



For more than ten years, Hank remained popular locally, but was unknown nationally. Then, in Nineteen Forty-Nine, he recorded his first major hit record. The song was "Lovesick Blues."

((TAPE CUT Two: "Lovesick Blues"))

Hank Williams and his group performed "Lovesick Blues" on the stage of the 'Grand Ol Opry' house in Nashville, Tennessee. People in the theater would not let him stop singing. They made him sing the song six times. After years of hard work, Hank Williams had become a star.

VOICE ONE:

Hank wrote many songs in the years that followed. Singers are still recording them today. They may sing the songs in the country and western style -- the way Hank wrote them. Or they may sing them in other popular styles. Either way, the songs will always be his.

Hank Williams wrote both happy songs and sad songs. But the sad songs are remembered best.

When Hank sang a sad song, those who listened knew it was about something that had happened to him. Somehow, he was able to share his feelings in his music. One of the most famous of these sad songs is "Your Cheatin' Heart." One music expert said "Your Cheatin' Heart" is so sad, it sounds like a judge sentencing somebody to a punishment worse than death itself.

((TAPE CUT Three: "Your Cheatin' Heart"))

"Your Cheatin' Heart" was written in the early Nineteen-Fifties. It has been recorded by more than fifty singers and groups in almost every style of popular music.

VOICE TWO:

Many years after Hank Williams' death, new fans of his music have asked why he could put so much of his life into his songs. There is no easy answer to that question.

Hank Williams had many problems during his life. He and his wife Audrey did not have a happy marriage. Many of his songs seemed to ask, 'Why can't we make this marriage work?' Many people knew that when Hank sang this song, "Cold Cold Heart", he was singing about his wife and their problems. Those who had similar problems felt that Hank was singing about them, too.

((TAPE CUT Three: "Cold Cold Heart"))

VOICE ONE:

Hank Williams drank too much alcohol. Those who knew Hank Williams say he did not have the emotional strength to deal with his problems. They say he often felt he had no control over his life.

Everything seemed to be moving too fast. He could not stop. And he could not escape. He had money and fame. But they did not cure his loneliness, his drinking, or his marriage problems.

Hank was always surrounded by people, especially after he became famous. None, however, could break through the terrible sadness that seemed to follow him everywhere. One song, "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry", expresses his feelings of loneliness.

((TAPE CUT Four: "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry"))

VOICE TWO:

When Hank Williams began to record his songs, country and western music was not popular with most Americans. It was the music of the poor farming areas of the South. However, because Hank's songs told of real-life troubles with such great emotion, something unusual began to happen to his music.

Radio stations that had never played country and western music began to play Hank Williams' songs. Famous recording stars who never sang country and western music began recording songs written by Hank Williams. He had created a collection of music that stretched far past himself and his times.

Hank Williams' life and career were brief. He died on New Year's Day, Nineteen-Fifty-Three. He was twenty-nine years old.

((TAPE CUT Five: "Your Cheatin' Heart"/Count Basie & orchestra))

VOICE ONE:

You have been listening to PEOPLE IN AMERICA, a program in Special English by the Voice of America. Your narrators were Larry West and Tony Riggs. PEOPLE IN AMERICA was written by Paul Thompson.