



John Jacob Niles (April 28, 1892 – March 1, 1980) was a folklorist and composer who roamed Appalachia in the Summer of 1933 collecting folk ballads. As the story goes, he was in Murphy, North Carolina, attending an open-air church fund-raiser.

"A girl stepped out to the edge of the little platform attached to the automobile. She began to sing. Her clothes were unbelievable dirty and ragged, and she, too, was unwashed. Her ash-blond hair hung down in long skeins.... But she was beautiful and, in her untutored way, she

could sing. She smiled as she sang, smiled rather sadly, and sang only a single line of a song."

Niles learned just a fragment of melody from the young woman, named Annie Morgan, and from it composed the song that you hear today. It is a haunting tune in a minor key that has its life within the central mystery of Christianity - that the king of the Universe would sacrifice his only child on behalf of "poor or'n'ry sinners like you and like I." Each stanza ends on a major four chord which leaves the question unresolved, open-ended.

For this song vocalist Jane Harvey Brown employs a light, breathy tone that conveys the image of Annie Morgan under an open sky in Winter. After the instrumental chorus, up a fourth in G minor, Jane returns, even more vulnerable in her head voice, before coming back to the original key of D minor to sound stronger again.

Lyrics:

I wonder as I wander

I wonder as I wander out under the sky
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die
For poor or'n'ry sinners like you and like I
I wonder as I wander out under the sky

When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow's stall
With shepherds and farmers and wise men and all
But high from God's heaven a star's light did fall

And the promise of ages it then did recall

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing
A star from the sky or a bird on the wing
Or all of God's Angels in heaven to sing
He surely could have it 'cause he was the King

I wonder as I wander out under the sky
How Jesus the Savior did come for to die
For poor or'n'ry sinners like you and like I
I wonder as I wander out under the sky

Credits:

Recorded October 20, 2017 at Oak Street Recording, New Orleans, LA

Panorama Jazz Band feat. Jane Harvey Brown

Jane Harvey Brown - Vocal

Ben Schenck - Clarinet

Tomas Majcherski - Alto Saxophone

Charlie Halloran - Trombone

Michael Ward-Bergeman - Accordion

Patrick Mackey - Tenor Banjo

Matt Perrine - Tuba

Doug Garrison - Drum Set

Music by John Jacob Niles (Schirmer) and arranged by Ben Schenck (Snack Daddy Music/ASCAP) and Jane Harvey Brown.

Recorded, edited, mixed and mastered by Lu Rojas at Oak Street Recording, New Orleans, LA

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