

Slavery Links Library: Music play list

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WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER?

One role of the Slavery Links Library is to connect people and organisations with whatever ‘stuff’ will make a difference. The difference to be achieved is a better understanding of slavery or a greater preparedness to act.

In this sense, music is information.

Experience suggests that there are four ways that music about slavery can contribute to understanding and possible action, as follows:

- Through pleasure
- Through insight
- Through rapport
- Through business

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Music for pleasure

Music that refers to slavery can be uplifting, scary, stirring. It can show courage in the face of adversity, resilience, the will to survive and utter defeat, sometimes all mixed in together. Being present to such music can plumb the depths of human emotion and there is a possibility of reward in this for its own sake.

From the point of view of Slavery Links Library, an experience which creates a state of heightened arousal can leave a person more open to the possibility of change.

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Music can breed enquiry and insight

The Slavery Links Library has supported the development and testing of [sixteen workshop topicss](#) on the subject of slavery.

Experience has shown that people in the workshops had many of the facts. What they lacked was a framework for understanding those facts. Once armed with a way of understanding, people in the workshops were quick to appreciate the problem and possible solutions.

When the connection to slavery is made explicit, music can provide a way of engaging with slavery, a framework for understanding, a spur to further enquiry and action.

Music for rapport

Music can be a way to embrace human emotion. Some music refers to the *experience* of slavery. Dis-honour lies at the heart of slavery experience, which the American academic Orlando Patterson described in this way:

“... how consistent are the attitudes of the expression of generalised dishonour not only among all slaves but among all oppressed peoples. There is, for example, the crushing and pervasive sense of knowing that one is considered a person without honour and that there is simply nothing that can be done about it. ... There is too ... the direct and insidious violence, the namelessness and invisibility, the endless personal violation, and the chronic inalienable dishonour.”¹

Music for business

In May 2012 ABC Radio Classic FM played samples of slavery music in the days leading up to a public address and a workshop to be provided by Slavery Links at the University of South Australia. In consultation with the Slavery Links Library, music was selected by Ivan Lloyd for the breakfast program to be broadcast by Emma Ayres. This activity did four things:

- Each broadcast was a test of the specific music selected and its use as a way of communicating about modern slavery
- Each piece provided a measure of listener engagement and feedback
- The series of broadcasts illustrated one of Slavery Links strategies: to ‘add the language of slavery’ to existing activities and enterprises
- The broadcasts demonstrated that the play list in the present paper could be used as the framework for a single public performance

1. Orlando Patterson (1982) *Slavery and social death* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England), page 12

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'SLAVERY MUSIC'?

Music can resonate with human emotion in a listener. Some music also attempts to describe emotions from real life. Such music can be found across styles: in rap, pop, jazz and classical music and in the world of opera. There is music to be found which refers to the emotions and or the actions involved in violence, abuse and exploitation.

For the Slavery Links Library, the challenge is to discern which music refers to the specific case of slavery. The test of slavery is quite strict - are the *powers of ownership* being exercised. Does one person act like he or she *owns* another person? (See the paper on this site: [What is slavery?](#))

The forms of slavery where *powers of ownership* may be exercised are:

- Born into slavery
- Child labour
- Child soldiers
- Child trading
- Debt bondage
- Enslavement in war
- Forced labour
- Forced marriage
- Human trafficking
- Labour trafficking
- Organ trafficking

In some of these forms, it is safe to assume that all persons exposed have been enslaved in some way (treated as if owned). Child trading, debt bondage, forced marriage and peonage (a sort of serfdom) are clear-cut examples of slavery. The Supplementary Convention 1956 defined these forms, these slave-making systems, that have persisted for generations.

However not all instances are so clear-cut. Not every child worker is a slave: only those who have been treated as if owned. Likewise with people who have been trapped by forced labour or human trafficking: they may have been abused or exploited, but they do not fit into the class of people who have been enslaved unless and until they are subject to the powers of ownership.

Slavery is a crime against humanity and the test for slavery is strict.

SLAVERY MUSIC WHICH ILLUSTRATES THESE FORMS

Born into slavery

There are people alive today who were born into slavery. The accessible music that refers to being born into slavery comes to us from the past.

A well known example from opera would be Verdi's *Nabucco* (*Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate*, the so-called Hebrews' Chorus). Camille Saint-Saëns' *Samson et Dalilah* referred to a different period in history, when the Israelites had been delivered into the hands of the Philistines. Were they enslaved for long enough for their offspring to be 'born into slavery'?

In some countries the role of temple slave can be inherited by people, groups or tribes. Such temple slaves – and the music that refers to them – would therefore qualify as fitting the 'born into slavery' category. In Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers*, the duet *In the depths of the temple* refers to a woman who is desired and who has a role in the temple. Could she have been what academics call a 'hierodulic' slave, a person who is kept in the temple and used (in a physical way) to communicate with the gods?

Music from Africa also refers. There are so-called 'spirituals' from African American plantation workers; and some music that developed into African-American jazz. These forms are supposed to refer to slavery times.

More recently Rosemary Nalden worked in South Africa with Buskaid and Soweto Strings. The Soweto children played songs of sorrow (*the lion sleeps*) or culture (*the click song*) or responses to Apartheid. The anti-Apartheid song *Ons pola hier in Sophiatown* is a song of defiance: the title roughly translates as 'we're staying here in Sophiatown'.

Child labour

Not all child labour is slavery, not even when a child is working long hours where conditions are harsh, sickness comes with the job and injuries are common. The child is being exploited or abused, not necessarily enslaved.

The test for slavery is about *ownership*. Is the child being treated as property? Is the child unable to leave? The musical *Oliver* is an example of a story-book child (who lived in a Western country) who was enslaved close to home, who was trapped and unable to leave.

Child soldiers

A child soldier (who may be forced to become a cook or guard or fighter or porter or sex slave) is not just a fighter who is young. A child soldier is *owned* in the sense that he / she is under age, conscripted and cannot leave.

A former child soldier from Sudan who has produced rap music is Emmanuel Jal. Originating in the south, his music reflects the rhythm and tones of settled farming and herding communities. One of his CDs is titled *War Child*. Another features the Arabic rhythms of Abdel Gadir Salim-Baai (who comes from North Sudan). This fusion in styles of music symbolises the developing hope for peace between north and south.

Child soldiery affects parents and siblings too. For example, Karen women in Australia have their own songs about the forced enlistment of children by the Burma (Myanmar) regime.

Child trading

Child trading occurs when a parent or guardian receives material or other benefit for placing a child in a situation of exploitation.

In Nepal and other parts of South Asia, parents who are desperately poor may place an older child in this way, as the (supposed) only way to keep that child alive and providing for other family members.

In a Western context, aspects of the exploitation of *Hansel and Gretel* could qualify as child trading. Better still [because claims of parentage and guardianship were involved] take the musical *Annie*, when Rooster and Lily tried to take Annie from her orphanage as a way of getting a reward.

Debt bondage

Debt bondage is a promise to provide service in return for a loan, but where the terms of the loan don't spell out when or how the debt will end. It is an open-ended bond, common in South Asia but also to be found in some indentured labour 'contracts' during Colonial times

There may be examples of music that would qualify but no study has come to light at the time of writing.

Slavery in War

The opera *Aida* refers to war captives. That well mannered drama does not quite capture the plight of a woman who was taken, say, in World War II by the Japanese as a 'comfort woman'. Recent examples of rape and sex slavery being used as a tactic of war come from Bosnia / Kosovo (memorialised by Eve Ensler in the stage play *Vagina Monologues*). Other examples come from the DR Congo (East Kivu Province) and Rwanda. An example from classical times might refer to the rape of the Sabines.

There are other musical settings about conflict, which illustrate that ownership can be exercised in obscure ways. Such music tells us that when people are dis-empowered by conflict, *ownership* may be exercised by direct means such as rape or indirect means such as psychological control, an assertion of exclusivity, or control of sexuality or movement.

Consider Puccini's *Madam Butterfly* or the musical *South Pacific*, where an American serviceman dupes a woman from a foreign country into a sham marriage. Are these examples of the powers of ownership?

Forced labour

Forced labour or compulsory labour is extracted under menace of penalty. It goes beyond conscription or the labour of a convict. It goes beyond the normal civic obligations that might apply in an emergency. Forced labour is endured by subject peoples and we have limited access to their music.

Forced labour was epitomised by Leopold II of Belgium, during his 'rubber terror' in the Congo. Forced labour was used in the Soviet Gulag and in Nazi camps. Forced labour can become 'normalised'. According to a 1998 report from the International Labour Organisation, forced labour was utilised by the regime in Burma for

"portering, the construction, maintenance and servicing of military camps ... work on agriculture, logging and other production projects undertaken by the authorities or the military (or) for the profit of private individuals, the construction and maintenance of roads, railways, bridges, other infrastructure and a range of other tasks ..."

Forced labour can be found in some indentured labour 'contracts' during Colonial times. Indentured labour, with features of forcing, was allegedly used by the Dutch, the British; the French; and by Australians.

Forced marriage

In the time of the Roman Empire, the young woman Susanna refused a forced marriage arranged by the Emperor Diocletian. Susanna was killed and her male relatives were punished horribly in retribution. The story was told through music by the composer Couperin, who wrote *Veni sponsa Christi (Come, bride of Christ)*, a *Motet to Saint Susanna*.

Forced marriage is not about abusive or exploitive relationships. Forced marriage is strictly defined in terms of *ownership* – forced to marry without consent; or a widow who is inherited by another husband.

Mozart's piece entitled *Escape from the Seraglio* could qualify. Other less obvious examples that could meet the test of *ownership* are:

- Kidnapping marriage, which is a particular form of forced marriage. *Helen of Troy* may qualify as being music about kidnapping marriage.
- So-called 'honour' killing is another way of expressing ownership over someone's sexuality. Delibes' *Lakme* can be construed as a post-Colonial example of this sort of distorted ownership.

In selecting music about forced marriage, it is necessary to differentiate. Stories of betrayal or abandonment (such as Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*) do not qualify. Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* describes an arranged marriage, not a forced marriage. Likewise Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* and *Lucia di Lammermoor* are arranged marriages, not forced in a strict sense. Exploitation does not qualify as slavery.

Human trafficking

Human trafficking occurs where so much deception is used that no meaningful consent can be given. For example:

- an offer of work in the entertainment industry becomes a job in some form of forced labour or a slavery-like situation
- people [such as the Rohingya] are so desperate that they leave home to seek work under any circumstances; and may end up trapped and enslaved on a fishing boat, in a factory or down a mine.

There may be music about trafficking in communities affected. However such music has not been identified at the time of writing.

WHAT IS THE SLAVERY LINKS LIBRARY?

Slavery Links is a [community association](#) with a six-year track record of research and action to minimise the harm arising from modern slavery.

The Slavery Links Library has a solid [catalogue](#) of evidence-based and historical works about slavery. The Library supports research activities and [exhibitions](#) as well as academic seminars, briefings about slavery, evidence-giving to parliamentary inquiries, and workshops with adult education groups, community groups, interest groups, secular and faith groups.

The Slavery Links Library also supports the development of education materials. The Library has supported the development of [sixteen workshop topics](#). The Library supported the book [Australians and Modern Slavery](#). The Library has also supported the preparation of papers for [human rights staff](#), [judicial officers](#) and [family practitioners](#).

How does the Library operate?

The Slavery Links Library is funded by members, not by Government, philanthropic trusts or appeals for public money. We do accept donations.

What difference do we make?

The internet is not a reliable source of information about slavery.

The Slavery Links Library collects and disseminates information to support better business decisions, more informed consumers, more engaged members of Non Government Organisations. The Library supports increased community awareness and community action. Library information assists organisations to recognise their anti-slavery roles more fully.

We encourage you to [join the Library](#), as:

- A member
- A student member
- A donor member

We invite your support, to:

- Provide professional advice
- Provide practical support
- Donate an early edition of a book about slavery
- Donate original research or historical papers about slavery