

FRANK MEHRING

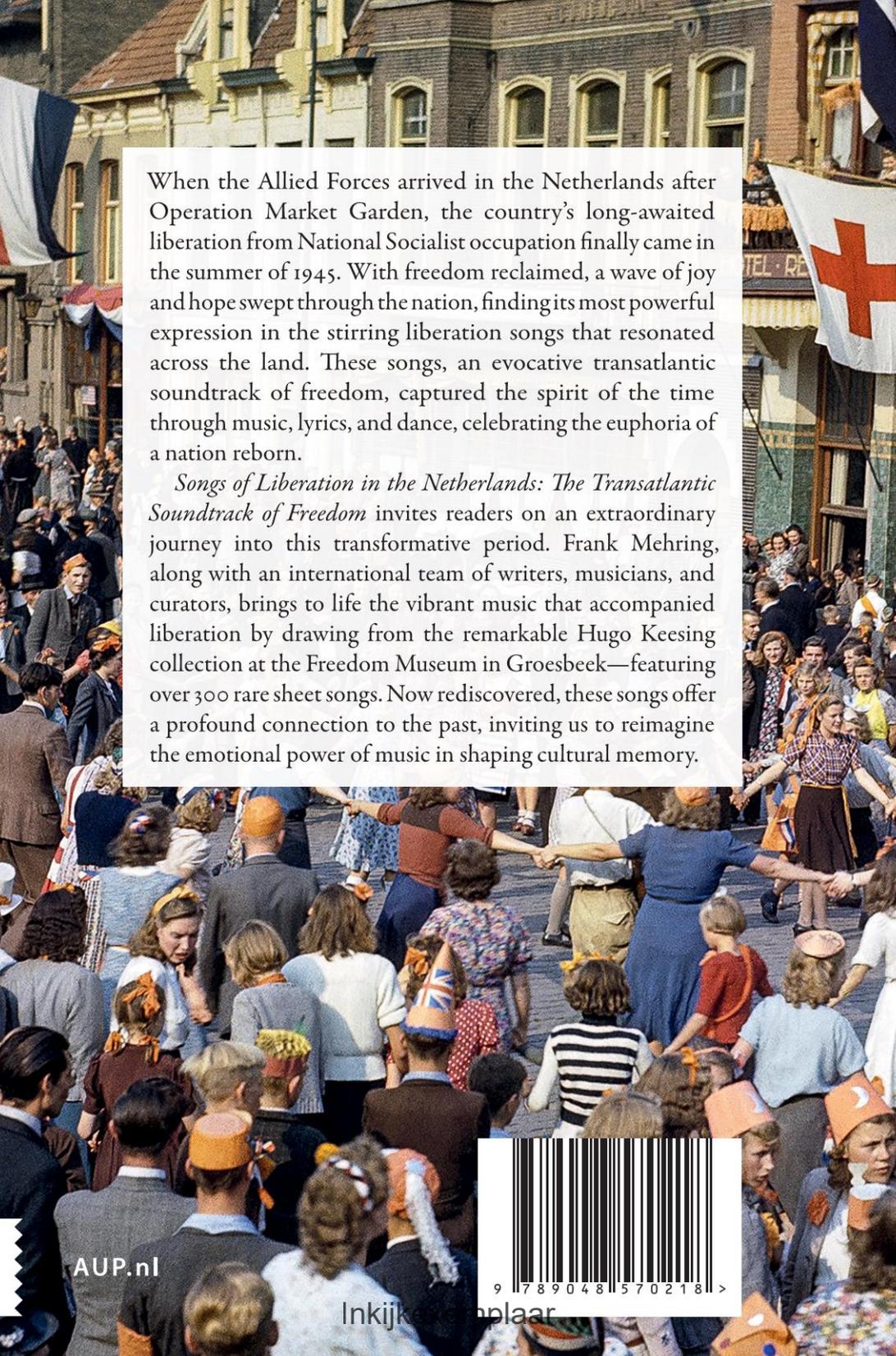
Songs of
Liberation
in the Netherlands



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THE TRANSATLANTIC
SOUNDTRACK OF FREEDOM

Inkijkexemplaar



When the Allied Forces arrived in the Netherlands after Operation Market Garden, the country's long-awaited liberation from National Socialist occupation finally came in the summer of 1945. With freedom reclaimed, a wave of joy and hope swept through the nation, finding its most powerful expression in the stirring liberation songs that resonated across the land. These songs, an evocative transatlantic soundtrack of freedom, captured the spirit of the time through music, lyrics, and dance, celebrating the euphoria of a nation reborn.

Songs of Liberation in the Netherlands: The Transatlantic Soundtrack of Freedom invites readers on an extraordinary journey into this transformative period. Frank Mehring, along with an international team of writers, musicians, and curators, brings to life the vibrant music that accompanied liberation by drawing from the remarkable Hugo Keesing collection at the Freedom Museum in Groesbeek—featuring over 300 rare sheet songs. Now rediscovered, these songs offer a profound connection to the past, inviting us to reimagine the emotional power of music in shaping cultural memory.



*Songs of
Liberation
in the Netherlands*

For Jan and Hugo

Inkijkexemplaar

FERRANK MEHRING

George G. Stone
Libertarians
in the Outlands
and the Mainland



THE TRANSLANTIC
SOUNDTRACK OF FREEDOM

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Unless otherwise specified, all translations of song lyrics provided are literal, aiming for accuracy in meaning rather than poetic interpretation or artistic embellishment.











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I can hardly bear to listen in the kitchen,
since beautiful music stirs me to the very depths of my soul.

Tuesday, April 11, 1944

Anne Frank

Looking back, for me it was as if I
had actually survived the war with music.

December 10, 2014

Jan Hendriks

May the music of liberation
serve as a reminder
of the inspiring heights we can reach
when we continue to strive for
justice, freedom, and democracy.

January 20, 2025

Frank Mehring



Eens komt weer de dag van de vrede, cover (1945)

PRELUDE: FIND THE COST OF FREEDOM IN SONGS

Frank Mehring

At the height of the Vietnam War in 1970, amidst a world shaken by conflict and yearning for peace, American singer-songwriter Stephen Stills penned one of the most hauntingly beautiful reflections on war and freedom. In just four lines, his song *Find the Cost of Freedom* captured the raw emotions of an era, echoing the fears, hopes, and grief of a generation engulfed in turmoil. The song's enduring resonance is a testament to its timeless message, compelling us to continually reflect on the cost of freedom in the face of violence and war.¹

Find the cost of freedom
Buried in the ground.
Mother Earth will swallow you.
Lay your body down.

What makes these lines so incredibly moving? They compel us to confront the sobering reality that the freedoms we cherish today have been paid for with the lives of others. The imagery of 'Mother Earth' swallowing the

fallen unites us with the countless soldiers and activists who have sacrificed everything for something greater than themselves. The song's true power, however, is fully realized in its musical performance by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young (CSNY), where the listener becomes an intimate participant in this shared human experience.

The human voice—arguably the most primal and affecting instrument—reaches into the depths of our being, blending rational thought with raw emotion. Each member of CSNY brings a distinct vocal quality to the song: David Crosby's smooth, warm baritone; Stephen Stills' raspy, soulful tenor; Graham Nash's pure, soaring harmonies; and Neil Young's distinctive, nasal timbre that adds a piercing clarity to the blend. Whether performed with a single guitar or a cappella, this song never fails to evoke a powerful emotional response—a mix of reverence for the freedoms we enjoy and, in the best-case scenario, a renewed commitment to safeguarding them.

This sentiment of collective responsibility is reflected in the American civil rights movement, where songs like *We Shall Overcome* performed by Joan Baez and Bob Dylan's anthems like *Blowin' in the Wind*, *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, or *Like a Rolling Stone* united a generation in the fight against war, segregation, and racial injustice. The renowned folk musician and activist Peter Seeger famously reflected on the transformative power of music as a tool for social and political change, arguing that the 'right song at the right time can change history'. In addition, participation was the key for his use of music to bring about change.² Music became a rallying cry for equality and a way to channel collective hopes for a world free from oppression.³ Joan Baez to this day performs the song that once was part of the civil rights movement but has in its DNA the wish for peace across time, nations, and peoples.

We shall live in peace
We shall live in peace
We shall live in peace someday

This book takes us back to a similarly transformative period in history: the final days of World War II. It highlights the period between Operation Market Garden in September 1944 and the jubilant Dutch summer

of 1945, when the shadow of war finally lifted. During this brief but significant window, the genre of liberation songs emerged as a powerful expression of newfound freedom. These songs—infused with the joy, relief, and resilience of a people released from tyranny—were much more than mere entertainment. They were declarations of life, victory, and the human spirit’s refusal to be subdued.

The surviving sheet music from this era, with its vibrant cover art, witty and poignant lyrics, and often irresistible melodies, offers a rich yet overlooked archive of cultural history. While much has been written about the military strategies, political negotiations, and acts of heroism that shaped the postwar world, the liberation songs provide a unique and deeply personal lens through which to understand this pivotal time.

Exploring the cost of freedom through art—especially music—offers us a deeply engaging opportunity to appreciate the lives we lead in democratic societies and reminds us of our duty to preserve the values we hold dear. In his book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, the French theorist Jacques Attali argued that music often foretells social and political change. He suggested that shifts in musical styles and practices can act as early indicators of broader societal transformations. Conversely, music can also be a tool for those in power to maintain control, propagating official ideologies and suppressing dissent. Yet, when wielded by the oppressed, music becomes a form of resistance—to mobilize, inspire, and bring about change. Liberation songs are quintessential examples of this, functioning as powerful weapons against tyranny.

Just as the civil rights movement used music to unite and inspire people in their struggle for equality and justice, this tradition of resistance through music has transcended time and borders. Decades later, in a vastly different context, the Russian punk collective Pussy Riot carried forward this legacy, using their performances to confront authoritarianism and demand accountability. While the movements differ in their historical and cultural circumstances, both demonstrate the enduring power of music as a rallying force for freedom and social change.

While Attali’s analysis emphasizes music as both a forecaster of social change and a tool for maintaining power, the performances of the Russian Punk group Pussy Riot serve as a potent example of how music can be harnessed by the oppressed to resist authoritarianism. By fusing art with

activism, Pussy Riot directly challenges the structures of control that Attali suggests music can help dismantle, reinforcing the idea that music is not only a reflection of societal shifts but also an active agent in the fight for freedom. Their performance of the punk prayer *Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Drive Putin Away* inside Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior in 2012 exemplified their defiance, using provocative lyrics and location to criticize the close relationship between church and state. The song title encapsulates the core of the protest, calling for divine intervention to remove Putin from power. Other parts of the lyrics such as 'The Church's praise of rotten leaders!' criticize the Russian Orthodox Church for supporting Putin and aligning with corrupt political leadership or 'Black robes, golden epaulettes; Freedom's phantom's gone to heaven!' metaphorically reference the clergy's opulence and their abandonment of the ideals of freedom. Music, in this context, transcends entertainment, becoming a vehicle for political resistance, catalyzing public discourse, and embodying a collective yearning for freedom.⁴

The tradition of using music to celebrate freedom and as a call to action whenever liberty is threatened continues to thrive in today's global cultural environment. Modern anthems like Lady Gaga's *Born This Way* and Katy Perry's *Roar* echo the same themes of self-expression and liberation from societal constraints. In Nate Parker's 2016 film *Birth of a Nation*, the protagonist's call to 'Sing to him a new song!' is powerfully underscored by Andra Day's soulful *Rise Up*, a song that has become a modern hymn for justice and equality.

I'll rise up
Rise like the day
I'll rise up
In spite of the ache
I will rise a thousand times again
And we'll rise up
High like the waves
We'll rise up
In spite of the ache
We'll rise up
And we'll do it a thousand times again.