

Desperados Waiting for a Train

Words and music by Guy Clark



It's hard to believe a song as iconic as "Desperados Waiting for a Train"—one of "outlaw" country's signature songs—could be the simple story of a real person, but that's the truth. Jack Prigg, the "drifter and driller of oil wells," so memorably portrayed, was a hard-living wildcatter who lived for many years in a residential hotel run by Clark's grandmother in the tiny West

Texas town of Monahans. "He was like a grandfather to me," Clark says. "I used to hang out with him when I was a boy and listen to all his stories. He had worked the oil wells all his life and he took me everywhere, even to bars and out on the rigs with him. He taught me how to drive—and a lot about life." Jerry Jeff Walker recorded "Desperados" in 1973, scoring FM radio play, and David Allen Coe recorded it the next year on his glittery debut, *The Mysterious Rhinestone Cowboy*. But the song really entered mainstream consciousness in 1985, when it was featured on the first album

by country supergroup The Highwaymen: Kris Kristofferson, Johnny Cash, Waylon Jennings, and Willie Nelson. The album topped the country charts, and "Desperados" was a Top 20 hit. Clark recorded the song on his first album, *Old No. 1* (1975, RCA/Sugar Hill, www.sugarhillrecords.com). For a bit of fun, trace the changes made to the lyrics over time by the various artists who recorded the song. Coe, for example, replaced the line "Carry on Jack, that son of a bitch is coming," with the rather more heavy-handed "Don't cry Jack, it's only Jesus coming." Two acoustic guitars are featured on the recording of "Desperados Waiting for a Train." One strums along while the other plays little fills in dropped-D tuning. We've notated chord frames below so you can strum along like the rhythm guitar in standard tuning. Note the quick chord changes moving through F#m in measures 5 and 7.

—MELANIE HAIKEN

Verse

♩ = 70

D xx0132

D xx0132

1. And I'd play the Red Riv - er Val - ley And he'd
2-5. See additional lyrics.

A x01230

Bm x13421

G 320004

F#m 134111

Em 023000

D xx0132

Bm x13421

5 sit in the kitch - en and cry — And run his fing - ers through se - ven - ty years of liv - ing and won -

G 320004

F#m 134111

Em 023000

Asus4 x01240

A x01230

D xx0132

9 der Lord has e - very well I've drilled gone — dry Oh his friends me and this old — man was like

Chorus

Bm x13421

G 320004

Bm x13421

1-4. **G** 320004 **F#m** 134111

13 des - pe - ra - dos wait - ing for a train — like des - pe - ra - dos wait - ing for a train —

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Em 023000
A sus4 x01240
A x01230
5. G 320004
Bm x13421

17 Well he's a Like des - pe - ra - dos wait - ing for a train —

G 320004
Bm x13421
G 320004

20 Like des - pe - ra - dos wait - ing for a train —

1. **D**
 And I'd play the Red River Valley

A Bm
 And he'd sit in the kitchen and cry

G F#m Em D Bm
 And run his fingers through seventy years of living

G F#m Em Asus4 A
 And wonder "Lord has every well I've drilled run dry?"

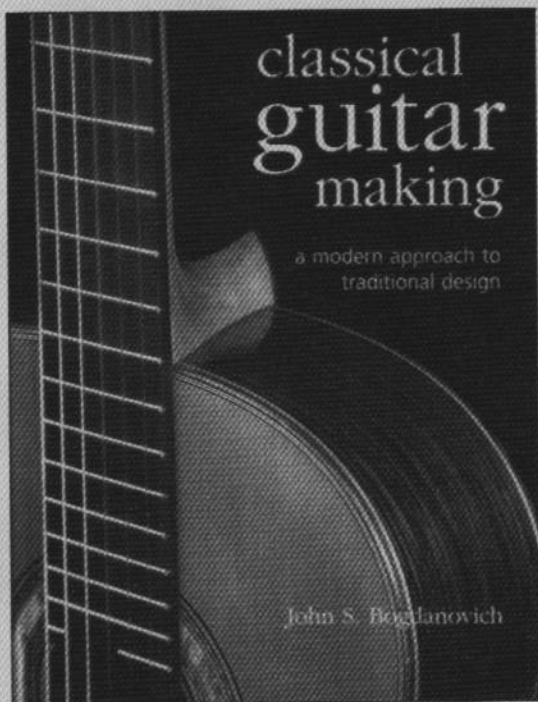
D
 Oh his friends, me and this old man was like

Chorus

Bm G
 Desperados waiting for a train

Bm G F#m Em Asus4 A
 Like desperados waiting for a train

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