

STARGAZING

COMPOSER'S NOTES

THE SONG IN A SENTENCE

The best way I know to gain a perspective on the trials and tribulations of life here on Earth is to gaze up at the sky - and remind myself that there's absolutely nothing we can do here on this lonely planet that is of any significance whatsoever on a universal scale.

HISTORY & MAIN POINTS OF THE SONG

Strangely, considering that I think of this as one my most personal songs, I don't recall exactly when I wrote it. I'm pretty certain I wrote the melody in 1987 when I was staying with a friend in Calgary, Canada, but the original version was to very silly words that I fortunately don't remember. I think the current words were probably written within a year of that, but my memory is fuzzy on this point.

The song is trying to put into three brief verses quite a complex thought. As someone with no religious beliefs, I accept that we are material beings in a material universe. Having some conception of the vast scale of the cosmos and of our speck-of-dust-like insignificance within it, it seems to me that the brief existence we enjoy here is all the more precious. With no deity to ride in like the cavalry and rescue us, it's totally up to us to preserve our beautiful planet and to make life as fulfilling and as rich as possible for as many of its inhabitants as possible, both human and non-human.

But, in the long run, and on the universal scale, the fate of the Earth is irrelevant to all but those who live on it. Looking at the night sky, contemplating the vast distances to even our nearest neighbours, gives me a great sense of comfort. We may be well on our way to wrecking the only planet we're able to live on, but there's nothing we can do to even make a mark on the rest of the galaxy, let alone the universe. Almost certainly, out there somewhere, are millions or billions of other life forms at all stages of development, both more primitive than us and inconceivably more advanced. It would be great to think we had a future, but if we haven't, we're probably not the only chance to explore the potential of existence for this amazing chemical wonder that we call Life.

STYLISTIC POINTS

I've long thought that I'll die happy if I manage to write one song that has the simplicity and beauty of a really good folk song, and I think I've come fairly close to it with this. So that means the performance needs to be straightforward, simple and 'nothing fancy'. If you have a listen to the Maggie Duffy and Stephanie Green performances in the portfolio, you'll see what I mean.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Use the lyrics as a starting point for a discussion about the purpose (if any) of our existence. Explore the question of whether the hypothetical existence of a Creator renders our existence more or less precious, more or less awesome – you can guess my answer!
- I would love to see a really imaginative animation to accompany this song – something that tried to convey the sense of scale of the cosmos and Earth's place in it. If you have the skills, why not give it a go? We may well feature it on SingTV.