAY VERITE

- **The Reunion Concerts**, hotly anticipated by Pearl and the **many** participants, provides a natural platform for reconsidering the Ash Grove and the Ash Grove performers **at work** today. The concerts will bring **together** former friends and collaborators, some for the first time in decades.
- **Ed Pearl** is organizing the Ash Grove Reunion Concert to prevent his life's work and mission from perishing. He is still actively organizing for progressive causes; and just as the Reunion concert is in its final planning stages, the national presidential campaign suddenly awakens the very spirit he has been trying to evoke. We will follow his dogged efforts to tell the Ash Grove story while organizing the culminating event of his life at the very moment he, and those around him see the possibility of a new spirit on the rise.
- **Dave Alvin** will be a central character through his personal mission in song and performance on the road to bring back the Ash Grove spirit. He will be one of the people pointing the way to discovering the Ash Grove's secrets.
- **The Legacy** of the Ash Grove will be shown with footage of select AG alumni in the world today. Besides the musicians who have graduated from the Ash Grove, this could also include former staff and fans who have opened clubs, produced roots music, joined and led social movements. The trail leads from Hollywood studios to jazz clubs, federal courtrooms and college campuses to Navaho reservations.

## RECREATIONS

*Raising Up the Ashes* will shoot recreations in the style of archival footage from the period to help illustrate some of the stories, scenes and atmosphere of the club.

## Audience

*Raising Up The Ashes* will appeal to a wide national and international audience because of its universal themes, compelling story, legendary characters and music spanning many eras and genres.

## FANS OF THE MUSIC

Americana roots music maintains a broad and steady audience that spans many continents and generations. No matter what music or entertainment passes in and out of style, American roots music, based in the near-mythical roster of Ash Grove performers, maintains a wide following demonstrated in attendance at music concerts and festivals world-wide, Americana radio stations, CD and digital music sales, video websites and in audiences for both documentary and dramatic film subjects.

Ry Cooder's *Buena Vista Social Club*; Taylor Hackford's *Ray* (Charles) biopic; Martin Scorsese's PBS Blues series, D.A. Pennebaker's *Monterey Pop*, and even *Woodstock* were either produced by or featured Ash Grove performers. The Coen Brothers film, *O Brother Where Art Thou* was a surprise hit to a great deal because of its use of roots music and featured Ash Grove performers.

Music was the number one medium to spread the messages of the 60's. From Canned Heat's *Let's Get Together* and *Going Up The Country*, The Chambers Brothers' (*Time Has Come Today*) to The Byrd's rendition of Bob Dylan's *Hey Mr. Tambourine Man*, the Ash Grove's influence figured prominently.

**(I'd put this at end of Audience section)**

**SALES AND MARKETING INFORMATION:**

Note: Locating accurate video/dvd sales figures is difficult.

Some recent films with themes, characters and participants similar to *RAISING UP THE ASHES* within the past ten years that have the following box office statistics

*Buena Vista Social Club* (1999) had box office sales totaling approximately \$28 million. The video, dvd and the Grammy-winning cd music sales were substantial.

*The US VS. John Lennon* (2006) had a limited theatrical release. In the first 8 weeks in 60 theaters it grossed approximately \$1 million.  
VHS Rentals: \$5,910,000

*O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000) became a surprise hit partly due to its traditional music sound track and concert series, *Down From the Mountain*. *O Brother*, while not a documentary is a quirky Coen Brothers film which grossed \$45.5 million US and \$29 million international.

*Woodstock* (had box office sales totaling 50,000,000 (USA) (sub-total, \$13,300,000 (USA)??)

Rentals \$16,400,000 (USA)

Should we put *Ballad*? gross of just \$231,000??

in 35 theatrical markets....

The box office, dvd sales and soundtrack successes of recent biopic films, *Walk The Line* and *Ray* also indicate that the themes, musical content, characters and story of the Ash Grove resonate with the public.

**Mention tie-in with a possible soundtrack?**

**FANS OF THE ASH GROVE**

During its existence hundreds of thousands of people came to the Ash Grove many of whom have become major figures in music, arts, education and political and community activities. Plus, many of the artists interviewed have achieved national and international renown. We can create a buzz necessary to generate interest beginning in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, with concerts and special exhibits, similar to the UCLA Ash Grove 50th Anniversary publicity.

## FANS OF THE 1960'S

The 1960's stands as a turbulent, exciting, compelling era in American history and the Ash Grove's music, politics and culture figured prominently in the era. From the assassinations of the Kennedy's and Martin Luther King, the Vietnam War, the Hippies, Black Panthers, all of the movements came to the Ash Grove, a center deeply involved in the times.

In summary, *Rising Up The Ashes* will have a broad audience of music fans, cultural and 1960's era buffs, for a story of inspiration about a home for the talented, quirky and unrecognized that will affect the hearts of many.

## The Filmmakers

**Aiyana Elliott** is an award winning filmmaker, selected by Variety as one of the top ten Digital Video directors to watch. Her feature film *The Ballad of Ramblin' Jack* was awarded The Special Jury Prize for Artistic Achievement at the Sundance Film Festival and she was awarded the IFP Anthony Radziwill Documentary Achievement Award. Aiyana Elliott directed and produced a short film entitled *TOUGH*, which was broadcast on Bravo and IFC. She directed and produced *Blackfire – Res Rock The Vote*, a short documentary broadcast on PBS, following a Navajo punk band's efforts to get out the youth vote on the Big Mountain reservation in Arizona. In 2006 she directed a documentary feature entitled *RAW*, in which six people journey to a raw food center to undergo a radical diet in the hope of curing their diabetes. She is also producing a documentary about a recent cross country tour of the acclaimed 'Freak Folker' Devendra Banhart.

### **Jerry Kay – Co-Producer**

Jerry Kay, is a former Ash Grove employee, who in 1969 filmed a series of Ash Grove backstage video recordings of performers lost in the fires. Inspired by Ash Grove performances of Luis Valdez's *El Teatro Campesino*, Kay spent six years as a full-time organizer for Cesar Chavez's United Farm Worker's Union. For five years, he co-produced and hosted a live music radio show on Santa Cruz, California's local NPR station, KUSP, featuring many local, California and national touring bands and performers. Kay co-produced a recording of Hawaiian songs, *The Tau Moe Family with Bob Brozman*, designated one of the outstanding folk recordings of 1990 by the Library of Congress' American Folklife Center.

### **Ed Pearl – Producer**

Ed Pearl, owner and founder of the Ash Grove, is an accomplished concert and event producer. Over the years Mr. Pearl has produced successful roots-themed concerts at many locations including the Hollywood Bowl, Santa Monica Civic Auditorium and the Wiltern Theater. He continues to organize and produce events that reflect his commitment to music and the progressive community .

### **Taylor Hackford – Creative Consultant**

A graduate of USC film school, Hackford credits the Ash Grove as an early inspiration and hangout. He filmed some of his earliest KCET music documentaries through his connection with the Ash Grove. He is an Academy-Award winning producer and director for films including *Ray*, *When We Were Kings*, *La Bamba*, and *Dolores Claiborne*.