

The power of song shared

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Tuesday I found myself sitting with a group of elders in a church basement in Maynooth. I asked them to share stories of being in the presence of the divine. Each one shared about being touched, and moved, by a holy presence. Almost half of the stories were set in the midst of song.

The night before my own spirits had been lifted by a song. That song is still rising in the quiet moments of my days. Monday evening forty strangers gathered in a large empty upstairs room above Riley's pub. We became the [3 Alarm Choir](#) – a spontaneous creation of one night's making – never to be repeated.

Linda Clark and Luke Lee-Burton have been kindling these spontaneous celebrations of song the first Monday nights of each month. With the five buck cover charge you're handed a single sheet with the words to a song. Luke and Linda teach us its three high, low and medium-so parts. They add the fuel of laughter, kibitzing with us, and one another, and get us to sing, sing, sing, until we burst into fire.



By 9:30 we are a choir. We were a group of strangers. Now we are singers of old songs. Songs that put words to what's in our silent hearts. The song we sang monday was potent and powerful and prophetic. When I saw that the song was Patti Smith's "[The People have Power](#)" it took me way back.

I first heard Patti Smith in 1979. I was studying literature and political philosophy at Trent in 1979. Patti Smith was for me a raw punk poet who somehow expressed hope from the midst of a righteous anger. Punk deconstructed commercialized rock and took it to the bottom where an anti-social rage shook its leathered fist at false gods.

And here I was almost forty years later singing Patti Smith's anthem in a pub.

"I believe everything we dream can come to pass through our union."

I can still feel the rising of my blood as we sang it like we meant it. Back then I'd only listened. Now I was giving the song my own voice.

"We can turn, the world around
We can turn, the world around."

Patti Smith's raw energy seems grounded in the awakened dissatisfaction of the sixties gone wrong. It rekindled the dreams of the sixties but from the ashes of an angry cynicism.

I awakened to the cry
that the people have the power
to redeem the work of fools

Smith's esoteric interest in ancient religious mysticism is woven throughout her lyrics. She evokes the ancient angry voices of prophetic protest – calling out the crimes of principalities and

powers. Calling those with ears to hear - the people's cries.

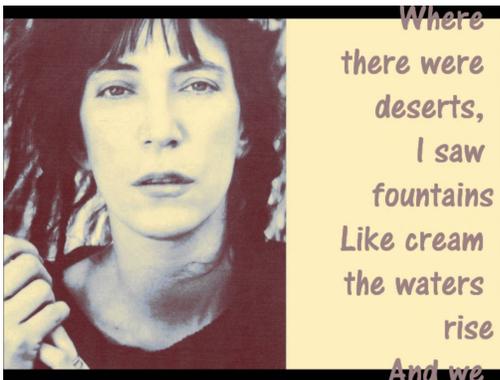
"And the armies - ceased advancing
'cause the people - had their ear"

Her rolling chant, sung together in numbers, rings a gong of truth within.

People have power
People have power
People have power
People have power
People have power

You can't sing words like that with a group of people without feeling your blood rise to its truth. Not "the people will get the power someday" or "if only those in power would listen" but WE have power NOW!

The power to dream
The power to rule
The power to wrestle the world from fools



It's the power of a Palm Sunday chant. Jesus riding into Jerusalem not on a horse but a mule. Not to fight the armies of Empire but to wrestle the truth to the ground. To speak as prophets before him spoke. To speak as all prophets of all faiths speak today. When religion becomes a tool of the wealthy - backed by the violence of politics. When those wielding the power of fear use the lives of the meek as mere fodder for their means - a divine voice will arise from among them.

"upon the meek, the graces shower
it's decreed - the people rule."

That divine voice has no other power than love. Love cannot be bought, sold, traded, or wielded by any king, priest, or bureaucrat. Love can only be shared freely. Love lives in the midst of the people. Love removes the barriers that divide us. Love inspires our imaginations.

And that is what singing together does as well. When we share an innocent laugh. When we sing a song of hope. Our souls are lifted with a love from the bottom of our hearts - where despair and powerlessness mate - to give birth to a new day of thankfulness and hope.

To sing such a song is to give thanks for breath. To sing such a song is to give voice to an ancient divine hope.

And we stood there - all together
With none to laugh - or criticize
And the leopard - and the lamb
Lay together - truly bound

To sing together in a group without agenda, seeking fun and stimulation on a cold Monday night, was for me a discovery of something bottomless. A mysterious wellspring. A source from where dreams arise. And to bring such dreams awake - is to begin to let god's divine imagination move us to work with the power that is love shared.

That's what's been carrying my soul on wings this week as I hum and work away.