

## HANK COCHRAN: MASTER OF SAD SONGS

Hank Cochran always held true to his songwriting motto: “Make it short. Make it sweet. Make it rhyme.” That idea summarized his talent for matching beautiful melodies to lyrics that could be achingly sad. Over a thirty-year span, he composed a remarkable 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 was a fan of influential country singer Lefty Frizzell, and he also noticed that his uncle attracted the attention of young women with his guitar playing. So, Cochran decided to learn the instrument, too.

Cochran dropped out of school at age twelve and hitchhiked with his uncle to New Mexico, where they worked on oil rigs. Four years later, he moved to California and started playing in a country band but quit after a year when its music drifted toward rock & roll.

Cochran was also writing songs at the time, and Pamper Music in Nashville began publishing some of his submissions. When Pamper offered him \$50 a week to write songs and to pitch them to recording artists and producers, Cochran accepted and moved to Nashville in 1960.

Over the next thirty years, country legends ranging from Patsy Cline to George Strait turned his songs into hits. Although he had a modest recording career, Cochran focused on matching the right artists with the songs he wrote or represented.

“Do not ever let anyone tell you that your song is no good if you believe in it,” Cochran told *American Songwriter* magazine



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 also had a knack for discovering talent. After first hearing a young Willie Nelson, Cochran sacrificed a pay raise so Pamper would hire Nelson to write songs. After signing with Pamper, Nelson scored a huge hit with Faron Young’s recording of “Hello Walls.” Meanwhile, Cochran kept writing hits of his own.

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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)

Cochran was married five times, and given his misfortunes at love, it's not surprising 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. Circle the phrase "had a knack" in the seventh paragraph. Underline the clue words and phrases that help you understand its meaning. Then, define the phrase in your own words.

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2. "Do not ever let anyone tell you that your song is no good if you believe in it. I am determined to prove someone wrong if they do not like my song. Have the determination and you will do it!" How did Cochran exemplify this belief in the decisions he made throughout his life? Give specific examples.

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3. Explain the title of this essay, "Master of Sad Songs." Highlight examples in the text that support your answer.

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