

NINA SIMONE



I wish I knew how it would feel to be free
I wish I could break all the chains holding me
I wish I could say all the things that I should say
Say 'em loud, say 'em clear
For the whole round world to hear

I wish I could share all the love that's in my heart
Remove all the bars that keep us apart
I wish you could know what it means to be me
Then you'd see and agree
That every man should be free

I wish I could give all I'm longing to give
I wish I could live like I'm longing to live
I wish that I could do all the things that I can do
Though I'm way overdue I'd be starting anew

Well I wish I could be like a bird in the sky
How sweet it would be if I found I could fly
Oh I'd soar to the sun and look down at the sea
And I'd sing 'cos I'd know that
And I'd sing 'cos I'd know that
And I'd sing 'cos I'd know that
I'd know how it feels to be free
I'd know how it feels to be free
I'd know how it feels to be free

Billy Taylor & Dick Dallas

About 20 years ago the great black American singer, songwriter, pianist and civil rights activist, Nina Simone, performed only a few miles away from here, at the annual Bishopstock Blues Festival at Bishops Court, Clyst Honiton. She was sensational, commanding, and for those of us lucky to be there it was an unforgettable musical experience.

Trained as a classical pianist, her first recital was given when she was 12 in a church hall. When her parents, who had taken seats in the front row, were forced to move to the back of the hall to make way for white people, Nina refused to play until they were moved back to the front. It was her first action as a civil rights protester, but certainly not her last.

Her first black protest song was *Mississippi Goddam*, her response to the 1963 murder of Medgar Evers and the bombing of the Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama that killed four young black girls. She recorded *I wish I knew how it feels to be free*, one of her most popular songs, in 1967. This seems a sadly appropriate moment to remember it.

"She is loved or feared, adored or disliked", Maya Angelou wrote in 1970, "but few who have met her music or glimpsed her soul react with moderation"

She died in 2003 at her home in France, less than 3 years after her performance in Clyst Honiton.

Suggested by Sheila Stone