

Helen Chadwick

Through the Cracks

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"He was a Kurd too" said
Nawros.*

The singers who have inspired me? There are so many: the many grandmothers and grandfathers I have been privileged to meet in the mountains of Georgia who carry that stunning tradition, a female Muslim Praise Singer in the North of Ghana, the singers from the townships around Johannesburg, that extraordinary actor from Lithuania, and many more.

But I will tell just one story here, a more recent one, of someone living less than a few hundred yards from my house.

I am currently working on *Dalston Songs* based on interviews with people who live in my street and my area, Dalston, in the East End of London. It is song/theatre, performed by three women, and is to have its premier in the autumn of 2007 in Nottingham and at the Royal Opera House in London. For it I asked each interviewee to speak about what 'Home' means to them. Dalston is an area where over ninety languages are spoken and where the street is lined with Turkish and Kurdish cafes and where the market has Ghanaian hair braiding stalls and many stalls selling African and Caribbean foods.

I met Nawros Oramari in June when we were the two singers in a development project for Opera North in Leeds. When I first heard Nawros sing that Monday morning he took me straight back to my love for the voice of the great Iranian singer Shahram Nazeri, of whom I had heard recordings many years before. "He was a Kurd too" said Nawros. I couldn't believe that at the end of that week I would have the honour of sharing a stage with such a singer. Nawros uses a particular technique where he flutters through his voice from one note to another in descending curves, revealing the soul through the cracks. It falls out of him with the greatest of ease and always with inspiration and love.

As we walked to and from the work space and our lodgings, Nawros told a little of his terrible story. A Southern Kurd from what is currently Iraq, he had been a freedom

Disappeared Helen Chadwick

♩=90

Voice

Disappeared disappeared the sound of voice the binding of your coat the strength of your

Voice

hold the warmth of your hand Disappeared disappeared the

Voice

Disappeared disappeared the sound of voice the

♩=130

Voice

binding of your coat the strength of your hold the warmth of your hand They forced us to

Voice

binding of your coat the strength of your hold the warmth of your hand They forced us to

Voice

land They forced us to

Voice

por ferthose bu lets. "Here are the bu lets we killed him with" They said: "Held"

Voice

por ferthose bu lets. "Here are the bu lets we killed him with" They said: "Held"

Voice

por ferthose bu lets. "Here are the bu lets we killed him with" They said: "Held"

Voice

dead He's dead He's dead Your love/one is dead Dead! They forced us to

Voice

dead He's dead He's dead Your love/one is dead Dead! They forced us to

Voice

dead He's dead He's dead Your love/one is dead Dead! They forced us to

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Helen Chadwick. Photo: Alex Macro for WaterAid

fighter and revolutionary, fighting with his lyrics and his songs for Kurdish independence. The impact on his life was imprisonment in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran, torture, displacement, exile, and a life, even now, of nightmares and broken nights, unable to forget the terrible things he experienced and witnessed. And he is the gentlest of men, and a man of truth.

He now lives here, where many Northern Kurds (from the part of Kurdistan under Turkish occupation) live. He sings for the Kurdish community in London and all over the world and works as a freelance translator for the Home Office using his many languages: Bahdini, Sorani, Kurmanji

(Kurdish dialects), Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, Afghandari and English. Returning to Kurdistan twice to see his family, he says that he had missed London when he was there. For a long time he had not dared to contact them for fear of reprisals against them. When eventually he contacted them, it took a while before they believed who he was, and that this phone call was not some further hardship they were being forced to endure in being told he was alive when they believed him dead.

When I returned home from that week, I asked Nawros if I could interview him, and later two songs were written inspired by him and his story.

The Whole World

He said in his quiet voice
"I don't have a home
the whole world is my home".

Imprisoned in four countries,
tortured,
forbidden to sing.

He said in his quiet voice
"I don't have a home
the whole world is my home".

Exiled,
his family believed him dead,
forbidden to sing.
He said in his gentle voice
"I don't have a home
the whole world is my home".

Hidden,
given a new name,
forbidden to sing.
He said in his kind voice
"I don't have a home
the whole world is my home".

Displaced,
he sent news of his survival,
forbidden to sing.
He said in his breathtaking voice
"I don't have a home
the whole world is my home".

Alone,
singing once again, singing once again,
singing once again, singing once again.

He sent help to his family,
to those who'd thought him killed,
singing once again, singing once again,
singing once again, singing once again.

Disappeared

Disappeared.
Disappeared.
The sound of your voice,
the lining of your coat,
the strength of your hold,
the warmth of your hand.

They forced us to pay for those bullets.
"Here are the bullets we killed him with".
They said "He's dead, he's dead, he's dead."
Your loved one is dead. Dead."
They forced us to pay for those bullets
they said they'd killed you with.

Disappeared.
Disappeared.
The sound of your voice,
the lining of your coat,
the strength of your hold,
the warmth of your hand.

HELEN CHADWICK (Britain) is a singer, performer and composer. She performs solo and with the Helen Chadwick Group and has released eight albums. Helen took part in many of the early Magdalena projects. She is currently preparing a community opera about a child refugee arriving in the UK involving professional refugee musicians. Her *Requiem for the Innocent* which had its premier last autumn, is dedicated to the uncounted dead in the Iraq war.
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