

Hank Cochran: Master of Sad Songs

Hank Cochran often quoted his own songwriting advice: “Make it short. Make it sweet. Make it rhyme.” That saying helped him write beautiful melodies, catchy titles, and sweetly sad lyrics. Over a thirty-year span, he composed twenty-nine Top Ten hits, making him one of the most successful songwriters in country music history.

Cochran was born on August 2, 1935, in Isola, Mississippi, and picked cotton as a child. Growing up, he noticed his uncle was attracting the attentions of young women with his guitar playing, and Cochran decided to learn the instrument, too.

When he was nine, his parents divorced and Cochran was placed in an orphanage in Memphis, Tennessee. He dropped out of school at age twelve, hitchhiked to New Mexico, and worked on oil rigs. Four years later, he moved to California and started playing in a country band, but quit after one year, when the band’s music drifted toward rock & roll.

Cochran was writing songs at the time, and Pamper Music in Nashville began publishing some of them. When Pamper offered him fifty dollars a week to write songs and try to get his songs and songs by other writers recorded, he accepted and moved to Nashville in 1960.

“Do not ever let anyone tell you that your song is no good if you believe in it,” he told *American Songwriter* in 2009. “I am determined to prove someone wrong if they do not like my song. Have the determination and you will do it!”



Cochran was married five times, and considering this history, it’s not surprising that his lyrics often addressed heartbreak, loneliness, and despair. He once said that “Don’t You Ever Get Tired of Hurting Me,” one of his favorite original songs, could still make him cry years after he wrote it.

“Hank could feel things nobody else could feel,” said Country Music Hall of Fame member Bobby Bare. “He was a brave man, because he wasn’t afraid to fall in love ... and when it all went south, he wasn’t afraid to throw it out there and tell people how it felt.”

Cochran was elected to the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1974. In 2014, four years after he died of pancreatic cancer, he was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

Sources: *American Songwriter*, Country Music Hall of Fame: Poets and Prophets, *Encyclopedia of Country Music*

LISTEN:

Some of Hank Cochran’s songs made popular by other artists:

“The Chair” (George Strait)

“Don’t You Ever Get Tired of Hurting Me” (Ray Price, Ronnie Milsap)

“I Fall to Pieces” (Patsy Cline)

“Make the World Go Away” (Eddy Arnold)

“Ocean Front Property” (George Strait)

“She’s Got You” (Patsy Cline)