In her moving memoir *An Unfinished Song* (1984), Joan Jara reconstructs the evidence of her husband’s last days, following the military overthrow of Salvador Allende’s democratically elected Popular Unity government in Chile. With thousands of others detained without arrest, at first in the buildings of the Technical University and later in the Estadio Chile in central Santiago, Víctor Jara sang to sustain other people’s spirits. At first he performed the songs that had made him a beloved folksinger, an icon of the Popular Front, and a representative of the New Song movement. He sang Andean and Chilean folk songs from his days as a member of the groups Quilapayún and Inti-Illimani. Later he sang the “manifiesto” he had composed on the second night of the mass detention. Eventually his celebrity—and his singing—gave him away; members of the militia recognized him and separated him from the crowd.

A week later, his body was discovered in a corridor under the stadium. He had been beaten brutally and shot several times. The “manifiesto” survived because other prisoners in the Estadio Chile memorized the music and kept the scraps of paper on which Jara had scrawled the lyrics.

There are five thousand of us here
in this small part of the city.
We are five thousand.
I wonder how many we are in all
in the cities and in the whole country?
Here alone
are ten thousand hands which plant seeds
and make the factories run.
How much humanity
exposed to hunger, cold, panic, pain,
moral pressure, terror and insanity?
Six of us were lost
as if into starry space.
One dead, another beaten as I could never have believed
a human being could be beaten.
The other four wanted to end their terror
one jumping into nothingness,
another beating his head against a wall,
but all with the fixed stare of death.
What horror the face of fascism creates!
They carry out their plans with knife-like precision.
Nothing matters to them.
To them, blood equals medals,
slaughter is an act of heroism.
Oh God, is this the world that you created,
for this your seven days of wonder and work?
Within these four walls only a number exists
which does not progress,
which slowly will wish more and more for death.
But suddenly my conscience awakes
and I see that this tide has no heartbeat,
only the pulse of machines
and the military showing their midwives' faces
full of sweetness.
Let Mexico, Cuba and the world
cry out against this atrocity!
We are ten thousand hands
which can produce nothing.
How many of us in the whole country?
The blood of our President, our compañero,
will strike with more strength than bombs and machine guns!
So will our fist strike again!

How hard it is to sing
when I must sing of horror.
Horror which I am living,
horror which I am dying.
To see myself among so much
and so many moments of infinity
in which silence and screams
are the end of my song.
What I see, I have never seen
What I have felt and what I feel
Will give birth to the moment

Estadio Chile

September 1973