

"**Midnight Special**" is a traditional folk song thought to have originated among prisoners in the American South. The song refers to the [passenger train *Midnight Special*](#) and its "ever-loving light" (sometimes "ever-living light").

The song is historically performed in the country-blues style from the viewpoint of the prisoner and has been performed by many artists.

Only two versions of the song have reached the US *Billboard* Hot 100. [Paul Evans](#) recorded the highest-charting version of "Midnight Special," reaching number 16 in the winter of 1960. Five years later, [Johnny Rivers](#)' version reached number 20 in 1965. The Johnny Rivers version was used as the theme for the NBC music program [The Midnight Special](#).

[Lead Belly](#), [Big Bill Broonzy](#), [Sonny Terry](#) & [Brownie McGhee](#), [Odetta](#), [Les Paul](#), [The Kingston Trio](#) (who also recorded their song "[The Tijuana Jail](#)", which retains the same music but with new lyrics), [Pete Seeger](#), [Peter, Paul and Mary](#), [Burl Ives](#), [Big Joe Turner](#), [Bobby Darin](#), [Cisco Houston](#), [Jimmy Smith](#), [Mungo Jerry](#), [Van Morrison](#), [Little Richard](#), [Buckwheat Zydeco](#), [Otis Rush](#), [The Spencer Davis Group](#), [Lonnie Donegan](#), [Eric Clapton](#), [The Louvin Brothers](#), [Long John Baldry](#), [The Kentucky Headhunters](#), [Willie Watson](#), [Mischief Brew](#), [Hoyt Axton](#) and [Creedence Clearwater Revival](#), among others, have recorded the song. Jody Miller arranged her own version and included it on her first album *Wednesday's Child is Full of Woe* in 1963.

[Harry Belafonte](#)'s 1962 version is notable for containing the [first official recording](#) of [Bob Dylan](#), who played harmonica.

[Harry Dean Stanton](#) performs the song in the 1967 movie [Cool Hand Luke](#). [Creedence Clearwater Revival](#)'s 1969 version was used in the opening sequence of [Twilight Zone: The Movie](#), in a scene featuring [Albert Brooks](#) and [Dan Aykroyd](#) enthusiastically singing along.

[ABBA](#) recorded the song in 1975 for charity, as a part of a [folk](#) medley, along with "[Pick a Bale of Cotton](#)" and "[On Top of Old Smokey](#)". It was the B-side to their 1978 single "[Summer Night City](#)". The medley represents the group's only recording of material not written by [Benny Andersson](#) and [Björn Ulvaeus](#) after their breakthrough with "[Ring Ring](#)" in

1973.

Dylan references a line from the song — "Shine your light on me" — on the second track, "[Precious Angel](#)", of his 1979 gospel album [Slow Train Coming](#).

The Dutch band [Drukwerk](#) also recorded a cover of "Midnight Special" for their 1982 album *Tweede Druk*, mixing English and Dutch vocals. (wiki)