

Fairport Convention, Part Xi (The Hanging Song)

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

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

(Chorus)

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, stamped there is the command
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

(Chorus)

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 mended now," they say, "your ordeal's nearly over
Your life's as good as ended," but I hear their voices waver
Once more the board is shaken? and again I hang in limbo
While the guards jump on the trapdoor and my body stands on tip-toe

(Chorus)

They stand me in a corner with my hands and feet still ties
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 'cos it wasn't theirs to take
Three's the board? the law requires, a man could feel the stake

(Repeat chorus)