



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 songs with lyrics that often were sweetly sad. Over thirty years, he wrote twenty-nine Top Ten hits, making him one of the most successful songwriters in country music history.

Cochran was born in 1935 in Isola, Mississippi, and picked cotton as a child. Growing up, he was a fan of country singer Lefty Frizzell, and he noticed his uncle was getting the attention of young women when he played guitar, so Cochran decided to learn the instrument, too.

When Cochran was nine, his parents divorced, and he 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 its music drifted toward rock & roll.

He was also writing songs at the time, and Pamper Music in Nashville began publishing some of them. When Pamper offered him \$50 a week to write songs and pitch them to recording artists, he accepted and moved to Nashville in 1960. Although he recorded some albums early in his career, he focused on matching the songs he wrote to the right artists.



“Do not ever let anyone tell you that your song is no good if you believe in it,” he told *American Songwriter* magazine in 2009. “I am determined to prove

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LISTEN

“Don’t You Ever Get Tired of Hurting Me” (Ray Price and Ronnie Milsap), “Make the World Go Away” (Eddy Arnold), “She’s Got You” (Patsy Cline)



HANK COCHRAN: MASTER OF SAD SONGS (CONTINUED)

someone wrong if they do not like my song. Have the determination and you will do it!”

Cochran was married five times, and 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 artist 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 his death, he was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.



CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. What inspired Cochran to learn to play the guitar?

2. What advice did Cochran give to fellow songwriters when they came across people who disliked their songs. Explain his advice in your own words.

3. Circle the word “despair” in paragraph six. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand its meaning.

