

Massa buy me:

Song of Negro slaves in Barbados, undated (late 18th century) edited by Philip Colls from a source in the Gloucester archive.

G.S. is Granville Sharp (1735-1813), who was related to the Lloyd-Baker family of Hardwicke Court, was one of the leading anti-slavery campaigners of the late 18th century and the early 19th century.

Performance suggestions.

Presumably the song was sung by men, although there is no reason why women should not sing it. The music will sound well at a slow tempo, slowing into every cadence of the solo verse. When the chorus enters it will sound appropriately pained at the notated pitch, with a slow portamento to each high note, including the first one. The high notes of the chorus would sound well doubled at the lower octave.

I have altered the rhythm of the Solo verse to fit the words of the second verse. I am not at all certain that Obudda-bo is correct, however. Perhaps "bo" is not intended to be sung; but I cannot work out what it might mean.

The following is included in the original manuscript.

An African Song or Chant, taken down in notes by G.S. from the information of Dr. Wm. Dickson, who lived several years in the West Indies, and was Secretary to a Governor of Barbadoes. (sic) A Single Negro (while at work with the rest of the gang) leads the song, and the others join in chorus at the end of every verse. (Generally in a minor key – suppose E with minor 3rd.)

The Chorus is annotated: Chorus of labouring Negroes as they proceed in their work. NB a is sounded by them like the French ai or English a (rhyme with say)

Notes

'For is an abbreviation of Before, meaning Before I would live, or rather than live, etc. Obudda signifies destruction; from the Hebrew abad (he destroyed) and abandon (a name of the Devil in Holy scripture) the Destroyer, and from thence the English word bad.

Regulaw seems to mean to be sold, or merchandise, and may be derived from the Hebrew word recal (The present Editor cannot here reproduce the Hebrew letters) a merchant or merchandise.

Philip Colls: Gloucester, February 2007.