

Artist Inspiration

My name is Vienna Carroll and I sing. Singing is my passion, I love singing; I sing all the time. I grew up happily spending hours and hours of deeply passionate and often unaccompanied singing of the Spirituals and traditional gospel hymns during the marathon church services of the Black Ladies of my youth – my great-grandmother, my grandmother, my godmother, and my mother.

As a child and adolescent I sang along with television commercial jingles, as well as my favorite "inspirations" - Dinah Washington, Ray Charles, Andy Williams and the Beatles. I sang militarily in my Salvation Army church choir, as well as European music and show tunes in my school choirs. I studied violin and piano. Music was all around but no songs moved me like that early church music.

As part of my studies at Yale University, I began to explore these Spirituals as a body of work. It was there that I felt that an important part of their story was still "waiting to be told."

I found the stories of those spirituals thirty-years later and became compelled to tell them. During an extended visit to York, PA., I visited the local historical society and to my total surprise and utter wonderment and I found these *books*. *Books* that documented the "slave grapevine" (the manner by which slaves communicated vital information, warnings, and current events) as well as York's historical involvement in Underground Railroad activity and its role as a hotbed of abolitionism; *books*...that brought black people out of the shadows, where they had patiently waited to be remembered, acknowledged, and honored. I strongly believe that the slave grapevine was in fact the *actual* Underground Railroad. This unexpected, but welcomed discovery, has led me to the inevitable conclusion that "We freed ourselves." Thus, *Singin Wid A Sword in Ma Han* was born.

Spirituals were a primary force in all aspects of life: work, relaxation, religion, etc. Much has been written about the role of this music during the time of slavery as vehicles of spiritual escape and spiritual freedom. Of course the Spirituals figured prominently in physical escape and successfully achieving freedom as well. I have imagined, and *Singin* shows, how.