

THE AFRICAN'S GRAVE

Words and Music by John Kirkpatrick – Copyright © Squeezer Music.
Written for the Georgians In Stone project in Bishop's Castle, 2020.

One of the gravestones in Bishop's Castle churchyard commemorates an unknown African who died in the town. With unfortunate irony, to our modern eyes, that person is named only by a pair of initials – I.D. There is no record of how somebody of African birth came to be here, or what their life was like, or how they came to die here. The quotation from the Bible is one often used during the campaign to abolish slavery. The Slave Trade was abolished in 1807, and the Emancipation of Slaves finally came about in the 1830s.

The full inscription reads:

*“Here lieth the body of I.D., A native of Africa,
Who died in this town Sept 9th 1801.*

‘God hath created of one blood all nations of men’ – Acts Ch 17 verse 26.”

CHANT:

Boom-ba-da ma-dinghy yar-da boom-ba-da ba-yoom

(Sing in unison twice, in part harmony twice, in full harmony four times)

One Blood, One Blood

(Tune and altos, while tenors and basses chant)

HYMN: God hath created of one blood all nations, all women, all men

(Once in unison, once in harmony)

HALF CHANT:

(Tenors & Basses only - Once and a half)

1. You are not so cruel, not so unkind
But your eyes are blinkered, your eyes are blind
I play your games, like a little black toy
But you don't see me, your little black boy
Not once you ask about my home
Not once you ask about my land
Not once you ask about my name
Not once you ask, do you feel no shame?

Chant twice in full harmony

One Blood, One Blood

Hymn once in harmony

Half Chant

2. Your white man's clothes, they pinch my skin
 They catch my breath when I breathe in
 With your soles and heels, and your buckles and bows
 Can't feel the earth between my toes
 I hear you speak, I learn your tongue
 You call me African, you call me John
 But as I stand here in your white man's shoes
 They are not my words, not the words I use

Chant twice in full harmony

One Blood, One Blood

Hymn once in harmony

Half Chant

3. When you lay me down in the cold, cold ground
 Tear off these clothes that bind me down
 Tear off these shoes, made me so sore
 And let me dance, let me dance once more
 And if you listen where I lie
 You'll hear my song 'neath the Shropshire sky
 You'll hear my name 'neath the Shropshire moon
 You'll hear me dance to my family tune

Chant three times in full harmony

Once in unison to finish.



Phrasing for the chant:

Tune: Boom-ba-da ma-dinghy yar-da / Boom-ba-da ba-yoom

Alto: Yar da / ba-da ma-ding - hy

Tenor: Yoom-ba-da-ma yar - da/ Boom-ba-da-ba yoom-ba-da-ma

Bass: Boom ba-da - yar / Ba da yar

Phrasing for Altos – end of chant before “One Blood”:

Yar - da / ba-da ma-yoom

Phrasing under “One blood”

Tenor: Boom-ba-da ma-dinghy yar-da / Boom-ba-da ba-yoom

Bass: Boom- ba-da / Ba da yar

Phrasing for Half Chant after hymn, before verses:

Tenor: Boom-ba-da ma-dinghy yar-da / boom-ba-da ba-yoom

Boom-ba-da ma-dinghy yar-da / Boom

Bass: Boom-ba-da yar / Ba da yar

Boom-ba-da yar / Boom

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Verses:

In the first half of each verse, the Altos sing the words in parallel with the Tune, while the Tenors and Basses do rhythmical chanting (which is the same for each verse) underneath.

In the second half of each verse, the Tune carries on while the other three parts sing the words at a regular half speed underneath, until the last two phrases.

In Verse 2, the lower three parts pause either side of the words "African" and "John", and sing those words in parallel with the Tune, and in harmony.