



Cuba Goodings as escaping slave Samuel Woodward

Songs of Freedom

Freedom (2014, M).

Freedom (or as it was originally known *Carry Me Home*) is a film intimately related to the tradition of the 2007 film *Amazing Grace*. *Amazing Grace* was one of the first films reviewed by ACCatalyst when we started in 2007 and the poster graced our second cover.

Freedom stands more firmly in the Christian film tradition, especially as it was filmed in the USA (Connecticut) and is clearly aimed at a certain market.

Musical theatre actor and Australian actor and presenter Peter Cousins is the director—his first film, clearly a labour of love, and a worthy effort. He would be well-known to Australian audiences from many musicals and television shows and he uses his musical theatre background in a variety of ways in the film, overseeing the many well-known spiritual songs and laterally connecting a musical acting troupe and the anti-slavery movement.

Freedom has two intertwined stories, connected by a bible and slavery. Virginian Slave, Samuel Woodward, is played by US actor Cuba Gooding Jr. Samuel leads his family to escape using the Underground Railroad—a network of anti-slavery workers—many Christians, especially Quakers, who provided safe passage for slaves to the north and to Canada.

The other story develops the

Amazing Grace theme through John Newton as the slave trader, and connects with the second period as among his cargo of slaves on one trip was Samuel's great grandfather. As readers and singers will know John Newton's life was eventually changed and this *Amazing Grace* is experienced by others in the film too.

The film itself is partly a musical as there are times when the actors break into song, but it is mainly a drama and is mostly well acted and made, though could have been helped by a tighter script, and some further editing, and also deletion of some visual effects in favour of the simple storyline. The songs are memorable and quite moving. I personally found the star of the movie to be the singer Jubilant Sykes, who plays the slave translator Ozias. After taking up the film's kind offer of downloading four songs, I played *City Called Heaven* on a continuous loop while I was thinking about and writing my review.

Go and see this film, or buy the DVD when it comes out and invite some friends to view and discuss. It has a warm heart and addresses some serious issues and is part of the increasing world-wide campaign to recognise and address the continuing slavery scandal that belies many increasing wealthy countries.

In June I attended three films at the Sydney Film Festival that had

religious themes. Each was different but illuminating:

Calvary (2014, MA)

This film had a wide commercial release and many reviews, mostly by secular reviewers who clearly had no understanding of the issues or base of the film set in contemporary Ireland. This is an adult film, struggling with the ever present matter of sexual abuse in the church, and revolves around a good priest who during hearing a man's confession is given a 'death sentence' by the man who had been abused by another priest. It is a black comedy with an edge that is at times unnerving and it also provides an insight into an Ireland that is post-Catholic, but always Catholic, and in a state of confused ethics.

Stop the Pounding Heart (2014)

This dramatised documentary centres around a Christian family in Texas and one of the 12 children — Sara, a teenager who is beginning to relate to and wonder about boys and one in particular — a member of the nearby rodeo circuit. Sara's mother helps her to understand her feelings and the issues involved. The film is quite sensitive to Christian practices and understandings, and is an intimate portrayal of a family who are basically content with few material possessions and demonstrate Christian love toward each other and

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