

A Change Is Gonna Come (1964)

Sam Cooke

LISTEN FOR

- Socially conscious lyrics
- Heartfelt, ornamented vocal style
- Cinematic arrangement
- Studio polish

CREATION

Songwriters Sam Cooke

Label RCA Victor 8486

Musicians Sam Cooke (voice), William Kurasch, Arnold Belnick, Ralph Schaeffer, Jack Pepper, Irving Lipschultz, Alexander Neiman, Ralph Schaeffer, Sidney Sharp, Darrel Terwilliger, Leonard Malarsky, Israel Baker, Tibor Zelig (violin), Harry Hyams (viola), Emmet Sargeant (cello), Chuck Badie (bass), Clifton White, Bobby Womack, René Hall, Norman Bartold (guitar) Harold Battiste (piano), William Hinshaw (French horn), John Ewing, David Wells, Louis Blackburn (trombone), Earl Palmer (drums), Emil Radocchia (timpani)

Producer Sam Cooke, Hugo Peretti, Luigi Creatore

Engineer David Hassinger

Recording RCA Studio (Hollywood, CA); January 1964; stereo

Charts Pop 31, R&B 9

MUSIC

Genre Soul

Form Simple verse with refrain

Key B-flat major

Meter 4/4 for intro, then 12/8

LISTENING GUIDE

Time	Form	Lyric Cue	Listen For
0:00 0:06 0:08 0:11	Intro (3)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violins (L), cello (R) frame the stereo field with descending melodies. • Trombones • Timpani • French horn melodic tag
0:16 0:32 0:45	Verse 1 (8)	<p>“I was born”</p> <p>“It’s been a long”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice (C); brass choir—French horn (L), trombones (R)—plays sustained chords; bass (R) drums (R), snare reverb “shadow” (L); strings out. • Refrain • French horn tag
0:49 1:05	Verse 2 (8)	<p>“It’s been too hard”</p> <p>“It’s been a long”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • String melodies (L and R) play counterpoint to voice; brass choir continues sustained chords • Refrain; strings join brass in sustained-chord texture.
1:22 1:25 1:39	Verse 3 (8)	<p>“I go to the movie”</p> <p>“It’s been a long”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brass plays rhythmic figure; strings play sporadic phrases. • Timpani (L) • Refrain; brass texture as in Verse 1; strings out.
1:55 2:03 2:20	Bridge (8)	“Then I go to my”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brass anacrusis; tremolo strings; French horn answers vocal phrases. • Timpani echoes anacrusis figure. • Brass and timpani anacrusis leads to climactic chord change, highlighted by timpani roll and downward rushing strings.
2:29 2:45	Verse 4 (8) Refrain	<p>“There’s been times”</p> <p>“It’s been a long”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brass rhythm from Verse 3; French horn melody. • Strings play sustained chords; brass out.
3:03	Tag		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full ensemble holds final chord.

LYRICS

I was born by the river in a little tent
Oh and just like the river I've been running
ev'r since
It's been a long time, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it
will

It's been too hard living, but I'm afraid to
die
'Cause I don't know what's up there,
beyond the sky
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it
will

I go to the movie and I go downtown
Somebody keep tellin' me don't hang
around
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it
will

Then I go to my brother
And I say brother help me please
But he winds up knockin' me
Back down on my knees, oh

There's been times that I thought I couldn't
last for long
But now I think I'm able to carry on
It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes
it will

SOURCES

- Joseph Schloss, Larry Starr, and Christopher Waterman, *Rock: Music, Culture, and Business* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 87–89.
- Albin Zak III, Course Pak for A MUS-398 at the University of Albany.
- <http://www.metrolyrics.com/a-change-is-gonna-come-lyrics-sam-cooke.html>