

(Ghost) Riders in the Sky: A Cowboy Legend

(From Wikipedia page)

“(Ghost) Riders in the Sky: A Cowboy Legend” is a cowboy-styled country/western song written in 1948 by American songwriter, film and television actor Stan Jones. (A number of versions were crossover hits on the pop charts in 1949, the most successful being by Vaughn Monroe. The ASCAP database lists the song as “Riders in the Sky,” but the title has been written as “Ghost Riders,” “Ghost Riders in the Sky,” and “A Cowboy Legend.” Members of the Western Writers of America chose it as the greatest Western song of all time.)

The song tells a folk tale of a cowboy who has a vision of red-eyed, steel-hooved cattle thundering across the sky, being chased by the spirits of damned cowboys. One warns him that if he does not change his ways, he will be doomed to join them, forever “trying to catch the Devil's herd across these endless skies.” *The story has been linked with old European myths of the Wild Hunt, in which a supernatural group of hunters passes the narrator in wild pursuit.* [My emphasis]

Stan Jones stated that he had been told the story when he was 12 years old by an old Native American who resided north-east of the Douglas, Arizona border town, a few miles behind D Hill, north of Agua Prieta, Sonora. The Native Americans, possibly Apache, who lived within Cochise County, believed that when souls vacate their physical bodies, they reside as spirits in the sky, resembling ghost riders. He related this story to Wayne Hester, a boyhood friend (later owner of the Douglas Cable Company). As both boys were looking at the clouds, Stan shared what the old Native American had told him, looking in amazement as the cloudy

shapes were identified as the “ghost riders” that years later, would be transposed into lyrics.

Riders On the Storm

The Wikipedia webpage, *(Ghost) Riders in the Sky: A Cowboy Legend*, states that “Ghost Riders in the Sky” has inspired various artists and first lists “The Doors’ ‘Riders on the Storm,’ from the album *L.A. Woman* (1971).”

The *Songfacts* webpage for Door’s song, “Riders On The Storm,” states that the song “evolved out of a jam session when the band was messing around with ‘Ghost Riders In the Sky,’ a 1948 cowboy song by Stan Jones that was later recorded by Johnny Cash and many others. It was Jim Morrison's idea to alter the title to ‘Riders On The Storm’.”
