

# **PETERLOO**

## **Cantata**

**Music: Gary Daverne      Script: Ruth Hamilton**

### **Synopsis**

The setting is in England between 1815 and 1819. This was a period of immense political tension and mass protest as a result of the Napoleonic Wars.

Fewer than 2% of the population had the vote and hunger was rife with the disastrous Corn Laws making bread unaffordable, accumulating since the 1815 battles at Waterloo.

On the morning of 16th August 1819 a huge, but peaceful crowd, the majority dressed in their Sunday best, began to gather on the field around what's now called, St Peters Square in Manchester.

Local magistrates watching from a window near the field panicked at the sight of the large crowd and read the riot act.

On horseback the cavalry came, armed with sabers. By 2pm the carnage was over and the field left full with abandoned banners and dead bodies, an event that became known as The Peterloo Massacre.

All in the name of liberty and freedom from poverty.

Narrator

Rich Lady (part of the chorus)

Rich Gentleman (part of the chorus)

Poor woman (part of the chorus)

Poor Man (part of the chorus)

Mixed Chorus of men and women with solo lines

# PETERLOO

## INTRODUCTION

**Chorus:** Waterloo. Waterloo.  
Waterloo. Eighteen fifteen. Waterloo.

**Narrator:** *1815 Waterloo*

**Chorus:** Waterloo. Eighteen fifteen. Waterloo.

**Narrator:** *The glorious battle that finally defeated the mighty army of  
Napoleon Bonaparte.  
An army that exceeded in greatness that of Tamerlane, Alexander,  
Darius and Caesar.  
1815.  
For the wealthy, war was glorious. War was entertaining.*

**Chorus:** Waterloo. Waterloo.  
Waterloo. Waterloo. Waterloo. Waterloo.

**Lady:** *1815. I have been invited to the Duchess of Richmond's ball in  
Brussels. Shall I wear my diamonds or my rubies?*

**Chorus:** Waterloo. Eighteen fifteen. Waterloo.

**Gentleman:** *Rubies my dear. They'll look well with my uniform.  
I hope Mr. Nap, Old Boney, won't interrupt the ball.*

## No. 1 THE WALTZ

**Lady:** *(Gracefully)*

V.1 Dance, dance the waltz with me,  
Hold me near.  
Say you'll always waltz with me  
And that you'll hold me tight  
Dance 'till the morning light.  
Say you'll waltz with me  
Say you'll waltz with me

V.2 Dance, dance the waltz with me,  
Hold me near.  
Please don't leave me all alone  
Or you'll see my heart aches  
Dance 'till the morning breaks.  
Say you'll waltz with me  
Say you'll waltz with me

**Gentleman:**

V.3 Yes. I will dance the waltz with you,  
Hold you close.  
If I leave you dear tonight  
I will recall the sweet touch  
Of your hand in mine  
When I waltz with you  
I will waltz with you

**DANCE (optional)**

**Both:** Say you'll waltz with me  
Say you'll waltz with me

(Key Change)

**Chorus:**

V.4 Yes, we will dance tonight  
One last waltz

**Gentleman:**

I may have to leave you soon  
Dance with me hold me tight  
We'll waltz 'till the morning light

**Lady:** I will waltz with you  
I will waltz with you

**Chorus:** We will waltz; we'll waltz all night  
Until the dawn.

**Narrator:** *But there was no glory for the poor.*

## No. 2 WATERLOO

**Chorus:** Waterloo. Waterloo.  
Looooo..... (*Under woman/man narration*)

**Woman:** (*Spoken with urgency*) 1815. Food prices are high. We cannot afford bread. We are starving, but there is a war on.

**Man:** (*Spoken with urgency*) 1815. The Bill of Enclosure has taken away my land and I have no means of livelihood.

**Men:** (*Sung with pride*)

Through the cold, through the mud, through the rain we marched.  
(*Could be* Old campaigners and new  
*solo lines*) In the cold, in the mud, in the rain we camped  
At a place near Waterloo

**Chorus:** At a place near Waterloo

V.1 (*With anguish*)

**Men:** How can we sleep when we're soaked to the skin?

**Women:** How can they sleep when we're soaked to the skin?

**Men:** How can we rest when we're chilled to the bone?

**Women:** How can they rest when we're chilled to the bone?

**Men:** How can we sleep?

**Women:** How can they sleep?

**Men:** Lashed by the wind?

**Women:** Lashed by the wind?

**Men:** Aching and shaking with cold

**Women:** Shaking, shaking, shaking, shaking,  
Shaking, shaking, shaking, shaking

V.2

**Men:** Smear all our blankets with mud and with clay

**Women:** Smear all our blankets with mud and with clay

**Men:** Fashion a pillow with straw or with hay

**Women:** Fashion a pillow with straw or with hay

**Men:** Sleep close together

**Women:** Sleep close together

**Men:** Out of the wind

**Women:** Out of the wind

**Men:** Aching and shaking with cold

**Women:** Shaking, shaking, shaking, shaking,  
Shaking, shaking, shaking, shaking

V.3

**Men:** How can we fight when we're covered with mud?

**Women:** How can they fight when we're covered with mud?

**Men:** How can we fight when we've nothing to eat?

**Women:** How can they fight when we've nothing to eat?

**Men:** How can we fight?

**Women:** How can they fight?

**Men:** Leader's not there

**Women:** Leader's not there

**Men:** Aching and shaking with cold

**Women:** Shaking, shaking, shaking, shaking,  
Shaking, shaking, shaking, shaking

**Chorus:** (*With pride*)

Through the cold, through the mud,  
Through the rain we marched.

Old campaigners and new

In the cold, in the mud, in the rain they camped

At a place near Waterloo

At a place near Waterloo

**Women:** (*With anger*)

Eighteen, fifteen

My son, husband, brother, lover

Killed, killed, killed, killed

**Chorus:** At Waterloo

**Narrator:** *The law doth punish the man or woman who steals the goose  
from the common.*

*But lets the greater villain loose who steals the common from the  
goose.*

**Chorus:** Waterloo

### **No. 3 ENCLOSURE – CORN LAW**

**Narrator:** *Many people lost their land and homes because of the Enclosure.  
The Corn Bill greatly increased the price of bread.*

**Chorus:** Enclosure Corn Law, (*10 times under solo voice*)

**Woman:** I sold my son to a chimney sweep  
We were starving

**Man:** Woman, your son is dead  
He fell

*(Key change)*

**Chorus:** Eighteen sixteen. Eighteen sixteen. Eighteen sixteen,  
Eighteen sixteen. Eighteen sixteen. Eighteen sixteen,  
*(Under narrator)*

**Narrator:** *1816. It has rained. 1816. The crops have failed.*

**Woman:** I cannot afford to buy bread for my family

**Chorus:** Eighteen sixteen

**Woman:** My husband is one of three hundred thousand men.  
Dismissed from the force without a pension.

**Chorus:** There is no work

### **No. 4 POOR SONG**

**Chorus:**

*(Could be solo lines)*

V. 1 They left their wives and children  
They left their homes and friends  
To fight against Napoleon  
So Boney would not win

**Everyone:** They fought to succor England  
So freedom could bear fruit  
England did not succor them  
She's left them destitute  
But England did not succor them  
She's left them destitute

V. 2 The new bill of enclosure  
Has left us with out homes  
They've lost their way of living  
And hunger threatens them  
Their children work in factories

**Everyone:** Their wives are their slaves too  
They toil for sixteen hours a day  
But still can't pay for food  
They toil for sixteen hours a day  
But still can't pay for food

V. 3 The factories can't employ them  
They're turned away in scorn  
Children die from hunger  
Their wives are maimed at work

**Everyone:** The rich care but for rich reward  
Their lives the price that's paid  
The rich care but for rich reward  
Their lives the price that's paid

*(Key change)*

V. 4 And if they steal a rabbit  
To fill their children's mouths  
They're hanged or transported  
The price for being poor

**Everyone:** They're sent if they owe money  
Off to the debtor's goal  
Then they can neither pay their bills  
Or buy their families food

**Everyone:** And England did not succor them  
She left them destitute  
She left them destitute

**Narrator:** *1816 - Men, women, children toil for 16 hours a day in appalling conditions.*

**Chorus:** *Wah..... (Under narrator. Repeat as required)*

**Narrator:** *Many are maimed or killed at work.  
Most die young from occupational diseases.  
Many are forced to apply for poor relief as wages  
are below subsistence level.  
Among the common people a savage anger breaks out.*

**Everyone:** *(ad lib – animated shouting and screaming in anger)*  
Stop child labour  
Shorter working hours  
Improve working conditions  
Higher wages  
Minimum fixed wages  
Repeal the Corn Law  
Votes for all men  
We want manhood suffrage

**Everyone:** *(Shouting and clapping in rhythm)*  
Burn the mills, burn them  
Burn the mills, burn them  
  
Smash machines, smash them  
Smash machines, smash them  
  
Sack the towns, sack them  
Sack the towns, sack them  
  
Burn the mills, burn them  
Burn the mills, burn them  
  
Burn. Burn. Burn. Burn.  
Burn. Burn. Burn. Burn. Burn.

**Narrator:** *1817. The situation has intensified.*

**Women:** *(With anger)*  
My son, husband, brother, lover  
Arrested, imprisoned, transported  
Hanged for his part in the riots



## No. 5 WORK SONG

**Narrator:** *The rioting has been stopped by hanging or transporting those involved.*

*1818: The plight of the common people is unchanged.*

**Solo Woman:** *(With desperation)*

My man is a weaver, weaving cloth for pay, but  
Factories have opened up; we'll have no work today

**Chorus:** Where shall we go the find some work?  
We must be bold  
Shall we go to Manchester?  
Where the streets are paved with gold, gold, gold

**Solo 2<sup>nd</sup> Woman:**

My man is a cobbler, payed to mend your shoes  
Starving people cannot pay, now we can't pay our dues

**Chorus:** Where shall we go the find some work?  
We must be bold  
Shall we go to Manchester?  
Where the streets are paved with gold, gold, gold

**Solo 3<sup>rd</sup> Woman:**

My man's a small holder, growing food for you  
He pays taxes for the poor, now we're poor people too

**Chorus:** Where shall we go the find some work?  
We must be bold  
Shall we go to Manchester?  
Where the streets are paved with gold, gold, gold  
Where the streets are paved with gold  
*(Key change)*

**Solo Woman:** *(With desperation)*

My man is a poor man, beggars we will be  
Change the Government and laws. Set us poor folk free

**Chorus:** Where can we go the find some work  
Before we are too old  
We will march to Manchester  
Where the streets are paved with gold  
Where the streets are paved with  
Gold. Gold. Gold. Gold.  
Gold. Gold. Gold. Gold

**Narrator:** 1819 Manchester

**Chorus:** Manchester. Eighteen nineteen, Manchester,

**Narrator:** *On the morning of 16<sup>th</sup> August 1819 at St. Peters Square, Manchester, the peaceful crowd gathered to protest, with dignity and discipline, the majority dressed in their Sunday best.*

**Chorus:** Manchester. Eighteen Nineteen, Peterloo

**Narrator:** *On horseback the cavalry came, armed with sabres. By 2pm, the carnage was over and the field left full with abandoned banners and dead bodies, an event that became known, as ..... The Peterloo Massacre.*

**Chorus:** Peterloo. Eighteen nineteen, Peterloo.

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**Peterloo** was originally composed in a shorter version, in 1978, while the composer was Composer in Schools for two years, at Auckland's North Shore Teacher's College.

It was written for and performed by the College music department under the direction of Stuart Manins.

The handwritten manuscript remained untouched until 2006 when the composer loaded it on to a computer.

He revisited the score again between 2017 and 2019, revised and lengthened it to its present form.

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