THE SINGER AND THE SONG
ASSEMBLY SCRIPT

ABOUT THIS PLAY
The play is 12 minutes long. It include 10 characters and chronicles the history of protest music, from Beethoven to the present.

The play comes with a PowerPoint presentation which can be found in the folder ‘assembly’ on The Power of our Voices CD. Music referred to in the play is embedded in the PowerPoint slides.

To activate the appropriate musical selection, click on the musical note on each slide.

At the end of each character’s dialogue you will see a slide citing a relevant article from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Please allow a few seconds for the audience to read this before the next character enters.

Directions for teachers are written in bold pink italics. Stage directions are in (pink italics and brackets).

Multimedia requirements: computer with good speaker system, projector, screen.

10 CHARACTERS
Disc jockey
Ludwig van Beethoven
Ethel Smyth
Billie Holiday
Paul Eluard
Joan Baez
Ewan MacColl
Bob Marley
Emmanuel Jal
Kate Tempest
(Students acting the characters in the play stand in a half circle)

**DISC JOCKEY**
Fifty years ago the human rights organisation Amnesty International was founded. Today we are going to hear from people who have used their words and their music to fight for justice and human rights. I am going to be your disc jockey.

Hello, Sir. Who are you?

**BEETHOVEN** *(steps forward and shakes his hand)*
Guten Morgen. My name is Ludwig. I am a composer from Germany. It's good to meet you. My friend Schiller wrote a great poem about the brotherhood of man called ‘Ode to Joy’. I wrote a tune for it in D Minor. I put it in my 9th Symphony.

**DISC JOCKEY**
Today everyone knows that great tune, Ludwig.

**BEETHOVEN**
And I wrote ‘Fidelio’ – my opera about a man who is thrown into jail, tortured and threatened with death just for what he thinks.

**DISC JOCKEY**
Sounds like a case for Amnesty International!

**BEETHOVEN**
Eh? Sorry, my friend. I didn’t quite catch that. I’m a bit deaf.

**(Beethoven steps back)**

**(Ethel Smyth steps forward)**

**DISC JOCKEY**
How d’you do, Madam.

**ETHEL SMYTH**
My name is Ethel Smyth. I’m a composer. I campaigned for women to have the right to vote. Please play ‘March of the Women’, my song for the Suffragettes. We sang it on our demonstrations.
DISC JOCKEY
Weren’t you in Holloway Prison?

ETHEL SMYTH
Yes, I was – loads of women were. The Suffragette Prisoners’ Choir used to sing that song as they marched round the prison exercise yard. I used to conduct them with my toothbrush. You can laugh, but we won women the right to vote, in the end, didn’t we?

BILLIE HOLIDAY
Good to meet y’all.

DISC JOCKEY
Great to meet you, Billie Holiday. You are a giant amongst the jazz greats. When I heard that song ‘Strange Fruit’ it knocked me sideways.

BILLIE HOLIDAY
Yup, it’s a powerful, beautiful, terrible song. It’s about lynching: the murders of hundreds of black men across the Deep South of the USA in the 1920s.

I sang it wherever I could, whether the folks liked it or not. But I didn’t write it. Abel Meeropol, a Jewish school teacher from New York composed it and wrote the words. He’d seen a photo of two murdered black guys strung up from a tree down in Indiana, with them white folks and their children all standing around the tree like it was a picnic and smiling. Now play us that song, sweetie…
DISC JOCKEY
My next guest is the French poet…

(Paul Eluard bursts in, his arms stretched out greeting the audience)

PAUL ELUARD
Bonjour! My name is Paul Eluard!

In the Second World War – a desperate time – my country was occupied by Hitler’s Nazis. Thousands were arrested, deported as slaves or sent to the Nazi death camps. Human rights disappeared. I joined the French Resistance. I wrote a poem to ‘Freedom’.

I wanted to write that word on the clouds, on children’s exercise books, on the hillsides, on the prison walls, on my friend’s faces, on my bed, on my dog… People learned my poem and whispered it in secret. It spread everywhere. That word ‘Freedom’ drove the Nazis nuts. We smuggled it over to England. You British printed thousands of copies and dropped them over occupied France.

(Paul Eluard steps back)

Joan Baez steps forward)

DISC JOCKEY
Joan Baez, peace campaigner and folk singer. What have you in store for us today?

JOAN BAEZ
‘We Shall Overcome’ is one of the world’s best-known campaigning songs. Its tune lifts the heart. Its words inspire courage, dignity and defiance.

This was the song of the civil rights movement in the USA. We sang it in the segregated buses and on the marches for equality against the racist laws in the southern states.

In 1963 we sang with 300,000 people on the huge civil rights march in Washington when Dr Martin Luther King gave his famous speech ‘I have a dream’. Play us a bit.

Play Joan Baez recording of ‘We Shall Overcome’

(Ewan MacColl steps forward)
DISC JOCKEY
And now let’s hear from Ewan MacColl, composer and singer of hundred of songs; songs about work, love, justice, history and workers’ rights.

EWAN MACCOLL
I collected and sang the traditional folk songs of the common people of this country. Among them were the songs of Irish and Scottish Travellers and Romany Gypsies. We made a radio programme about their lives: joys and bad times too. One song was about a Romany baby, born like the Christ child on a frosty morning. Wise men came, but they came to evict them and told the family to go, shift, move.

(Ewan MacColl steps back)

(Bob Marley steps forward)

DISC JOCKEY
A big welcome to Bob Marley from Jamaica, the guy who gave Reggae and Ska music to the world.

BOB MARLEY
Mornin’, respect and thank yuh my breddahs an sistren. I wrote a piece called ‘Redemption Song’.

…and I sang it acoustic – just with mi guitar. It’s about standing up for your rights ‘wen trubble tek yuh’ as we say. It is a song about the slave trade. It’s a call for action against oppression and slavery of the mind.

(Emmanuel Jal steps forward)

DISC JOCKEY
This man’s life has been extraordinary. As a child he was swept up into his country’s civil war. He survived by sheer luck and a lot of courage.

EMMANUEL JAL
Well, yes – I’ve had a topsy-turvy kind of growing up. I was just a little kid in Southern Sudan when war broke out. My Dad joined the rebels. My Mum was shot dead by government troops. I was seven. I fled to Ethiopia with lots of other kids. We were recruited into the Sudan People’s Liberation Army.
I spent the next four years not as a schoolboy but as a child killer. Lots of kids died.

My mind was full of fear and revenge. I saw and I did some dreadful things.

**DISC JOCKEY**
What a nightmare, Emmanuel. So how on earth did you get into the music business?

**EMMANUEL JAL**
When I was 11 I was adopted by a British aid worker called Emma. She smuggled me into Kenya. I started my education there. I learned music. I fell in love with hip hop. I sang in four languages about what I knew – refugees, street children, religious divisions, racial conflict and war. My first record, ‘Gua’ was a hit. I am a Christian, but I made my second record with my Muslim friend Abdel. It’s called ‘War Child’. It’s about our lives. It’s a plea for peace and unity… and I became a rap star. Play us a bit of it could you?

**(Emmanuel Jal steps back)**

**DISC JOCKEY**
Hi there, Kate Tempest. I couldn’t finish this show without a protest song from you. I heard that amazing rap you did in Ireland about the work of Amnesty International. YOW!

**KATE TEMPEST**
Pleased you liked it! I sang it 50 years after Amnesty International began its campaign for human rights.

► **Play video of Kate Tempest at Dublin (linked from slide 25)**
DISC JOCKEY
Today, you have heard from some of the poets and musicians
who used their tunes and their words to fight for justice and to
change the world.

KATE TEMPEST
OK so what happens next?

BOB MARLEY
Why don’t you write your own songs for human rights?

EMMANUEL JAL
I had something important to say. My words and my songs are my
life. I wrote mine down. You can write yours.

KATE TEMPEST
That’s what I did.

EVERYONE
Just do it!

CREDITS

We Shall Overcome
Recording licensed by Vanguard Records Inc
Publishing credit with lyrics ‘We Shall Overcome’ new words and music adaptation
by Zilphia Horton, Frank Hamilton, Guy Carawan and Pete Seeger (c) 1960 and 1963
International copyright secured. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Strange Fruit
Lyrics reproduced by permission of the publisher.

March of the Women
Composer: Ethel Smyth. Music published by J Curwen and Sons Ltd. Lyrics
reproduced by permission of the publisher.

War Child
Recording licensed by Sound 360. Lyrics reproduced by permission of Emmanuel Jal
and Clinton Outten.