

Aistė Benkauskaitė, *voice*

Justas Pilbaitis, *piano*

SONGS OF PROTEST AND RESISTANCE



Kaunas University of Technology,
Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities
Mickevičiaus g. 37, Hall 202

September 29, 2023 – h. 19:00



Layout and texts by Dario Martinelli

Cover photo by Viktorija Lankauskaitė



CONCERT PROGRAMME

Radio Londres, the nickname given by the French partisans to BBC Radio broadcasts in nazi-occupied France, has re-surfaced. Called now Re-Radio Londres, this crucial tool for antifascist resistance has a new programme, designed to remind listeners of the values of freedom and democracy against all forms of oppression. In this programme, fifteen significant songs of protest and resistance, arranged for piano and voice, will be performed live by singer Aistė Benkauskaitė and pianist Justas Pilibaitis, in a tasteful blend of classical, jazz and pop styles. Each song was cherrypicked to represent, as widely as possible, the variety of themes and moods related to social protest and resistance of the last 100 years. There will be songs about war and about peace, courage and fear, slavery and liberation, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Holocaust, the invasion of Ukraine and the siege of Sarajevo.

With one common denominator: the unmatched ability of music to give comfort, inspiration, strength, and hope that – eventually – “we shall overcome”.



Photo by Viktorija Lankauskaitė

Aistė Benkauskaitė is a Lithuanian mezzo-soprano with a wide repertoire ranging from Baroque music through Mozart, Rossini and many others, including popular, folk and jazz repertoires. She has performed, among other ensembles, with the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra and has represented her country in the Lions European Music Contest in Zagreb, Croatia. In 2023, she has won the first place in the 23rd Vincė Jonuškaitė–Zaunienė singers competition.

Justas Pilibaitis is an eclectic wunderkind of Lithuanian music. While attending daycare, he was already participating in singing competitions and TV shows. He took classical piano lessons while in primary school and a few years later he developed his passion for jazz and funk, playing in different bands. He eventually graduated in music technologies, and now, besides his piano and keyboard gigs, he works as a freelance producer and composer and as a broadcast engineer in the Lithuanian National Radio.

SONGS OF PROTEST AND RESISTANCE

Prologue: Concern and fear

WHAT'S GOING ON? (A. Cleveland, R. Benson, M. Gaye)

GIMME SHELTER (M. Jagger, K. Richards)

Chapter 1: One hundred painful years

STRANGE FRUIT (A. Meeropol)

MAN IS NOT A MACHINE (D. Martinelli)

A GREAT DAY FOR FREEDOM (D. Gilmour, P. Samson)

MISS SARAJEVO (B. Eno, Bono, A. Clayton, The Edge, L. Mullen Jr.)

YELLOW AND BLUE (D. Martinelli)

Chapter 2: Fighting to be free

BELLA CIAO (trad.)

RAUDONI VAKARAI (I. Narkutė)

LE CHANT DES PARTISANS (A. Marly, J. Kessel, M. Druon)

Chapter 3: Learning to be free

WE SHALL OVERCOME (trad.)

BLACKBIRD (J. Lennon, P. McCartney)

REDEMPTION SONG (B. Marley)

Epilogue: How many more times?

BLOWING IN THE WIND (B. Dylan)

BOOKS ARE BURNING (A. Partridge)

WHAT'S GOING ON?

(Al Cleveland, Renaldo Benson, Marvin Gaye)

“With the world exploding around me, how am I supposed to keep singing love songs?” – Marvin Gaye asked himself, as he proceeded to record this most touching and musically deep protest song. The idea originated as Renaldo Benson, a member of the soul band The Four Tops, witnessed in 1969 an episode of police brutality against anti-war activists in Berkeley. He and songwriter Al Cleveland began working on the song, and eventually offered it to Marvin Gaye, who made changes in the melody and in the lyrics, and then decided to supervise the whole production of the song (as well as the whole album, bearing the same title). He gave the song that emotional arrangement we now know, and also added the chattering effect at the beginning, providing a touch of realism. “What’s going on?” is a song about the inability to understand the horror of war and violence. Considering that years later Marvin Gaye was shot dead by his abusive father, the line “Father, father, we don’t need to escalate” sounds nowadays staggeringly poignant.

*Mother, mother
There's too many of you crying
Brother, brother, brother
There's far too many of you dying
You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today
Father, father
We don't need to escalate
You see, war is not the answer
For only love can conquer hate
You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today, oh
Picket lines and picket signs
Don't punish me with brutality
Talk to me, so you can see
Oh, what's going on
What's going on*

*Yeah, what's going on
Oh, what's going on
Mother, mother
Everybody thinks we're wrong
Oh, but who are they to judge us
Simply 'cause our hair is long?
Oh, you know we've got to find a way
To bring some understanding here
today, oh-oh
Picket lines and picket signs
Don't punish me with brutality
Come on, talk to me, so you can see
Oh, what's going on
Yeah, what's going on
Tell me what's going on*

GIMME SHELTER

(Mick Jagger, Keith Richards)

A theme that is not too often explored in protest songs is “fear” and the general tension generated by war and violence, when these seem to be closer than ever. Released in 1969 by The Rolling Stones, “Gimme Shelter” is exactly a song written from the point of view of a terrified ordinary person who sees war, (suffering) children, rape and murder to be “just a shot away”, just behind the corner, and coming at any moment. The obsessive repetition of the refrain, besides being very effective musically (as it provides an exceptional pathos to the song), may be also read as a metaphor of such fear, a sort of “It’s coming, it’s coming... we need to run” cry of alarm.

*Ooh, a storm is threatening
My very life today
If I don't get some shelter
Ooh yeah I'm gonna fade away
War, children
It's just a shot away
It's just a shot away
War, children
It's just a shot away
It's just a shot away
Ooh, see the fire is sweepin'
Our streets today
Burns like a red coal carpet
Mad bull lost its way
War, children
It's just a shot away
It's just a shot away
War, children
It's just a shot away
It's just a shot away*

*Rape, murder, it's just a shot away
It's just a shot away Rape, murder,
it's just a shot away
It's just a shot away
Rape, murder, it's just a shot away
It's just a shot away
Mmm, a flood is threatening
My very life today
Gimme, gimme shelter
Or I'm gonna fade away
War, children
It's just a shot away
It's just a shot away
...
I tell you love, sister
It's just a kiss away
It's just a kiss away
...
Kiss away, kiss away*

STRANGE FRUIT

(Abel Meeropol)

Written in 1939, and since then turned into a jazz evergreen, “Strange fruit” was written by the poet and songwriter Abel Meeropol after he witnessed the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Marion, Indiana, in 1930. The horrifying image of the two bodies hanging from a tree inspired the metaphor of the “strange fruit”, hanging from “Southern trees” (the inhabitants of the American Southern states being the most inclined to acts of racist violence).

Recorded by all the major Afro-American artists of the 20th century (and not only Afro-American), including Nina Simone, Dee Dee Bridgewater and Betty LaVette. However, the definitive version remains the original one, from 1939, with the unique, piercing and dramatic voice of Billie Holiday – a perfect match with the mood and the contents of the song.

*Southern trees bear a strange fruit
Blood on the leaves and blood at the
root
Black bodies swinging in the
southern breeze
Strange fruit hanging from the
poplar trees
Pastoral scene of the gallant South
The bulging eyes and the twisted
mouth*

*Scent of magnolia, sweet and fresh
Then the sudden smell of burning
flesh
Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck
For the rain to gather, for the wind
to suck
For the sun to rot, for the tree to
drop
Here is a strange and bitter crop*



MAN IS NOT A MACHINE

(Dario Martinelli)

The song is based on the novel *Forest of the Gods*, by Balys Sruoga. One of the major works in Lithuanian literature, *Forest of the Gods* tackles the topic of Nazi concentration camps in a way that has been considered rather unique. Indeed, along with a matter-of-fact narration of the horrors witnessed during his imprisonment in Stutthof, Sruoga adds repeated elements of cynical and dark humor, almost as anesthetic pills against the reality he was experiencing. “Man is not a machine” – a title based on one of the most famous lines of the novel – tries to capture a similar mood: the tragedy of the camp and of the Nazi ideology, set against a lyrical context that often employs that kind of ironic disillusionment. The narrating voice, imprisoned in the camp, sees the surroundings through the barbed wire and still comments that “it’s a nice view” and that some kind of wildlife can be spotted, even if that turns out to be crows, rats and lice.

*Through the barbed wire
One can see the distance
Between mud and open fire
For whatever it’s worth
Still, the view is nice
Forests all around the fence
And crows and rats and lice
While they’re blowing up the earth
Saw the black smoke in the sky
Clouds of souls that weren’t warned
And had no time to cry
Or to curse their favorite god
Am I left dreaming ordinary
nightmares?
A wheel that keeps on spinning
round but
Man is not a machine
Man is not a machine
Man is not a machine
He, too, gets tired*

*Words we can’t repeat
Hope that history records them
Shout them in the street
Till there’s no other sound
Images and noise
May they always be remembered
Every single voice
Till the echo breaks the ground
We were dead and we survived
Feeding out of snow and silence
Hiding from the light
As we whispered in denial
Am I still dreaming ordinary
nightmares?
The wheel, it keeps on spinning
round but
Man is not a machine
Man is not a machine
Man is not a machine
He, too, gets tired*

A GREAT DAY FOR FREEDOM

(David Gilmour, Polly Samson)

Released on the Pink Floyd album *The Division Bell*, in 1994, "A Great Day for Freedom" is a song that addresses both the wave of hope and optimism caused by the fall of the Berlin wall, but also the ensuing uncertainties, difficulties and cultural differences between East and West Germany. As David Gilmour himself said, "I tend to think that history moves at a much slower pace than we think it does. I feel that real change takes a long, long time". The message of the song is that every historical event, be it tragic like the building of the wall or joyous like its fall, has its aftermath. Reconstruction is a difficult process: a positive change is just the beginning.

*On the day the wall came down
They threw the locks onto the
ground
And with glasses high
We raised a cry for freedom had
arrived
On the day the wall came down
The ship of fools had finally run
around
Promises lit up the night
Like paper doves in flight
I dreamed you had left my side
No warmth, not even pride
remained
And even though you needed me
It was clear that I could not do a
thing for you*

*Now life devalues day by day
As friends and neighbours turn away
And there's a change that even with
regret
Cannot be undone
Now frontiers shift like desert sands
While nations wash their bloodied
hands
Of loyalty, of history
In shades of grey
I woke to the sound of drums
The music played, the morning sun
streamed in
I turned and I looked at you
And all but the bitter residues
slipped away
Slipped away*



MISS SARAJEVO

(Brian Eno, Bono, Adam Clayton, The Edge, Larry Mullen Jr.)

Acts of resistance and protest may take different shapes, even that of a beauty contest. During the tragic siege of Sarajevo, which took place for almost 1,500 days between 1992 and 1996, Bosnian people did their best to live a normal life, often using that normality as an act of defiance towards the blockade and in general the desperate absurdity of the situation.

One of such acts was the organization of a beauty contest, in which the models walked onto the stage carrying a banner with the inscription "Don't let them kill us". Among the many who took notice of this courageous action, U2 were particularly impressed and decided to write a song about what Bono Vox defined a "purely Dadaist" act of protest. Released in 1995 with a guest-appearance by Luciano Pavarotti, "Miss Sarajevo" was of course performed during U2's concert in the Bosnian capital in 1997 – the Irish band being the first major act playing in Bosnia after the end of the war.

*Is there a time for keeping your
distance?
A time to turn your eyes away?
Is there a time for keeping your
head down?
For getting on with your day?
Is there a time for kohl and lipstick?
A time for curling hair?
Is there a time for high street
shopping?
To find the right dress to wear?
Here she comes, oh oh
Heads turn around
Here she comes
To take her crown
Is there a time to run for cover?*

*A time for kiss and tell?
Is there a time for different colors?
Different names you find it hard to
spell
Is there a time for first communion?
A time for East Seventeen?
Is there a time to turn to Mecca?
Is there time to be a beauty queen?
Here she come, oh oh
Beauty plays the clown
Here she comes
Surreal in her crown
Is there a time for tying ribbons?
(A time) for Christmas trees?
(Is there a time) for laying tables?
And the night is set to freeze?*



YELLOW AND BLUE

(Dario Martinelli)

Coming to the oppressions and the resistances of nowadays, the Russian aggression to Ukraine cannot be missed by anybody who has at heart the values of democracy and self-determination. "Yellow and blue" is intended as a message of hope and reconstruction, an attempt to offer comfort to the Ukrainian people. The tones are positive with a melancholic background, playing with the dualism "yellow" (a sunny, positive color) and "blue" (a word which in English also means "sad"). The song tries to make the dramatic aspect coexist with the optimistic one, the beautiful Ukraine of the past with the suffering Ukraine of today, the "broken pieces" with the rebuilding, the defeat of the "monster" with a better future, when Ukraine will sound "like no one will cry".

*Hoping for the better
Coming all together
I see yellow and blue*

*Clearing out the darkness
Sowing for the harvest
I see yellow and blue*

*With these hands and these bricks
Turning days into weeks
Till this city builds away all the pain
When the monster is gone
The warship on the run
And we feel the sun shine again*

*Mending broken pieces
Keeping up the spirits
I hear yellow and blue*

*Breathing in the clean air
Chasing out the nightmare
I hear yellow and blue*

*With remains of these tears
Turning months into years
Till this country sounds like no one
will cry
When the monster has drowned
'cause it all comes around
And the birds are back into the sky*

*And we'll be yellow and blue, We'll
be yellow and blue...*

*With a new morning light
Turning wrong into right
Till the world has no more reasons
to hurt
And that morning will come
And the monster will be gone
And we'll dance along the beating
hearts*

*And we'll be yellow and blue, We'll
be yellow and blue...*

BELLA CIAO

(trad.)

Originally a lullaby, then a protest song of the women working in rice fields (both cases bearing different lyrics, of course), “Bella ciao” became the anthem of the antifascist partisans only during the Italian Resistance, in 1943-1945.

While extremely simple, the lyrics have a deep emotional impact: they describe a partisan leaving his “bella” (his girlfriend) to fight against the Nazis. On this particular day, though, the partisan feels he may be killed, so he instructs the woman to take care of his burial in such a way that he rests on the mountain (where presumably he was fighting), by a flower that would serve as a reminder to everybody that he died for freedom. The flower, thus, would serve as a symbol of something beautiful that people can enjoy when they are free.

*Una mattina mi son svegliato
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella
ciao ciao ciao*

*Una mattina mi son svegliato
E ho trovato l'invasor*

*O partigiano portami via
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella
ciao ciao ciao*

*O partigiano portami via
Che mi sento di morir*

*E se io muoio da partigiano
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella
ciao ciao ciao*

*E se io muoio da partigiano
Tu mi devi seppellir*

*E seppellire lassù in montagna
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella
ciao ciao ciao*

*E seppellire lassù in montagna
Sotto l'ombra di un bel fior*

*One morning I woke up
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao
ciao ciao*

*One morning I woke up
And I found the invader*

*Oh partisan, carry me away,
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao
ciao ciao*

*Oh partisan, carry me away,
For I feel I'm dying*

*And if I die as a partisan
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao
ciao ciao*

*And if I die as a partisan
You have to bury me*

*But bury me up in the mountain
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao
ciao ciao,*

But bury me up in the mountain

*E le genti che passeranno
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella
ciao ciao ciao
E le genti che passeranno
Mi diranno: "Che bel fior"*

*È questo il fiore del partigiano
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella
ciao ciao ciao
È questo il fiore del partigiano
Morto per la libertà*

*Under the shadow of a beautiful
flower
And the people who will pass by
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao
ciao ciao,
And the people who will pass by
Will say to me: "what a beautiful
flower"
This is the flower of the partisan
O bella ciao, bella ciao, bella ciao
ciao ciao
This is the flower of the partisan
Who died for freedom*



RAUDONI VAKARAI

(Ieva Narkutė)

Curiously, although all clues point in the direction of a song written during the actual Lithuanian resistance after the Soviet occupation, from 1944 onwards, “Raudoni vakarai” is a very recent composition, having been written by the young songwriter Ieva Narkutė only in 2016. It is hard not to imagine this song as an actual sequel of “Bella ciao”. Whereas the Italian song is the story of a partisan leaving to fight the Nazis and telling his woman what to do in case he dies, “Raudoni vakarai” presents the same situation (applied of course to the resistance against Soviet Union) from the point of view of the partisan’s woman. She hopes her man will come back, and that the “red evenings” will bring Lithuania’s victory over the invader. However, as she lays down, the man doesn’t return: like his brothers he has “vanished in the forest”. He has given his life for a free Lithuania.

*Mano saujoj dūzgia bitės
Tavo plaučiuose vanduo
Mano saujoj gęsta rytas
Liūdnas kaip kareivio šuo
Mano rankos žvyro pilnos
Mala sniegą debesų
Verkia, rauda mano girnos
Aš smingu tau ant pečių
Aš atgulsiu, tu pareisi
Bus raudoni vakarai
Priešas trauksis,
Viskas keisis
Mano Lietuva bedale, ar bijai, ar
bijai?
Pūgos kilo trečią kartą
Krito bitės iš delnų
Gaudė, verkė miesto varpas
Dingo broliai tarp miškų
Visą naktį skundės liepoms
Aimanuojantys beržai
Kraujo raudoniu užlieti
Mūsų pustuščiai namai*

*In my palms the bees buzz,
Water in your lungs,
In my palms the morning fades,
Sad as a soldier's dog.
My arms--full of sand, grind the sky,
Full of clouds,
Millstones cry and weep;
I collapse onto your shoulders.
I will lie down; you will come back,
There'll be red evenings,
The enemy will fall,
Everything will change,
My Lithuania, without fate--are you
scared?
Blizzards rise for the third time,
The bees fell from the palms,
The city bell hummed and cried,
Brothers vanished in the forests,
Moaning birches complaining to the
lindens all night,
Blood red flooded
Our half-empty houses.*

*Man atgulus, nesugrįžai
Kur raudoni vakarai
Tuščio kelio tuščias kryžius
Mano Lietuva bedale, ar bijai?*

*Man atgulus, nesugrįžai
Kur raudoni vakarai
Tuščio kelio tuščias kryžius
Mano Lietuva bedale, ar bijai, ar
bijai?
Ar bijai?*

...

*I lied down, you didn't come back,
Where red evenings are,
The empty cross of the empty road,
My Lithuania, without fate--are you
scared?*

*I lied down, you didn't come back,
Where red evenings are,
The empty cross of the empty road,
My Lithuania, without fate--are you
scared?
Are you scared?*

...



LE CHANT DES PARTISANS

(Anna Marly, Joseph Kessel, Maurice Druon)

Quite simply, “Le chant des partisans” is for France what “Bella ciao” is for Italy: *the* anthem of resistance against Nazism. The music was written by Anna Marly in London in 1941, while the words were added later by Kessel and Druon. By 1943, the song spread out, in a version recorded by Marly herself, and thanks also to the rapid diffusion through free radios, becoming a sheer hymn for the *maquis*, the French and Belgian resistance fighters. The song’s tones are not unlike *La Marseillaise*, with words inciting to fight for freedom and show the enemy what the partisans’ spirit is capable of. From a musical point of view, the song is also notable for its “slow burning” increase of pathos, almost as if the army of partisans is slowly but steadily marching towards victory.

*Ami, entends-tu le vol noir des
corbeaux sur nos plaines?
Ami, entends-tu les cris sourds du
pays qu'on enchaîne?
Ohé, partisans, ouvriers et paysans,
c'est l'alarme
Ce soir l'ennemi connaîtra le prix du
sang et les larmes
Montez de la mine, descendez des
collines, camarades
Sortez de la paille les fusils, la
mitraille, les grenades
Ohé, les tueurs à la balle et au
couteau, tuez vite
Ohé, saboteur, attention à ton
fardeau, dynamite
(Liberté)
C'est nous qui brisons les barreaux
des prisons pour nos frères
La haine à nos trousseaux et la faim
qui nous pousse, la misère*

*Mate, do you hear the dark flight of
the crows over our plains?
Mate, do you hear the muffled
clamour of chained countries?
Hey, partisans, workers and
peasants this is the signal
tonight the enemy will know the
price of blood and tears...
Join the sabotage, get off the hills,
comrades!
Take the rifles, the machine gun, the
grenades out of the straws.
Hey, killers, with a bullet or by knife,
kill swiftly!
Hey, saboteur, take care of your
charge: dynamite...
(Freedom)
It's us smashing the prison bars for
our brothers,
The hatred on our backs and the
hunger that drives us, the misery.*

*Il y a des pays où les gens au creux
des lits font des rêves
Ici, nous, vois-tu, nous on marche et
nous on tue, nous on crève*

*Ici chacun sait ce qu'il veut, ce qu'il
fait quand il passe*

*Ami, si tu tombes un ami sort de
l'ombre à ta place
Demain du sang noir sèchera au
grand soleil sur les routes
Sifflez, compagnons, dans la nuit la
Liberté nous écoute
(Liberté)*

*There are countries where people
are dreaming deep in their beds,
here, we, you see, we're marching
on and we're getting killed, we're
getting whacked...*

*Here everyone knows what he
wants, what he does when it takes
place,*

*Mate, if you go down, a mate out of
the shadows takes your place.
Tomorrow black blood will be drying
under the sun on the roads,
sing, colleagues, freedom is listening
to us in the night
(Freedom)*



WE SHALL OVERCOME

(Trad.)

Likely a derivation from a gospel song named “I’ll overcome some day”, by Charles A. Tindley, “We shall overcome” is best known in the arrangement and version recorded by Pete Seeger in 1950. While it was recorded several times by different performers, the song’s fame is mostly due to oral transmission. It quickly spread out among various activists, particularly in the area of labor and civil rights, and by 1963, when Joan Baez performed it at the Lincoln Memorial, managing to involve 300,000 people into singing it, it became one of the official anthems of protest against all sorts of oppressions. The lyrics are as simple as they are solemn and emotional. “We shall overcome” is a song of hope, resilience, faith in the future, and also challenge to the oppressor: the line “we are not afraid” is the only one not ending with “some day”, but with “today”.

We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome, some day
Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day
We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand, some day
Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day
We shall live in peace
We shall live in peace
We shall live in peace, some day
Oh, deep in my heart

I do believe
We shall overcome, some day
We are not afraid
We are not afraid
We are not afraid, today
Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day
The whole wide world around
The whole wide world around
The whole wide world around some
day
Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day

BLACKBIRD

(John Lennon, Paul McCartney)

One of the many famous songs from The Beatles' catalogue, "Blackbird" is a song that Paul McCartney wrote in 1968, in support of the civil rights movement in America. Using the metaphor of the blackbird to describe an Afro-American woman struggling against racial discrimination, McCartney encourages the "bird" to take a pair of broken wings and learn to fly, to take sunken eyes and learn to see, that is, to make the most out of the difficult situation and eventually overcome it, by doing exactly what she was prevented to do. "Blackbird" stands out as one of McCartney's most effective songs of self-empowerment, a theme he often explores in his songbook, including the equally successful cases of "Hey Jude" ("take a sad song and make it better") and "Let it be" ("there is still a chance that they will see").

*Blackbird singing in the dead of
night
Take these broken wings and learn
to fly
All your life
You were only waiting for this
moment to arise
Blackbird singing in the dead of
night
Take these sunken eyes and learn to
see
All your life
You were only waiting for this
moment to be free
Blackbird, fly,
Blackbird, fly*

*Into the light of the dark black night
Blackbird, fly,
Blackbird, fly
Into the light of the dark black night
Blackbird singing in the dead of
night
Take these broken wings and learn
to fly
All your life
You were only waiting for this
moment to arise
You were only waiting for this
moment to arise
You were only waiting for this
moment to arise*



REDEMPTION SONG

(Bob Marley)

To free the body from slavery and oppression is a very difficult thing, but it can be achieved with reforms and revolutions. To get rid of mental slavery, however, is something that one can only do by themselves. “Redemption song” is exactly a warning that the only way to real freedom is to “think” ourselves as free and emancipated. This way, not only we won’t fear those who enslave us (the “old pirates” stanza refers to the ships that were transporting African slaves to America), but neither any other threat, including the atomic bomb. To underline the concept, Bob Marley uncharacteristically performed “Redemption song” alone with just a guitar, as if to underline the intimate, personal quality of the song. On the other hand, in another, equally-famous version of the song, Stevie Wonder made the message more epic and collective with a rich arrangement that possibly emphasizes the universal value of the lyrics.

*Old pirates, yes, they rob I
Sold I to the merchant ships
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pit
But my hand was made strong
By the hand of the Almighty
We forward in this generation
Triumphantly
Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs
Redemption songs
Emancipate yourselves from mental
slavery
None but ourselves can free our
minds*

*Have no fear for atomic energy
'Cause none of them can stop the
time
How long shall they kill our prophets
While we stand aside and look?
Ooh, some say it's just a part of it
We've got to fulfill the book
Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs
Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs
Redemption songs
...*

BLOWING IN THE WIND

(Bob Dylan)

By far, one of the best known protest songs, “Blowing in the wind” was released in 1963 and quickly became Bob Dylan’s signature tune. The lyrics are a ode to peace and freedom in form of rhetorical questions (“how many times must the cannonballs fly before they’re forever banned?”, “How many years can some people exist before they’re allowed to be free?”), all merging into one single question: “how is it possible to still allow all this?”.

And the answer... well, the answer is out there, as easy and obvious as it can be, but also so difficult to grasp, apparently. Like the wind, the answer is just in front of our face but we don’t see it. We might feel the wind, understand the answer for a bit, but then the wind changes direction and it’s gone.

*How many roads must a man walk
down*

Before you call him a man?

*How many seas must a white dove
sail*

Before she sleeps in the sand?

*Yes, and how many times must the
cannonballs fly*

Before they're forever banned?

*The answer, my friend, is blowin' in
the wind*

The answer is blowin' in the wind

*Yes, and how many years must a
mountain exist*

Before it is washed to the sea?

*And how many years can some
people exist*

Before they're allowed to be free?

*Yes, and how many times can a man
turn his head*

*And pretend that he just doesn't
see?*

*The answer, my friend, is blowin' in
the wind*

The answer is blowin' in the wind

*Yes, and how many times must a
man look up*

Before he can see the sky?

*And how many ears must one man
have*

Before he can hear people cry?

*Yes, and how many deaths will it
take 'til he knows*

That too many people have died?

*The answer, my friend, is blowin' in
the wind*

The answer is blowin' in the wind

BOOKS ARE BURNING

(Andy Partridge)

Released in 1992 by one of the most critically-acclaimed indie bands, XTC, “Books are burning” is one of the very few protest songs written in defense of culture and knowledge. Well aware that the suppression of freedom of speech and expression is the first step towards a suppression of all freedoms (“You know, where they burn books, people are next” says the song), Andy Partridge was initially inspired by the controversy raised and death threats received by writer Salman Rushdie after the publication of the book *The Satanic Verses*, in 1988. Eventually, though, Partridge decided not to write any specific reference to the Rushdie case, in order to make the song a universal plea in support to – as he calls it – “the human right to let your soul fly free and naked”. Seeing an increasing dominance of bigotry, propaganda and ignorance, Partridge concludes by hoping that the fire of the burning books will at least generate a phoenix of more open-mindedness and cultural freedom.

Perhaps, thus, the conclusive message of this concert is embodied in this quote by James Baldwin: “Ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have”.

*Books are burning
In the main square, and I saw there
The first eating the text
Books are burning
In the still air
And you know where they burn
books
People are next
I believe the printed word should be
forgiven
Doesn't matter what it said
Wisdom hotline from the dead back
to the living
Key to the larder for your heart and
head
Books are burning*

*Smell of burnt book is not unlike
human hair
I believe the printed word is more
than sacred
Beyond the gauge of good or bad
The human right to let your soul fly
free and naked
Above the violence of the fearful
and sad
The church of matches
Anoints in ignorance with gasoline
The church of matches
Grows fat by breathing in the smoke
of dreams
It's quite obscene
Books are burning
More each day now, and I pray now*

In our own town, watch us turn
 'round
 And cast our glances elsewhere
 Books are burning
 In the playground

You boys will tire of these games
 Books are burning
 I hope somehow, this will allow
 A phoenix up from the flames

