

Paradise road essay sample

[Art & Culture](#), [Music](#)



Paradise Road portrays people who, when stripped of the status and freedom, discover the power embedded in music. How does the film use music to unite people? Music is defined as “Vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion”. Bruce Beresford’s 1997 film, Paradise Road shows that music is more than that. It defines life, who we are, where we come from, what we value, is sometimes all we have, and ultimately unites our different cultures. The film deals with subjugation of women during the time of WWII, and the different cultures in those groups that all use music to define themselves. Even though the women, Japanese, and I use music to express who we are this is irrelevant when coming into contact with conflict, as common ground is frequently taken into account. In the time of 1942, the patriarchal ladder was strong and thriving, having men at the top and women at the bottom. Often being patronised and abused violently, the women in Paradise Road were dominated by men. In the first scene, the men are making jokes about the Japanese, saying that this is impossible for them to penetrate their city.

The women protest against the men and mention the Pearl Harbor incident, which the men dismiss with condescending retaliations such as, “My dear ladies...” which really means, “You have not a clue what you are talking about”. By doing this, the supremacy of men is set up from the beginning. It is also setup by a woman singing “Mad about the Boy”, conducted by a man. The song has the lyrics “I’m mad about the boy, and I know it’s stupid to be mad about the boy, I’m so ashamed of it.” This song immediately portrays that the silly women, even though they are ashamed of it, cannot

resist. It also illustrates that they crave the attention of men, know that it is stupid to, but are still obsessed with them. Beresford has used music to show how the women were dominated by the men. When the women arrive in Sumatra, they are immediately beaten by the Japanese men, as they want to set up the domination over them as soon as possible. The soldiers beat them senseless for undeserved respect, thus the women had no power, until they finally plotted against the soldiers to form a vocal orchestra.

This is the first sign of retaliation against men, and it was through music. One night, the second year of their horrible stay, the vocal orchestra, despite being prohibited to, gather in a large group to perform to their fellow women. The soldiers immediately react, and with a camera shot showing a soldier being the focus and the women being in the background, representing that the soldiers dominate them, they charge over to stop the celebration. Just before the men could apprehend them, the orchestra started singing, stopping the men in their boots. They are speechless; moved by the music, they put away their weapons and sit on the ground. As this happens, the camera now shows the choir in a huge beam of light, whilst the soldiers are now small and in the dark. The effect this gives is that the women are now in power for that brief moment, as the light (the good) has disrupted the dark (evil). At the same time the powerful music plays, the camera cuts to various places: the sick bay, showing the smiles on their faces, the cemetery, as a way of commemorating their lives and Captain Tanaka behind a barb wire fence.

This symbolises that their music is impenetrable, as it is locked behind the women's hearts, surrounded by a barb wire fence. As Beresford displays, music is representative of your culture in your life, and is important to everyone. In the film, a record player would often play the national anthem of Japan whilst the women were made to bow, as the flag raised and the soldiers saluted. This illustrated that the Japanese used music to express their culture through their national anthem, and that they highly valued that song, making the women also bow. The camera angle was from above, showing the flag wave through the women, symbolising the power they have over these women. This power was only in the women's favour after they sang to the Japanese general, who then asked Pargiter, through his translator, to sing a traditional Japanese folk song. Immediately, Pargiter declines as her " appreciation of the Japanese culture is at a low end". Pargiter most likely would have sung anything but a Japanese song but as because she had been treated so badly, she felt repelled by the thought.

If she had agreed to sing the song, it would be like throwing away the taste of freedom they just had, singing their own songs that the Japanese did not want to do in the first place. Being a musician, I can empathise with Pargiter's decision to not sing the Japanese song. I value her choice, as I also feel that music represents who you are, because it is an expression of your own life, not what others want you to do with your life. Music makes you feel united with the people around you, as you are free, enjoying yourself, and conveying who you are. This demonstrates how important culture is. Pargiter may have been stripped of her clothes and basic necessities, but she still had her own culture through the classical music they sung, something the

Japanese could not take away. The music they sing has an effect on the ruthless Captain Tanaka, as one day, he held Pargiter at gun point and led her into the forest. Suspenseful music played as they walked, implying that something bad was about to happen to her. The camera angle in this scene focused on the expression of fear on Pargiter's face.

This was to give emphasis to the already suspenseful scene. Surprisingly, Captain Tanaka sat down and started singing a traditional Japanese folk song. This illustrated how much music means to him in his culture, as he wanted to share this with Pargiter. Another way Beresford stresses the importance of music is by playing the song "London Berry Air". This song is the victory anthem of Northern Ireland, which symbolises that the war is over, and although the women have struggled, they have become victorious in life. Beresford is once again accenting the significance of music, how it is a part of our day to day lives and our cultures. Music is important to everyone's cultures; it is played before sporting matches, when prestigious medals are awarded, and at important ceremonies. It represents our heritage because of the years it has been built up by our society, and then spreads to other places in the world, uniting us all. When common ground is discovered, conflict between differing social groups, such as the Danish and American in the film, is irrelevant to the women. In Paradise Road, a common ground is established through the creation of the vocal orchestra, granting the opportunity for all the women, despite the different backgrounds, to amalgamate as a community.

This is important because without each other, the women will not survive. The first evidence of this is through the friendship of Pargiter (from the English Upper Class) and Daisy Drummond (a missionary), as initially, in Pargiter's words she " Never mixed with missionaries – we were taught to look down on them". They become friends because they both share a common interest in music, and Daisy encourages Pargiter to run the vocal orchestra. Beresford is displaying that through the music, these two ladies have resolved the divide between the two different social classes. Racial divides also add to the conflict, and the development of the vocal orchestra. Mrs Roberts, at first, does not want to join the orchestra because of her prejudice views on racial backgrounds of Malaysian prisoners. After the violent death of Wing, she reconsiders her attitude towards people with different racial backgrounds, and she unites with the orchestra.

She realises that she needs to bond with the other women over music, as it is essential to survival, and that no one is more important than anyone else. This is why the Japanese can treat them as one, not individually. If one of them acts out of line, the whole camp is punished. The soldiers are not on common ground to the prisoners, and cause the conflict, as they are above them on the social ladder. This resembles real life, the rich trampling over the poor, because they have the power. In a classroom, a teacher will often give detention to the whole class because a few students are acting out, which is treating them on common ground. It causes the students of different social groups to come together to try and successfully persuade the teacher into not giving them detention. This illustrates that it does not matter what ethnic, or social background you are from when encountering conflict, as

often times, people around you will be treated on common ground, as well as you.

Music is more than a sound, it is a tool used to unite our world. Paradise Road depicts exactly how powerful music is, and can influence how we feel about different people, because they identify themselves with their own music. Using background music, discreet imagery and having the main story being driven by music, Beresford successfully exhibits how music was used to save the women's lives, and explain how they feel at that point in time. The music united them all.