

Wichita Lineman

(Glen Campbell)

{Intro}

I am a lineman for the county
And I drive the main road
Searchin' in the sun for another overload

I hear you singing in the wire
I can hear you through the whine
And the Wichita lineman
Is still on the line

{Hook}

I know I need a small vacation
But it don't look like rain
And if it snows that stretch down south
Won't ever stand the strain

And I need you more than want you
And I want you for all time
And the Wichita lineman
Is still on the line

{Bridge}

And I need you more than want you
And I want you for all time
And the Wichita lineman
Is still on the line

{Outro}

"Wichita Lineman" is a song written by the American songwriter Jimmy Webb in 1968. It was first recorded by the American country music artist Glen Campbell with backing from members of The Wrecking Crew and was widely covered by other artists.

Campbell's version, which appeared on his eponymous 1968 album, reached number 3 on the US pop chart, remaining in the Top 100 for 15 weeks. In addition, the song topped the American country music chart for two weeks and the adult contemporary chart for six weeks. It was certified gold by the RIAA in January 1969. The song reached number 7 in the United Kingdom. In Canada, the single topped both the RPM national and country singles charts. As of August 2017 the song has also sold 357,000 downloads in the digital era in the United States.

In 2010, Rolling Stone magazine's list of the "500 Greatest Songs of All Time" ranked "Wichita Lineman" at number 195. It has been referred to as "the first existential country song". British music journalist Stuart Maconie called it "the greatest pop song ever composed"; and the BBC referred to it as "one of those rare songs that seems somehow to exist in a world of its own – not just timeless but ultimately outside of modern music". "Wichita Lineman" was featured in series 12 of BBC Radio 4's Soul Music, a documentary series featuring stories behind pieces of music with a powerful emotional impact.

Jimmy Webb's inspiration for the lyrics came while driving through Washita County in rural southwestern Oklahoma. At that time, many telephone companies were county-owned utilities, and their linemen were county employees. Heading westward on a straight road (arguably Country Road 152) into the setting sun, Webb drove past a seemingly endless line of telephone poles, each looking exactly the same as the last. Then, in the distance, he noticed the silhouette of a solitary lineman atop a pole. He described it as "the picture of loneliness". Webb then "put himself atop that pole and put that phone in his hand" as he considered what the lineman was saying into the receiver.

I thought, I wonder if I can write something about that? A blue collar, everyman guy we all see everywhere - working on the railroad or working on the telephone wires or digging holes in the street. I just tried to take an ordinary guy and open him up and say, 'Look there's this great soul, and there's this great aching, and this great loneliness inside this person and we're all like that. We all have this capacity for these huge feelings'.

The phrase "singing in the wire" can refer to the sonic vibration commonly induced by wind blowing across small wires and conductors, making these lines whistle or whine, like an aeolian harp. It could also, or even simultaneously, refer to the sounds that a lineman might hear when attaching a telephone earpiece to a long stretch of raw telephone or telegraph line, i.e., without typical line equalization and filtering. In the recording, a notable feature of Al De Lory's orchestral arrangement is the effort of the violins and keyboards to mimic these ethereal sounds and Morse code, and the lyric, "I can hear you through the whine", further alludes to them.

The musicians used on the recording included Campbell, Al Casey and James Burton (guitar), Carol Kaye (guitar), Don Bagley (bass), Jim Gordon (drums) and Al De Lory (piano). The orchestral arrangements were by De Lory.