



CDSS Sings—“Song on the Times”

by Jeremy Carter-Gordon

Why do we sing, who does it affect, and what can we do with that? In particular, how can singers, artists, and musicians in troubled times use their art to create change, point out injustice, and support struggles for the good. In the past year or so I've been incredibly proud to hear more and more discussion of these questions among my singing circles. There are so many incredible people out there doing good work, from organizing dance fundraisers for women's health, bringing music to marches, to educating about history and inequality through folk music. My story is one of many, and speaks to the desire that so many of us have to have music in our movement, and movements in our music.

In January of 2016 I brought “Song on the Times” to my vocal group Windborne and asked to sing it in our next concert. Written in the 1840s, the song speaks of the suffering and injustice around the UK brought about by greed of the rich, noting “The world seems upside down—They scorn the poor man as a thief in country and in town.” I had first heard the song in high school on the great Chumbawumba (yes, of “Tubthumping” fame for those who know their '90s rock!) album, *English Rebel Songs 1381-1984*, and the time seemed ripe to give the song voice again.

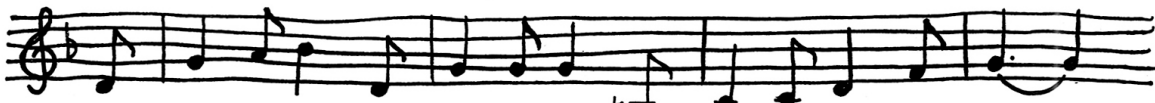
The message, though close to two centuries old, seemed incredibly timely in a political climate in which debates on income inequality, health care, and education as human rights, the wage gap, and a living wage are taking place alongside cuts to labor laws, a widening gap between rich and poor, and an explosion of money into politics. As we started performing “Song on the Times,” our audiences in both the US and the UK kept remarking on the power that songs of historical movements gave to current struggles. Everyone seemed to have suggestions for us, and while which songs they were interested in varied, there seemed to be a huge desire for artistic responses to the world today.

Music, whether sung in the streets, performed at rallies, or printed and distributed as a radical act, has held an important role in resistance movements in many settings. For me, singing songs from these political contexts is less about historical curiosity than an acknowledgment that what we fight for today is connected to struggles of the past, and draws power from them. The Chartist movement in the UK demanded rights such as the secret ballot, votes for non-land owners, and a salary for serving as a Member
continued on p. 14

SONG ON THE TIMES



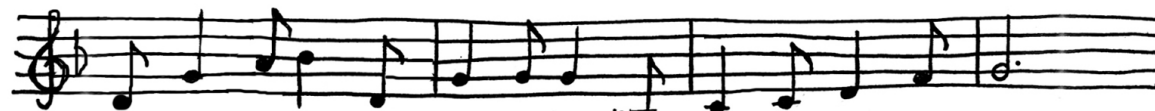
You work-ing men of Eng-land one mo-ment now at-tend



while I un-fold the treat-ment of the poor up-pon this land



for now-a-days the fac-try lords have brought the la - bor low



and dai-ly are con-triv-ing plans to prove our o-ver-throw.



So a-rouse you sons of free-dom the world seems up-side down.



They scorn the poor man as a thief in coun-try and in town.



Illustrated tune notation by Crafty Gru

(CDSS Sings—Song on the Times, cont. from p. 8)

of Parliament. The movement was unsuccessful at the time, but eventually these demands became reality and in many ways are now taken for granted in democracies. One of our songs, “The Chartist Anthem,” states: “A hundred years, a thousand years, we’re marching on the road. The going isn’t easy yet, we’ve got a heavy load.” Singing this song, knowing these histories, it really brings home for me the idea of fighting for things beyond one’s own lifetime.

We wanted to bring these messages of the past 400 years of dreaming and fighting for a better future to our world today, with a few updates. In mid-2016 we started planning a songbook and EP, collecting a few more songs, working with a visual artist to create beautiful illustrated wordsheets, and writing about the history and movements.

The US elections made the project feel more relevant, and made us decide to use half the profits of the book sales to support social action. We started recording, and in January we launched an Indiegogo campaign, hoping to raise \$5,000 to print the books. The campaign started off well, reaching our goal in just a few days. We were thrilled, and already planning on how we could make the books by hand for over 100 people who had ordered them. A week before inauguration day, we were in NYC doing a gig when we decided that we had to stop by Trump Tower to sing in protest and make a quick video of one of our songs and put it on Facebook. Much to our surprise, the video went viral, with over one million total views. From a little community campaign, our project ended up raising almost \$77,000 from over 2,600 people in all 50 states and 22 countries. We quickly realized we had touched a nerve, and that our original plans of hand making books was not going to work. Luckily, with this support, we were able to expand the seven songs to eleven, and are working on professionally publishing the book with illustrated sheet music as well as guest essays by a great group of activists, singers, and scholars including Tony Barrand, Eliza Carthy, Larry Gordon, Mike Harding, and many others.

We have decided to devote more of our time in the coming year to bringing these songs to people across the country, from touring and performing, to giving workshops, from singing in support of marches and protests to distributing sheet music for free to school choirs. Of course we would love to have you join us!

Growing up with CDSS, I came to a strong belief that singing is powerful—as communities, in performance, with friends, or with strangers. Today it is important that this power is something that we consider—that we can draw upon in other parts of our lives. Music and art are not neutral; songs can give a voice to those

who have none, and can sometimes change hearts, even when minds are made up. We who are already familiar with this power of song must lead the charge. Sing at protests, organize a songswap or concert to support an organization doing good, write a new song and teach it to your friends. Stand up, and Sing out!

In song and solidarity, Jeremy Carter-Gordon

You can find more info on the project at igg.me/at/SOTT/, and more about Windborne on Facebook or at Windbornesingers.com. Windbourne (photo p. 14, l to r): Jeremy Carter-Gordon, Lauren Breunig, Will Rowan, Lynn Mahoney Rowan.

Jeremy will lead two classes at American Dance & Music Week, August 5-12: Songs of Social Struggle and Harmony Singing, <http://www.cdss.org/programs/dance-music-song-camps/camp-weeks/american>.

(Sandy Bradley, cont. from p. 2)

When I was at Pinewoods and other camps, people would ask me to come call in their town. I told them I’d never get there, but to give me their address, anyway. When I got enough addresses in an area, I would send out a mailer detailing which three to four weeks I would be in their area, and people would get back to me right away. I was usually calling with their local band. My drivers during these tours included Kate Charles, Molly Tenenbaum and Paul Brown. We mostly did a dance every night. I published the itinerary and contacts so other callers could do it.

In London, Bernard Chalk insisted I meet Laurie Andres. When I did we had a musical explosion! The Pacific Northwest dance musicians needed to hear his dynamic phrasing! So I talked him into touring westward with me. He lives in Seattle now. Another auspicious pairing for dance music was getting to play guitar on both New England Chestnuts recordings with Rod and Randy Miller. Also Sandy’s Fancy with Alan Jabbour and Tommy Thompson.

Playing with the Small Wonder String Band (Greg and Jere Canote) was also a great adventure. We could do a dance one night and a concert the next night in the same town, which can be an almost efficient way to be on the road. And then came our NPR show: Sandy Bradley’s Potluck, which went on for 13 years, locally and nationally.

Sandy Bradley of Raymond, WA will receive the CDSS Lifetime Contribution Award in Seattle, WA on September 16, 2017.