

Concert in Sofia church • Sunday 22 August 2010



# Words of Realness

Poetry by Spoon Jackson, life-sentenced prisoner from California, USA. Music composed by Stefan Säfsten.

Svenska kyrkan   
SOFIA FÖRSAMLING

Stockholm Concert Orchestra  
  
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## Spoon Jackson

Spoon Jackson is serving a life sentence and has been imprisoned in California for more than 30 years. He has very small or no chances of being released. Yet still he can say: *“There is beauty in cell bars”*. In his lyrics, Spoon contemplates about most things in life – love, nature, the creation, aspects of richness and poverty. He philosophizes about finding peace when you are in jail as well as feeling both imprisoned and un-free although you are living in freedom.

Spoon Jackson has been awarded the PEN-prize for his writing; drama, poetry, novels and biography. In May 2010 his latest book, named *“By Heart”*, was released.

## Stefan Säfsten

Stefan Säfsten has been working as head of the music unit of Eskilstuna parish since March 2010. Before that he served as cantor in Kista parish for 27 years. He studied at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm and graduated in 1980, as Bachelor of Fine Arts.

Stefan has been leading several choires and ensembles. His preference in music includes most genres from jazz to chamber and church music. Stefan Säfsten arranges music as well as composing of his own. In 2004 he composed the suite *“Freedom for the prisoners”* based on Spoon Jackson’s lyrics, followed in 2009 by *“Word of Realness”* by the same poet.

>> **CONTACT:** stefan.safsten@svenskakyrkan.se



## Järva Röster

Järva Röster (Kista Church Choir) was founded in 1978, at the time of the inauguration of the church in Kista parish. The choir has about 35 members.

The repertoire consists of music from various genres and époques, from baroque to jazz. Järva Röster takes an active part in the parish service as well as frequent concerts, often with contemporary music.

The choir has performed in several churches in Stockholm and sites around Sweden. Järva Röster has also toured abroad on a number of occasions, e.g. USA, Italy, France, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Germany and Norway.

>> **CONTACT:** www.jarvaroster.se

## Vox Pacis

Vox Pacis (The Voice of Peace) is an association established in Stockholm in 2006. The purpose of Vox Pacis is to work for peace and reconciliation in the world – by musical, artistic, inter-cultural and inter-religious means. Vox Pacis cooperates with artists and scientists from all the major world religions, and has a network spread over five continents.

>> **CONTACT:** www.voxpaci.com



## Two suites – two tours to California

” ” About seven years ago I was given a packet of poetry, together with the question: “Could you compose music to some of these poems? They are written by a life-sentenced american prisoner named Spoon Jackson.” Some of my choir members, working in the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, had a colleague that was corresponding with this inmate. “Of course,” I said, “I can take a look at that.”

After a while I started reading the poetry and became totally fascinated by Spoon’s way of describing his situation, his surroundings and his emotions. I decided to do more of this than just set a single poem to music. The result was the suite “*Freedom for the Prisoners*”, first performed in the church of Kista in May 2004.

In spring of 2006 the choir and I had the opportunity to go to San Francisco to perform “*Freedom for the Prisoners*”. During that tour many new and useful contacts were made. The Swedish church in San Francisco helped us connect with the Peace lutheran congregation in Danville and it’s pastor Steve Harms, who wanted us to return for another tour.

In May 2009 we went back to California, to perform the newly composed suite “*Words of Realness*”. This time we did performances in San Francisco, as well as in Danville, Sacramento and Nevada City. Beside of these “ordinary” concerts we were given the unique possibility to perform inside the New Folsom State Prison for the life sentenced prisoners, including Spoon Jackson. An amazing experience in many ways. We also did a concert inside the San Quentin Prison.

Stefan Säfsten  
*Composer and conductor*



# Words of Realness

## Recitation Jes 61:1-2

### Realness

It's all about  
keeping it real  
no matter  
how you feel

Keeping it real  
the way the ants  
move up an ant hill

It's all about  
keeping it real  
when there are no clouds  
you can see

It's all about  
keeping it real  
because it's always  
raining somewhere

Although our hearts  
been broken before  
it's all about  
keeping our hearts  
as open as the sky

It's all about  
keeping it real  
the way some plants grow  
through the concrete and steel

It's all about  
keeping it real  
though engulfed  
in the body

It's all about  
keeping the soul free  
free to soar  
anywhere it need be

It's all about  
keeping it real  
no matter how  
distant you feel

For realness eats raw meat  
and does not waver  
nor drift on the currents  
He has the staying power  
of the sun

Realness walks only  
in his own shoes

### Sweet Mother Earth

"Mystery of the wind and rain"  
Mystery of the wildflower in pain  
mystery of your majesty  
sweet Mother Earth

I feel your music, your grace  
your power, your light  
your hope for the human race  
we all sang your songs  
like the wind and rain  
like the fire in the night  
Close to the water our dreams swell  
our love a bottomless well

When you shake, quake  
rattle and wave  
you remind us  
to be humble, loving and brave

Keeping us in awe  
reminding us to pause  
and reflect on our cause  
reminding us to respect  
the mystery

Mystery of the fire and water  
Mystery of the heart in love  
Mystery of your majesty  
sweet Mother Earth

## **The Hand**

Moon hands  
Water hands  
My hands  
human hands  
heavy hands  
Grasping hands  
seemingly strong hands  
that weakens with time  
unlike moon or water hands

Human hands – what good  
are they really?  
We grasp things  
we can't really have –  
Hold things, tenderly  
we can't really hold  
Like heart hands grasping love

Better to have moon or water hands, hands  
that grasp  
without holding on

## **The Norm**

Dad, it's just the sun and moon  
an ordinary sun and moon

A trillion stars shining, glowing  
sustaining planets  
and life around them

Yet there's never enough light  
to light the universe  
the immeasurable darkness sucks in

The heavens, the trickle of stars  
cannot fill the darkness  
with light

My life spans the darkness  
inside the atom  
where I came from and will  
return one day  
back home with all the other  
stuff of the universe  
said to have been contained  
in a pea.

But there's a darkness that takes me  
to other worlds – worlds without atoms  
where the stuff of this universe  
means nothing

Darkness drapes the doors  
of these worlds  
worlds without gravity and pain –  
where flying is the norm

## **No World**

I become time and not exist.  
I become moment and live forever.  
Water and sprinklers take me away  
like the smoke from a cigarette.

I soar, I drift down sandy  
moon-bleached beaches.  
A muggy misty eyed Diana  
light my path.

The wind bends the sand  
like the sand bends man  
to fit shapes  
the earth demands.

I become water and travel  
anywhere in the ocean.  
I become sky and be  
anywhere in the universe.

There are billions of worlds and stars.  
We may not have our own planets  
like "the little Prince"  
found in his space travels.

We all have our own  
little worlds, no matter  
where we are.  
No matter how absurd.

Or how like the Do Do bird  
we choose to be.  
If we aren't careful  
they can become prisons.

## **No Moon**

I was afraid this would happen  
the way the night looks with no moon  
The way the wind whistles off  
the back porch

You want to love me  
How can I tell you  
I have a life but I don't have a life

What can I tell you  
Shall I tell you about  
the bars that don't speak

or the razor wire  
that longs to sever the throat  
or the cold winds  
that bounce off  
the emptiness

Shall I tell you  
about the trees 200 yards away  
across the river of electric wire  
How the trees haunt me  
like the smell of barbeque  
the sent of a mountain meadow  
the sight of crimson painted toes.

Across the river, across the fields  
across the hills  
there is wine  
that belongs to no one

What can I tell you  
Shall I tell you about  
the lovely women I never had

Shall I tell you  
about the moon fading away  
like a piece of hard round candy

I was afraid this would happen  
the way the night feels with no moon  
The way the wind whistles off  
the back porch

Pushing on the screen door  
like ten cats,  
like ten mad men fighting

## **More Rain**

I sit on this metal bunk  
facing a 3 inch by 2  
and a half foot long window

Watching beads of rain  
well up and criss-cross  
on the window pane  
looking like clear dreadlocks

I sit watching a dark sky  
swell up like dark bread

Bird shadows blink by  
now and then  
Rain is better looked at  
in darkness or by candle fire

I can only see little bits  
of rain and sky – there is  
the back side of another cell block

I would be lying  
if I did not say I wish  
there was more window

So I could see more sky  
So I could see more clouds  
So I could see more rain  
So I could see more sweet darkness  
So I could see.

## **SAG**

How do I hold my temper  
keeping my grace  
and not become bitter  
stuck in this infamous place

I remember even at seven  
I dreamed of a better place  
a better race  
than the human race

Stuck in this infamous place  
without a trace  
only a history of misery  
and indentured slavery

I pledge no allegiance to this flag  
and free,  
I let my pants sag.

I am the little black boy's souls  
taken from its mother's  
bosom and sold

While the old ones still  
linked to Africa kills  
the white ones with his head  
down and eyes closed

Stuck in this infamous place  
without a trace  
only a history of misery  
and indentured slavery

I pledge no allegiance to this flag  
and free,  
I let my pants sag

I am John Lennon who spoke  
of one race and one place.  
I am mother Teresa  
unafraid of any gunner.

I am Martin Luther King  
shot down on the balcony  
in the mids of his dream

I am Malcolm X betrayed  
by the beastie and burnt  
surreptitiously

Stuck in this infamous place  
Without a trace  
only a history of misery  
and indentury slavery

I pledge no allegiance to this flag  
and free,  
I let my pants sag

I am the one not mentioned  
in your constitution as human  
not allowed to vote  
until it made no difference  
Job is just an old metaphore  
the true warrior was a slave  
and John Brown the true  
hero of the brave

I am Emmet Till,  
hung from an old beautiful  
southern oak tree

Stuck in this infamous place  
without a trace  
only a history of misery  
and indentured slavery

I pledge no allegiance to this flag  
and free,  
I let my pants sag

## **Let Go**

In the desert the cactus  
needles only stick you.

Replace all the ugly  
and stupid thoughts  
with loving and beautiful ones.  
We only have this moment.

Like a mirage in the desert  
take notice of the little worry  
that is magnified  
and let it drift away; let it go.

## **Hope**

I'll be released, one day  
one way or another  
by a beautiful real life  
or a beautiful real death  
at the time dwelling in fear  
that my own death  
could be near

Hope touched my heart deeply  
and released me from my fear  
she gave me joy  
she gave me peace  
never to give up  
even in death  
even in life

Hope touched my mind  
and freed me to see

That even when you are  
not in my conscious mind  
one way or another  
I am released from my fear  
and the simple things of life  
become clear

You help me stand above the strife  
hand in hand we soar  
you give me life  
you give me joy  
you give me peace

At the time dwelling in fear that  
my own death  
could be near  
she calms my soul  
lifts my spirit  
and releases me  
and links me to Mother Earth  
by a beautiful real life  
or a beautiful real death

### **April Showers**

I trust the rain  
to fall in April showers  
I trust zephyr's breeze to blow  
for hours  
I trust the sun to set  
for the moon to rise at twilight.

I often give out little trusts like raindrops  
although often they are taken too far  
and sold like trinkets  
to an aborigine.

I trust in God  
although often I don't believe  
I trust a child's spirit to live  
despite death's constant bellows.

I trust Aphrodite –  
in all her ardent charms  
The beauty of a butterfly  
The loyalty of the sun  
and its warmth.

I trust in tiny raindrops  
to open my protesting heart.

### **Recitation Rom 12:20–21**

#### **Forgetting**

The sparrows forgives the hawk  
for snatching its breath of spring.  
Life forgives death  
for sucking the plants and animals dry.

Death forgives life  
for replenishing the land, for making  
man and woman over again.

The trees forgive the sun  
for being sometimes overbearing.  
The oceans forgive the moon  
for having them overflow their banks.

Out of respect the sun sets  
and allows the moon its full glow –  
all being stars and one love  
and forgive each other.  
The human forgives...

### **Recitation 1 Joh 3:18–21**

#### **Moment to Moment**

We cannot capture time  
It is not contained in an hour glass  
nor the palms of someone's hands.

We cannot capture a sweet rainy day  
nor a glorious sunset  
and the sweet sprinkles of a rainy day  
Moment to moment is all we have.

When will we start forgiving ourselves  
and others  
and live and love ourselves  
and others?  
Moment to moment is all we have.

When will we stop blaming ourselves  
and others  
and just be ourselves  
and let others

In this moment, each moment  
enjoy this moment.

Take this moment to forgive  
yourself, your friend, your enemy  
your mom, dad, sister, brother, partner  
or lover.

Take this moment to share a smile  
with people you don't know  
For moment to moment – this moment  
is all we have.



## **Yesterday's Ken**

Of joy  
speak in tongues  
on silent winds

Of love  
dance on clouds  
in a distant  
galaxy

Of hate keep it  
out of the gates  
of the heart, soul  
and spirit

Of truth  
let it be  
It can only be seen  
by one eye

Of knowledge  
know nothing  
Yesterday's ken  
is of a different reality  
The moment's a butterfly's wing

Sing of joy  
Dance of love  
Dream of peace.

## **My Reward**

Is your being you  
keeping the circle round  
my reward is your smile  
and your mindful glance  
sweetly piercing the moment.

My reward is your walk  
like a big cat  
with your head held back  
and your tail high.

My reward is the way  
you dance across the floor  
from inside out  
your toes swaying  
with mother Earth  
like grass in the field

My reward is seeing  
you being you  
a blended balance  
of love and realness  
happy and sad

It is a circle  
one foot in darkness  
one foot in light  
and love and realness  
keep the circle round



“

Another Swedish brother, Stefan Säfsten, a conductor and composer, has brought life to my poetry through music. Stefan and his wife, Lena, and the Järva Röster choir gave a small concert tour in the United States to promote *Freedom for the Prisoners*, the CD Stefan created of my poems set to his music. Stefan and I created our second project, *Words of Realness* and the release of that CD was also followed by performances of the work.

How do I hold a sunny day in my heart? How do I speak about the performance of *Words of Realness* that just took place here inside New Folsom Prison on the small yard not more than a week ago? What words can embrace the voice, the music, and sound that angels would hold dear?

To have sat on the grass and watched the prisoners and some prison staff enjoy an unprecedented concert event, simply as people enjoying a show, freed my spirit and heart and reminded me of our last night at San Quentin performing *Waiting for Godot* when I sat in the audience to share the last scenes.

Järva Röster, soundSFound Orchestra, and conductor, Stefan, brought inside New Folsom and left inside New Folsom beauty behind cell bars. I felt finally at home, at home with my Swedish people as we spoke, smiled, and laughed.

”

Quote from Spoon Jackson's latest book "*By Heart*"





## **Participants**

Järva Röster

Stockholm Concert Orchestra

Rebecca Davant, mezzo soprano

Nils Davant, recitation

Conductor: Stefan Säfsten