

THE WOMAN WHO REFUSED TO DANCE

A ONE ACT OPERA FOR FEMALE SINGER, SPEAKER, DANCER AND BAND
CONCEPT, WORDS & MUSIC BY SHIRLEY J. THOMPSON



Synopsis

In 1792 an Unknown Woman on a boat filled with enslaved persons heading for the island of Grenada from Calabar on the west coast of Africa, refused to dance as was the daily order by the ship captain. Her refusal led to an accusation of insubordination, and The Unknown Woman was beaten and hung up on the boat by the ankles as punishment for her act of defiance, and most importantly, as an example

to the other enslaved persons of what could befall them should they disobey orders.

The Unknown Woman died three days later, but the incident was widely reported through the news pamphlets of the time and caught the attention of the public. William Wilberforce employed the case study to argue the case for the abolition of the trade in enslaved African people in Parliament. An act was eventually passed to this effect in 1807. 2017 is thereby the 210th anniversary of the Act.

The opera conveys the narrative of the incident on the boat: the accusation, the beating, the astonishment of the other enslaved persons, and the unease of the sailors observing the inhuman treatment of The Woman. The opera also represents the thoughts of The (unknown) Woman as she is hanging from the boat. Thoughts of her idyllic past flash through her mind and thoughts of what her future might have held ... The Woman Who Refused to Dance brings to the fore a significant period in our shared histories and feeds into the dialogue about present-day human trafficking, the second most lucrative trade in the world.

The Woman Who Refused to Dance

**Give Me the Sky
I want to Fly
Away to Find My Destiny ...**

**No, I won't Dance!
No, there's no chance of that!
I must return
To my Maker
With my dignity
With my Spirit ...**

**Concept, Words & Music by Shirley J. Thompson
Running time: 35 mins**

