

Evangelistic Jazz Night Script

This evening we are going to be looking at **2 parallel stories**, 2 stories that are **intertwined in a profound way**. The 2 stories we are going to be looking at are the history of Jazz, particularly the **roots of Jazz** and also **'His story'**, history itself, the biblical story. The stories are both framed and united by a common theme, the theme of slavery!

Go Down Moses

Both our stories **start in Africa** and with people under rule and **oppression** of cruel masters. In the opening song there, you heard the account of the **Israelites enslaved by Egypt** under the tyrannous rule of **Pharaoh**.

"**Go Down Moses**" is an early Gospel Spiritual. It describes the events in the **Old Testament** in the book of **Exodus** in which God commands Moses to demand the release of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt.

Here's the account from **the Bible Exodus 3:7-10**

*The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. **8** So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—.... **9** And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. **10** So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."*

As you can imagine this account of the plight of the Israelites **struck a chord** with those captured in the African slave trade when they heard it.

This song **Go Down Moses** was an **early gospel spiritual** sang by the slaves in captivity in America **aligning themselves with the Israelites, and their slave masters with "Pharaoh"**.

The life of a slave in America in the 17th and 18th century was cruel and brutal and they would often **turn to song to express their emotion and alleviate** something of their **misery**. These were often in the form of **'work songs' and later 'The Blues'** but as the **biblical story took root** in their lives these **work songs took on a new tone with a spiritual theme** and this is why they are often referred to as Gospel Spirituals.

One infamous among these is a tune called:

'Nobody Knows The Troubles I've Seen'

So music became a huge **source of comfort** and an expressive release of tension for those under the oppressive American slave trade.

By **1810 the slave trade** to the United States was **coming to an end** and the slave population began to increase naturally, giving rise to an increasingly large native-born population of African Americans.

With fewer migrants who had experienced Africa personally, these transformations allowed the myriad of **cultures and** groups of enslaved Africans to **blend together**, making way for the preservation and transmission of religious practices that were increasingly "African-American."

This transition coincided with a great period of **Christian revival** in the Southern states of America beginning in the 1770s.

Increasing numbers of **slaves were attending church** as their **masters began to attend**, and many were converted to faith. As they heard teaching from the bible that taught that **all Christians are equal** in the sight of God, this message provided **true hope and sustenance to the slaves**.

The songs began to take on **a new tone of hope** and optimism in the midst of strife.

As you will hear in our next song:

Precious Lord, Take my Hand

Explaining the unique place Spirituals hold in the American musical experience, **Harry "Sweets" Edison**, the great Count Basie trumpeter, had this to say:

“...Spirituals are one of the oldest forms of art and culture we have in America, jazz and the blues came out of spirituals. Spirituals came out of the days of slavery. My great-grandmother, the one who lived to be 108, she used to tell me about it because she was born in slavery times. You know, they worked from sunup to sundown. Sometimes they worked all night. They worked so hard; they just waited to die, because they would be out of their misery. They sang the Spirituals because the music gave them hope. The music gave them strength to endure the day. They sang for relief.”

Well as we have seen **Both our stories started in Africa** and end in a **new land**, but in neither story is the journey easy. The slow abolishment of slavery across America meant even when freedom was found, **acceptance** in this new land they found themselves in **was not easily won**, conditions remained hard and life in this foreign land was not easy.

Once again the **story of the Israelites was a continuing comfort to them**. As the Israelites were redeemed from slavery in the great Exodus from Egypt **they too found themselves in the wilderness**, in a foreign land, and life continued to be hard, even to the point that some wanted to return to slavery. However, God was with them, he was their rock and their salvation.

As 1 Corinthians 10 a passage in the NT shows, it was Jesus, even then that was their hope and rock:

1 Cor 10

...our ancestors were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea. 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.'

And this great truth is drawn out in our next song which is called:

Jesus is the Rock in the Weary Land

In the early days of the slave trade many white owners and clergy preached a message of **strict obedience**, and insisted on slave attendance at **white-controlled churches**, they were **fearful** that if slaves were allowed to worship independently they would ultimately plot **rebellion** against their owners. It is clear that many saw these white churches, in which ministers promoted merciless obedience to one's master as a **mockery of the "true" Christian message of equality and liberation.**

In the slave quarters, however, African Americans organized their own **"invisible institution."** Through **signals, passwords, and messages** they called believers to **"hush harbors"** where they freely mixed **African rhythms, singing, and beliefs** with **evangelical Christianity.** It was here that the spirituals, with their double meanings of religious salvation and freedom from slavery, developed and flourished; Part church, part psychological refuge, these meetings provided one of the few ways for enslaved African Americans to express and enact their hopes for a better future.

So as they heard the **Gospel** and the **great news of Jesus rescue**, they found that **not only were they physically slaves** in a foreign land but they also had a **greater problem.** That their **slavery actually ran far deeper...**

The bible paints a very vivid picture of mankind's **bondage- to sin.** It reveals that **we are all slaves**, slaves to our own natural desires and lusts; that we **naturally reject God** and want to make *ourselves* God, living life our own way. It also tells us that the result of this is death and eternal separation from God's love, what the bible calls judgement and Hell.

So as they heard this they realised their greater problem was their spiritual slavery to sin.

But as they heard the news of Jesus rescue from this bondage to sin and judgement, as they heard that through Jesus laying down His life for them on the cross- dealing with their sin/their rejection of God- that he had paid the price for them (he had **redeemed them**)... as they heard that when he rose from the dead, he

defeated death and sin and made it possible to come back into relationship with God and to receive the great hope of eternity with Him in the promised land, the new creation... Heaven. This was the true freedom they had been looking for!

...

Our next song is an old favourite, a classic gospel song that speaks of this amazing undeserved act of grace through Jesus.

I'll leave you to guess the title

Amazing Grace

Obviously that song has **become a classic** in the church as well as in the jazz/gospel play list.

As I'm sure many of you are aware Amazing Grace was **written by John Newton**. In his early life he was a slave trader and renowned for being a **foul mouthed and thoroughly debauched man**. However, he was converted after a **near death experience** on a slave boat caused him to reflect on life and the divine. He turned to the bible and within its pages **discovered the grace of God**. He consequently went on to become a minister and a key **campaigner and proponent in the abolition of slavery in Britain**.

Our next song is another classic- **Wade In the Water**.

Now it is suggested that often when these songs were sang amongst groups of slaves they could be used to **signal many things**. For example, this song "*Wade in the Water*" by Harriet Tubman was allegedly sung as a warning to tell **escaping slaves to get off the trail and into the water** to make sure the dogs slave catchers used, couldn't sniff out their trail. So the did't leave a scent trail that dogs could follow.

But its literal meaning is tracing the **theme of water through the bible**. Starting with **the Exodus** and God freeing the Israelites by **parting the waters** of the red see, culminating with the washing with water in **Baptism**. A symbolic act undertaken by new Christian to show how they have been **washed clean** of all their sins **through Jesus death** as they are plunged under water and then symbolizing **Jesus defeat of death as they rise** from the

water- soaked! The **Holy Spirit enters** the new believer to walk with the believer and to transform them in their new life as a Christian.

So, with this in mind we are going to play- **Wade in the Water**

During the days of slavery, when Black Africans were cruelly plucked out of their own land and transported to the "New World", **a phenomenal new music evolved** – through the combination of the blues and work songs of an enslaved people, fused with the church, classical and folk music of the so called "civilized" Europeans. Jazz was created!

Now many of the songs that we have performed this evening would have **originally** been performed **a capella** as the slaves worked in the fields but we have spared you that. However, in New Orleans where much of the Afro Caribbean community settled, they found themselves able to **acquire cheap or even free** instruments discarded by the military ships that would dock at the port and very quickly through the improvisatory nature of the current music this new form of music began to take shape.

A **New Orleans funeral** would process to the graveyard to the strains of "**Just A Closer Walk With Thee**" and other dirges expressing their sorrow at their loss. But upon returning from the cemetery the band would launch into a swinging beat, such as "**Oh When The Saints Go Marchin' In**".

The background of this music is in the spiritual experience of African-American people, reared in slavery and nurtured on the Gospel. Like so much of the music we hear today it is nurtured in gospel music, in the music of the church, where these musicians learnt their craft through worship songs. It carries the twin themes of suffering and hope, so characteristic of Afro Caribbean culture. And it is through this early jazz style which we have been interpreting most of these songs.

Our next tune is a great little tune depicting the nature of what a relationship with Jesus is like.

Now, it is very **light hearted**, so I don't want you to take me to task on any major **theological doctrines** from it but it tries to satirically points us to that relationship with Jesus being through prayer.

Let me read the first verse to you.

The song is called Operator:

Operator
Information
Give me Jesus on the line
Operator
Information
I'd like to speak to a friend of mine
Oh prayer is the number
Faith is the exchange
Heaven is the street
And Jesus is his name
Operator
Information
Please give me Jesus on the line

So, for your enjoyment now- **Operator**

Ok, so we are getting close to the end of the first set now and so we **approach the end of our stories... or is it really the beginning?**

We are going to finish with 2 songs that talk of the end of this life, which in our current society would be a morbid topic wouldn't it? But far from it in these 2 tunes.

The first is the infamous afore-mentioned Oh When the Saints.

It is a song that sings of those who are 'in Jesus' marching in to a **blessed Kingdom!**

When the **slaves will truly become free**, free from their physical and spiritual bondage to return home to their father in a joyous home coming.

And then we will go straight on into Fly away by Sister Rosetta Tharpe- which sings of the glorious day when this life is over of rising up- flying away to be with Jesus.

Here is a line from the song

‘Just a few more days of this weary land till I go to that land where joy shall never end’.
And then the repeated refrain
‘I’m going to Jesus’

Now, I guess I want to leave you with a couple of questions as we finish this set that you might want to consider over your food and drinks now.

Do you have this hope?

Can you sing with such joy as you contemplate that day that we all face?

Have you realised that you are enslaved to sin and need saving from this?

Have you seen that it is only through Jesus act of grace not anything you have to offer that his is possible?

Have you done business with Jesus?

I hope you enjoy these last 2 songs and we’ll See you in the second half.