

Wake Up John (Hanging Song)

Fairport Convention

Wake up John, it's time to go
Come along John, don't be slow
Wake up John, it's time to go

A priest joins the procession just to help me kneel
With a warder at my elbow and another at my heel
Marching in the morning down a path I've lately seen
I was sleeping in this garden, am I still within my dream?
The echo of my heartbeat is the beating of a drum
And all the earth is singing with life's sweet hum
We filed in solemn silence, shuffled through a door
The place where life is taken for the letter of the law

Shake the holy water, summon up the guard
Dying's very easy, waiting's very hard

A rope was hanging from the roof, a sight which puzzles me
I thought a gibbet and a guard would make a gallows tree
But now all is revealed, standing there is just a man
My feet are on the trapdoor with a rope around my hand
And now the executioner is shaking hands with me
"My duty I must carry out, you poor fellow," says he
A strap is tied around my feet and a bag upon my head
And then the noose which separates the living from the dead

Shake the holy water, summon up the guard
Dying's very easy, waiting's very hard

There he whispers to me "Have you anything to say?"
My mouth is dry, my throat is tight, I answer "Drop away"
Silence now surrounds me, my heart is beating on
The trapdoor hardly moves at all, my life is still my own

They stand me in a corner with my hands and feet still bound
While a carpenter is called for and an explanation found
"The rain has warped the timbers," I hear the hangman say
"It's funny but it worked well, I tried it yesterday"
"All is ended now," they say, "your ordeal's nearly over
Your life's as good as ended," but I hear their voices waver
Once more the boat is shaken and again I hang in limbo
With the guardians on the trapdoor and my body stands on tip-toe

Shake the holy water, summon up the guard
Dying's very easy, waiting's very hard

They stand me in a corner with my hands and feet still tied
A warder holds onto the noose, the trapdoor opens wide
Is it magic or coincidence that keeps me on the brink?
It seems to work without me, "Will it kill me now?" I think
"Please, I'm tired of living and I really want to die"
I was taken to the scaffold and I heard the hangman cry
"Lee, I'm truly sorry, forgive these hands of mine"
He drew the bolt and I felt the jolt the third and final time
My life was spared that morning 'cause it wasn't theirs to take
There's the most the law requires, a man could feel the stake

Shake the holy water, summon up the guard

Dying's very easy, waiting's very hard
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