

Freedom Karaoke Songbook

The Freedom Karaoke Songbook contains popular music of the past 50+ years that has been censored or banned by various actors for various reasons. From the BBC to Wal-Mart, corporations, governments, and media outlets have established levers of pressure to maintain control over rights of expression that fly in the face of the status quo.

The counter-cultural value of music is well documented, from protest songs to spiritual hymns to punk rock. The songs collected here show an unusual history of pop, revealing the subtle ways in which censorship can be enforced, but also the curious nature of who might be targeted.

We hope you find the list intriguing, surprising, and most of all, fun to sing. Freedom Karaoke is an opportunity to bring these songs to life in a space committed to ideas, expression, and creativity; think of your performance as an act of protest against the distant levers of silence.

How to read the catalogue:

Band	Song(s)	Catalog Number(s)
	Explanation of censorship	
	Alt: Alternative songs by artist if the banned song is not included in the karaoke software.	

When censored songs are not present in the catalog, alternative suggestions by the band will be listed below each entry.

Compiled by Eryk Salvaggio for swissnex San Francisco's swissnex Salon, October 5, 2018.

ABBA	"Waterloo"	12284
	<i>Banned by the BBC during the first Gulf War for its reference to a military surrender, along with "Under Attack."</i>	
	Alt: Gimmie Gimmie Gimmie	01956
	Alt: Mama Mia	02101
	Alt: Dancing Queen	14090
AC/DC	"Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap"	N/A
	"Hell's Bells"	N/A
	"TNT"	N/A
	<i>Listed on a memorandum of songs recommended not to be aired by Clear Channel affiliate stations after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.</i>	
	Alt: "Highway to Hell"	02110
Alanis Morissette	"Ironic"	01085
	<i>Listed on a memorandum of songs recommended not to be aired by Clear Channel affiliate stations after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.</i>	
B-52s	"Rock Lobster"	11912
	"Love Shack"	13186
	<i>Banned from Russia after a dossier presented to the USSR by the Youth Wing of the Communist Party suggested the B-52s "advocated violence."</i>	
Barry McGuire	"Eve of Destruction"	11119
	<i>Protest anthem banned by various US radio stations for lyrical content regarding the war in Vietnam. One station declaring the song "an aid to the enemy." Said to have inspired a response, the military anthem "Ballad of the Green Berets." McGuire's song reached #1 on the charts in Norway.</i>	
Beastie Boys	"Sabotage"	N/A

	<i>Listed on a memorandum of songs recommended not to be aired by Clear Channel affiliate stations after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.</i>	
	Alt: "Fight for Your Right (To Party)"	15373
Beyonce	"Formation"	020243
	"Single Ladies"	018358
	"Hold Up"	20181
	<i>Told by the Malaysian authorities that she could only perform a 2009 concert under the conditions that she cover up her entire body, change her lyrics, and abandon her choreography. She refused and her concerts were cancelled..</i>	
Billie Holiday	"Strange Fruit"	N/A
	"Love for Sale"	N/A
	<i>"Strange Fruit" was banned from Philadelphia airwaves in 1939 for its depiction of a lynching; "Love for Sale" was banned by several US radio stations for depicting prostitution.</i>	
	Alt: "Come Rain or Come Shine"	01727
Billy Joel	"Only the Good Die Young"	11818
	<i>Billy Joel claims the single was performing poorly until it was banned by a Catholic College Radio Station: "That song was released as a single back in 1977, I think. It was not really doing very well, just languishing in the charts. Then it was banned by a radio station in New Jersey at a Catholic university. The minute the kids found out it was banned, they ran out in droves and it became a huge hit. If you tell kids they can't have something, that's what they want. I don't understand the problem with the song. It's about a guy trying to seduce a girl but, at the end of the song, she's still chaste and pure and he hasn't got anything. So I never understood what the furor was about. But I did write a letter to the archdiocese who'd banned it, asking them to ban my next record."</i>	
Bing Crosby	"I'll be Home for Christmas"	13491
	<i>Banned by the BBC in 1942 for possibly lowering morale, because the song ends with "I'll be home for Christmas / If only in my dreams."</i>	

Bjork	"Declaration of Independence"	N/A
	<i>The Chinese government condemned Icelandic chanteuse Bjork after she shouted "Tibet! Tibet!" during a performance of "Declare Independence" in Shanghai. The incident led the People's Republic of China to declare it would ban "any artistic group or individual who have ever engaged in activities which threaten our national sovereignty." Years later in Tokyo Bjork made a similar statement during the same song, but about Kosovo. A Serbian festival immediately cancelled her scheduled performance.</i>	
	Alt: "It's Oh So Quiet"	03217
Blondie	"Atomic"	04242
	<i>Banned by the BBC during the first Gulf War for its reference to Atomic Weapons.</i>	
	Alt: "Heart of Glass"	11263
	Alt: "Call Me"	14096
Bob Dylan	"The Times They Are A-Changin'"	12173
	"Like a Rolling Stone"	11588
	<i>Bob Dylan's political lyrics resulted in a rejected Chinese visa application for Dylan's performances in Beijing and Shanghai in 2010. The folk singer was invited back to China after promising to perform a pre-approved setlist.</i>	
Bob Marley	"Buffalo Soldier"	02048
	<i>Banned by the BBC during the first Gulf War.</i>	
Bobby 'Boris' Pickett	"The Monster Mash"	11710
	<i>The Halloween novelty song about a party for monsters was banned by the BBC for being "too morbid."</i>	
Bruce Springsteen	"I'm on Fire"	16761
	<i>Banned by the BBC during the first Gulf War.</i>	

Cat Stevens	"Peace Train"	15225
	<i>Cat Stevens, now Yusuf Islam, had converted to Islam prior to 9/11. From 2004 to 2006, he was forbidden from entering the United States after being placed on a terrorist watch list. His song "Peace Train" was also listed on a memorandum of songs recommended not to be aired by Clear Channel affiliate stations after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.</i>	
Cher	Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down)	02885
	If I Could Turn Back Time	16509
	<i>"Bang Bang" was banned by the BBC during the first Gulf War. The video for "If I Could Turn Back Time" was banned by MTV until it was re-shot; the video portrayed Cher dressed in a provocative full-body fishnet catsuit performing aboard the US Navy's battleship, the USS Missouri. The Navy has not allowed a music video to be filmed on its ships since.</i>	
Cutting Crew	I Just Died (In Your Arms Tonight)	00543
	<i>Banned by the BBC during the first Gulf War.</i>	
Dixie Chicks	Goodbye Earl	14775
	<i>Several country western stations prohibited this song about a woman taking revenge on an abusive spouse. The Dixie Chicks also faced significant backlash on country radio stations after speaking out against the Gulf War.</i>	
Elton John	"Rocket Man"	14511
	<i>Listed on a memorandum of songs recommended not to be aired by Clear Channel affiliate stations after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.</i>	
Elvis Costello	"Radio, Radio"	N/A
	<i>Told not to perform the song by Saturday Night Live executive producer Lorne Michaels in 1977, because of lyrics strongly critical of the media. Costello played it anyway, and was banned from SNL for 12 years.</i>	
	Alt: "Veronica"	15273
Eminem	"The Real Slim Shady"	02108

	<i>FCC fined Colorado Springs radio station KKMG \$7,000 in 2001 for playing a censored version of the song, which the FCC claimed contained "innuendo."</i>	
Frank Sinatra	"My Way"	02069
	<i>Listed here as a unique reversal, in that Frank Sinatra's anthem concerning individual perseverance is, in fact, one of the only Western songs ever performed at a state function in North Korea.</i>	
George Michael	"I Want Your Sex"	11406
	<i>The BBC restricted this song to late night radio play for "promoting promiscuity."</i>	
Gloria Estefan	"Get On Your Feet"	16766
	"Rhythm is Gonna Get You"	17824
	<i>Gloria Estefan is banned from performing or ever returning to her home country of Cuba, which labeled her a terrorist after she criticized former leader Fidel Castro.</i>	
Green Day	"American Idiot"	12523 / 05568
	<i>Oakland-based Greenday's 2004 record, American Idiot, contained clear criticism of the Iraq War and the policies of George W. Bush, and was asked to create a version with alternative or censored lyrics to be carried in Wal-Mart, then one of the largest music retailers in the country. The band refused. The band would go on to record alternative lyrics for future records for Wal-Mart, and recently re-recorded "American Idiot" without curse words.</i>	
Jay-Z	"Hard Knock Life"	01943
	"Dirt Off Your Shoulder"	12896
	<i>Denied entry to perform in China by the Minister of Culture, "to protect the city's hip-hop fans from nasty lyrics about pimps, guns and drugs."</i>	
Jimi Hendrix	"Hey Joe"	11289

	<i>Banned by the BBC after 9/11 for its violent content and the line "what you doing with that gun in your hand?" Recommended against airplay in a memo distributed to Clear Channel affiliate stations in the United States.</i>	
John Lennon	Imagine	00066
	<i>Banned from airplay by the BBC and Clear Channel "advised" against airing it during the Gulf War for its anti-war message. Lennon's other protest anthem with the Plastic Ono Band, "Give Peace a Chance," was banned by the BBC as well.</i>	
Kyu Sakamoto	Sukiyaki	12106
	<i>After World War II, South Korea passed a law intended to stifle Japanese influence on South Korean culture; the law effectively banned music with Japanese lyrics. Despite this, Japanese Pop has had an enormous influence on Korean pop music, and visa-versa.</i>	
Lady Gaga	LoveGame	018609
	Born This Way	018789
	Poker Face	018580
	Telephone	018606
	<i>"LoveGame" was banned from various radio stations for the line "I want to take a ride on your disco stick." "Born This Way" violates radio codes in Russia and Malaysia concerning the promotion of homosexuality. The album was banned in Lebanon after the release of her music video for "Judas" which featured religious imagery.</i> <i>Lady Gaga was forbidden to perform in China after being photographed with the Dalai Lama; and banned in Indonesia after the Islamic Defenders Front threatened to surround her plane if she landed, whereas authorities believed her dancing could corrupt the nation's youth.</i>	
Louis Armstrong	What a Wonderful World	12307
	<i>Listed on a memorandum of songs recommended not to be aired by Clear Channel affiliate stations after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.</i>	
Madonna	Like a Prayer	00215

	<i>Condemned for blasphemy by Pope John Paul II and the American Family Association, the Italian state broadcaster RAI banned the song. In the United States, religious groups called for a national boycott of Pepsi and its subsidiaries, including Kentucky Fried Chicken, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut, because of Pepsi's use of the song in an advertising campaign.</i>	
Maroon 5	Moves Like Jagger	18740
	<i>Maroon 5 was forbidden to enter China after one of its members wished the Dalai Lama a happy birthday on Twitter.</i>	
Mickey and Sylvia	Love is Strange	13865
	<i>Banned by the BBC upon release because the lyric "love is money in the hand" was interpreted to be a reference to prostitution.</i>	
Miley Cyrus	Wrecking Ball	19281
	Party in the USA	20377
	<i>Banned from performing in the Dominican Republic, which claimed her live performances "undertake acts that go against morals and customs, which are punishable by Dominican law."</i>	
Nena	99 Luftballons / 99 Red Balloons	10727
	<i>The Cold-War era synthpop protest anthem about the onset of nuclear war through simple human error was listed on a memorandum of songs recommended not to be aired by Clear Channel affiliate stations after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.</i>	
Oasis	Wonderwall	01080
	Champagne Supernova	15060
	Don't Look Back in Anger	16668
	<i>The Chinese government issued a blanket ban on the band, denying visas for a planned tour of the country, after singer Noel Gallagher attended a rally supporting Tibetan Independence. The government later denied this logic, calling the cancellation a result of economic conditions in the country.</i>	

Olivia Newton-John	Physical	11842
	<i>Banned by US music video channels for its depiction of a gay couple; banned from radio play for sexually suggestive content.</i>	
Pearl Jam	Given to Fly	04968
	<i>Headlining the Lollapalooza festival in Chicago in 2007, Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder lead the crowd in a cover of Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall" with the chorus changed to criticize then-president George W. Bush. AT&T, which was broadcasting the concert on a delay, was accused of muting those lyrics during a live telecast of the festival. AT&T blamed an outside vendor for the decision.</i>	
Phil Collins	In the Air Tonight	13915
	<i>Banned by the BBC in 1991 for its reference to the "air" during the first Gulf War; banned by Clear Channel after 9/11 for the same reason.</i>	
Prince	1999	15377
	When Doves Cry	12321
	Purple Rain	11868
	Let's Go Crazy	11580
	Kiss	11539
	<i>Banned from the Soviet Union in 1985 after a dossier presented to the USSR by the Youth Wing of the Communist Party suggested Prince's "activities are a mix of pornography, political apathy, and nuclear war propaganda."</i>	
Radiohead	Creep	15057
	<i>Banned by the BBC upon release for being "too depressing."</i>	
Roberta Flack	Killing Me Softly (With His Song)	16522
	ALT: Killing Me Softly (Fugees Version)	01210
	<i>Flack's version was banned during the first Gulf War for its reference to killing.</i>	

Robyn	Show Me Love	01538
	<i>The Swedish singer has claimed that her second album was shelved by her record label, RCA, because it dealt heavily with the subject of abortion.</i>	
Rod Stewart	Sailing	06656
	<i>Banned by the BBC after the war with the Falkland Islands because of its reference to the sea.</i>	
Shangri-Las	Leader of the Pack	16073
	<i>Banned in 1964 for its theme of death and, it has been speculated, for potentially inflaming rivalries between "mods" and "rockers."</i>	
Sheryl Crow	Love is a Good Thing	13372
	Every Day Is a Winding Road	09502
	<i>Wal-Mart, then one of the largest music distributors in the United States, banned sales of Sheryl Crow's album in response to a line in the song "Love is a Good Thing" which referenced "children shooting each other" with guns they purchased at the retailer. A spokesman said the lyrics were "irresponsible."</i>	
Talking Heads	Burning Down the House	10925
	Wild, Wild Life	12359
	And She Was	10792
	<i>"Burning Down the House" was listed on a memorandum of songs recommended not to be aired by Clear Channel affiliate stations after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. The band was outright restricted in 1985 within the USSR for "perpetuating the myth of the Soviet Union as a military threat." Bootleg copies of many of the banned artists in the Soviet Union were pressed into used X-rays and circulated underground.</i>	
Tears for Fears	Everybody Wants to Rule the World	15117
	<i>Banned by the BBC during the first Gulf War for its apparent reference to world domination.</i>	

The Bangles	Walk Like an Egyptian	16648
	<i>Banned by the BBC in 1991 for its reference to a Middle Eastern country during the first Gulf War, banned by Clear Channel in 2003 for the same reason during the second Gulf War.</i>	
The Beach Boys	God Only Knows	11212
	<i>Banned in 1966 in parts of the American south for blasphemy, owing to the use of the word "God" in the title and lyrics.</i>	
The Beatles	Back in the USSR	10831
	Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds	11660
	I am the Walrus	15485
	<i>"Back in the USSR" was banned by the BBC during the first Gulf War. "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" was banned by the BBC upon its release for apparent references to LSD, and "advised against" by Clear Channel after 9/11 for unknown reasons. "I am the Walrus" was banned by the BBC for use of the word "knickers."</i>	
The Clash	Rock the Casbah	11915
	<i>Listed on a memorandum of songs recommended not to be aired by Clear Channel affiliate stations after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.</i>	
The Doors	Unknown Soldier	17690
	Light My Fire	17676
	<i>Light My Fire was censored from being performed by the band during an appearance on the Ed Sullivan show for referencing drug use with the line "we couldn't get much higher.". The song was later banned from the BBC during the first Gulf War for use of the word "fire," while "Unknown Soldier" was banned at the same time for its strong anti-war message.</i>	
The Drifters	On Broadway	11799
	<i>Clear Channel issued a memo urging radio stations not to play the song after 9/11, as it contained references to New York City.</i>	

The Kingsmen	Louie, Louie	16529
	<i>Banned for sexual content, but a nearly 3-year-long FBI investigation of the lyrics were inconclusive: the vocal performance was so slurred that they couldn't determine the lyric's content.</i>	
The Kinks	Lola	15547
	<i>The song was banned by the BBC for referencing "Coca-Cola," which was against their advertising policies. Ray Davies of the Kinks re-recorded a British version with the reference changed to "Cherry Cola."</i>	
The Rolling Stones	Street Fighting Man	05944
	<i>US broadcasters were on edge during the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, and feared this Rolling Stones song would escalate street protests into riots.</i>	
The Sex Pistols	God Save The Queen	04676
	<i>Banned by the BBC for its criticism of the British government.</i>	
The Shirelles	Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?	12364
	<i>Banned by multiple US radio stations in 1958 for its reference to a sexual relationship outside of marriage.</i>	
The Who	My Generation	16097
	<i>Banned by the BBC for depiction of stuttering.</i>	
U2	Walk On	09627
	Sunday Bloody Sunday	12111
	<i>"Walk On" was banned by Burmese authorities because it was dedicated to imprisoned Burmese activist Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. "Sunday Bloody Sunday" was listed on a memorandum of songs recommended not to be aired by Clear Channel affiliate stations after the 9/11 attacks in 2001.</i>	