

= Little Wing =

" Little Wing " is a song written by Jimi Hendrix and recorded by the Jimi Hendrix Experience in 1967 . It is a slower tempo , rhythm and blues @-@ inspired ballad featuring Hendrix 's vocal and guitar with recording studio effects accompanied by bass , drums , and glockenspiel . Lyrically , it is one of several of his songs that reference an idealized feminine or guardian angel @-@ like figure . At about two and a half minutes in length , it is one of his most concise and melodically @-@ focused pieces .

The origins of " Little Wing " have been traced back to the 1966 recording of " ( My Girl ) She 's a Fox " , an R & B song which features Hendrix playing Curtis Mayfield @-@ influenced guitar accompaniment . He developed the song while performing in New York City 's Greenwich Village prior to his involvement with producer Chas Chandler . After being inspired by events at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival , Hendrix completed the song in October 1967 , when it was recorded by the Experience during the sessions for their second album Axis : Bold as Love .

" Little Wing " was released with the Axis album in December 1967 in the UK and the following month in the US . As one of only two songs from the album to become part of the Experience 's concert repertoire , the Experience often performed it live and recordings were issued on early Hendrix posthumous albums Hendrix in the West in 1972 and The Jimi Hendrix Concerts in 1982 . More recently , demo versions have been released as well as additional live renditions . " Little Wing " is one of Hendrix 's most popular songs and has become a standard , with interpretations recorded by musicians in a variety of styles . It is ranked number 366 on Rolling Stone magazine 's list of the " 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " .

= = Background = =

Jimi Hendrix began his career as a rhythm and blues guitarist and performed and recorded with several popular R & B artists , including the Isley Brothers , Don Covay , and Little Richard . He learned from other R & B guitarists , including Curtis Mayfield , who was known for his understated rhythmic fills and chording . Hendrix toured as a support act with Mayfield in 1963 . He described the experience : " The best gig was with Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions . Curtis was a really good guitarist ... I learned a lot in that short time . He probably influenced me more than anyone I 'd ever played with up to that time , that sweet sound of his , you know " . In 1966 , Hendrix recorded a song titled " ( My Girl ) She 's a Fox " with the Icemen , an R & B duo . Hendrix biographer Harry Shapiro has described it as " paced and phrased in the style of Curtis Mayfield , [ that ] is virtually a blueprint for ' Little Wing ' " . Later Hendrix producer John McDermott called his contribution to " She 's a Fox " ( included on the 2010 West Coast Seattle Boy : The Jimi Hendrix Anthology ) " perhaps the strongest of his pre @-@ Experience career . Hendrix 's Curtis Mayfield @-@ influenced guitar styling is the song 's strongest attribute " .

According to Hendrix , " Little Wing " came from an idea he had originally developed while playing in Greenwich Village , when he was fronting his band Jimmy James and the Blue Flames in the summer of 1966 . He later explained that he was further inspired during the Experience 's performance at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival :

I got the idea like , when we were in Monterey and I was just looking at everything around . So I figured that I take everything I see around and put it maybe in the form of a girl maybe , somethin ' like that , you know , and call it ' Little Wing ' , and then it will just fly away . Everybody 's really flyin ' and they 're really in a nice mood , like the police and everybody was really , really great out there . So I just took all these things an put them in one very , very small little matchbox , you know , into a girl and then do it . It was very simple , but I like it though .

= = Recording and composition = =

In October 1967 , recording sessions for the second Jimi Hendrix Experience album Axis : Bold as Love began at Olympic Studios in London . On October 25 , after recording the strongly R & B @-@

oriented " Wait Until Tomorrow " , the Experience recorded an instrumental version of " Little Wing " . It followed the same chord progression as the later master recording , but had a more forceful rock feel . After another take in the same vein , Chandler called for a different approach . Recording engineer Eddie Kramer explained , " Chas knew right away what was needed . He had Jimi slow the tempo down and try it again " . After the basic track was completed , Hendrix and Kramer recorded overdubs on October 28 , 1967 . For his recordings , Hendrix expended considerable effort to achieve the optimal tone for his guitar tracks . For his rhythm guitar , he had set his pickup selector to a nonstandard position between the neck and middle settings to achieve a " hollow " tone , sometimes mistakenly referred to as " out @-@ of @-@ phase " . However , for the lead , Kramer later fed the guitar signal through a makeshift Leslie speaker , which was normally used for electric organs . By rotating the sound , Leslie speakers produce vibrato- and tremolo @-@ like effects , i.e. , a pulsing or quivering addition to the sound ( Hendrix later popularized the use of the Univibe phase shifter effects pedal , which can be set to get a roughly similar effect ) . Next , Hendrix added a straight ( " dry , without any effects " ) glockenspiel to underscore his vocal and guitar . According to Kramer , " Jimi always kept an eye out for odd instruments that would be laying about the studio " and found the glockenspiel in Studio A. Last to be recorded was his vocal , which was treated with sound processing techniques to give it an airy sound . These have been variously described as artificial double tracking ( ADT ) , phasing , Pultec filter equalization , and processing with a Leslie speaker .

Regarding the song 's arrangement , Shapiro commented , " Musically , ' Little Wing ' is structured to lay a gossamer touch across the whole song from the arresting opening statement and the haunting glockenspiel to the use of a Leslie speaker cabinet for the guitar " . According to AllMusic 's Matthew Greenwald , it is based on a " gentle , soulful chord progression [ which ] guides the melody and is an accurate mirror of the title and lyrics " . The song has been notated in 4 / 4 time with one bar in 2 / 4 at a slow rock ( 70 ? 72 beats per minute ) tempo and is built on a chord progression without a bridge section :

After an instrumental introduction , there are two verses , followed by a guitar solo , which has been described as " richly melodic " by biographer Keith Shadwick . Shapiro noted the song 's brevity : " The song fades on a magical solo after only two minutes and twenty @-@ five seconds . Even live , ' Little Wing ' was hardly any longer ? he said what he wanted to say and stopped " .

Hendrix 's use of guitar chords for the song involves unconventional finger positions and approach to the fretboard . Guitarist Frank Marino explained :

He had the tendency to play with his fingers very flat [ on the guitar 's fretboard ] , and he had a very long thumb , so he could come over the top of the neck to play bass notes . That left his fingers in a likely position to do all this chordal @-@ type stuff . Playing with his fingers so flat also got him that double @-@ string effect every time , like in ' Castles Made of Sand ' or ' Little Wing " . That 's an R & B thing .

A reference work by Hal Leonard compares it to a pianist 's approach , with Hendrix 's " thumb fret [ ting ] the bass notes , functioning in almost the same manner as a keyboardist 's left hand , and the fingers of his fretting hand can be likened to a pianist 's right hand " . Leonard also adds that guitarist Adrian Belew describes the technique as a " lost art " .

= = Lyrics and interpretation = =

In discussing his lyrics , Jimi Hendrix was characteristically enigmatic . In a 1967 interview , he explained " Most ballads come across in different ways . Sometimes you see things in different ways than other people see it . So then you write it in a song . It could represent anything " . In different interviews , he acknowledged an American Indian @-@ influence on his songs " I Don 't Live Today " , " May This Be Love " , and " Little Wing " . He described " Little Wing " as being " based on a very , very simple Indian style " , perhaps referring to some mythologies of the indigenous peoples of North America in which spirits inhabit nature and animals , including birds . In one interview , he saw it as self @-@ explanatory : " That 's exactly what it 's about , like ' She 's walking through the clouds ' " ,

With a circus mind that 's running wild  
Butterflies and zebras , and moonbeams and fairy tales  
That 's all she ever thinks about , riding with the wind

Music journalist Charles Shaar Murray likens the figure to a feminine ideal : " Sometimes she is a spirit , sometimes a fantasy , sometimes a woman as solidly , palpably physical as he is " . The figure first appears as " Waterfall " in " May This Be Love " , where she offers solace and hope , and as " a soulful , loving sprite " in " Little Wing " . However , other writers have suggested that the figure is similar to the guardian angel associated with Christianity , which is clearly what she represents in Hendrix 's later song " Angel " . Hendrix 's brother , Leon , interpreted " Little Wing " ( and " Angel " ) as a general tribute : " He wrote it for his girlfriends , our aunties , and especially for our mama , who looked over us from high above in the afterlife " . Hendrix 's hand @-@ written lyrics for " Angel " ( with the note , " Finished January 14 , 1968 " ) use the title " My Angel Catherina ( Return of Little Wing ) " , which suggests that he saw a connection between the two songs . At the time , Hendrix had just finished a short tour of Scandinavia , where he had performed " Little Wing " in concert for the first time . At some point he responded to a question , " Love ? I know a girl , Katerina , in Sweden . " In a later 1969 interview , Hendrix described his relationships while he was on tour : " So like ' Little Wing ' is like one of these beautiful girls that come around sometimes ... She was a very sweet girl that came around that gave me her whole life and more if I wanted it . And me with my crazy ass couldn 't get it together , so I 'm off here and there and off over there . "

= = Releases = =

" Little Wing " , along with the rest of the tracks for Axis : Bold as Love , was mixed October 31 , 1967 . Because some of the masters had been lost , stereo remixes were prepared on November 1 ( it is not clear if " Little Wing " was among those remixed ) . On November 2 , 1967 , a monaural mix was prepared , making Axis the last Hendrix album specifically mixed in mono ( subsequent mono albums were electronically " folded " from the stereo mixes ) . When recording engineer Kramer was preparing the album for a new mono reissue , he commented on the differences : " Perhaps the most unique track was ' Little Wing ' . Jimi 's guitar and vocals were much drier while the drum reverb was much more present . It was experimentation ... the entire [ mono ] album was all mixed in one day ! "

The album was issued by Track Records in the UK on December 1 , 1967 , and Reprise Records on January 15 , 1968 , in the US . The song appears on subsequent reissues of Axis : Bold as Love , which continues to be a best selling Hendrix album . It has also been included on numerous Hendrix compilation albums , including The Essential Jimi Hendrix , Stone Free , The Ultimate Experience , Experience Hendrix : The Best of Jimi Hendrix , and Voodoo Child : The Jimi Hendrix Collection .

= = Live performances = =

" Little Wing " was one of only two songs from Axis that the Experience regularly performed in concert , the other being " Spanish Castle Magic " . Except for the glockenspiel and the song 's ending , their live performances generally follow the studio arrangement . Since the Axis recording ends on a fade , Hendrix needed to devise a different live ending . Early recordings show a progression to an open chord , while later ones have more elaborate single @-@ string guitar improvisation with effects , such as wah @-@ wah , before a chiming final chord . For one 1968 performance in San Francisco , Hendrix 's guitar signal was routed through a Leslie speaker . Writer Dave Rubin commented , " the real Leslie played outdoors [ out of the studio ] like this really gives a very delicate , gentle swirl to the chords and helps the chordal embellishments in the intro " . This version was also rendered at a slower ( 56 bpm ) tempo , making it somewhat longer ( 4 : 01 ) .

On January 8 , 1968 , the Experience debuted the song at the Konserthuset in Stockholm , Sweden , recordings of which have appeared on bootleg albums . Other live versions appear on Stages : Paris 68 ( L 'Olympia Paris , January 29 , 1968 ) , The Jimi Hendrix Concerts ( Winterland Ballroom

San Francisco , October 12 , 1968 ) , and Hendrix in the West ( Royal Albert Hall London , February 24 , 1969 ) . These recordings have been reissued on Live in Paris & Ottawa 1968 , Winterland , and The Jimi Hendrix Experience box set . The 1969 Royal Albert Hall live recording was included on singles issued in the UK and US in 1972 . A March 17 , 1968 , instrumental jam with Hendrix and members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band and the Electric Flag is built around " Little Wing " . Hendrix recorded it for his personal use around the time he began recording tracks for Electric Ladyland at the Record Plant studio in New York . This low fidelity tape from the Cafe au Go Go , along with others from the Generation Club and the Scene in New York , was later stolen from his apartment and has appeared on several bootleg albums over the years .

= = Recognition and legacy = =

In 2004 , Rolling Stone magazine included " Little Wing " on its list of the " 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " at number 366 . As one of Jimi Hendrix 's most popular and interpreted songs , " Little Wing " has gone on to become a standard . Some artists who have recorded it include :