

## Johnny Cash, 1932-2003: 'The Man in Black' Recorded More Than a Thousand Songs

He recorded not only country music, but religious songs, rock and roll, folk and blues. *Transcript of radio broadcast: 22 December 2007*

VOICE ONE:

I'm Faith Lapidus.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Doug Johnson with the VOA Special English program PEOPLE IN AMERICA. Today we tell about world famous country music performer Johnny Cash.

(MUSIC: "I Walk The Line")

VOICE ONE:

That was Johnny Cash singing his first major hit record, "I Walk The Line". It has sold more than two million copies since it was released in nineteen fifty-six.

Music industry experts say Johnny Cash recorded one thousand five hundred songs during his life. He sold more than fifty million records. He recorded not only country music, but religious songs, rock and roll, folk and blues.

### Johnny Cash

Johnny Cash's music could be as dark as the black clothes he always wore. Those songs told stories about poor people, outlaws, prisoners, coal miners, cowboys and laborers. He sang about loneliness, death, love and faith. He also sang very funny songs, like this one, "A Boy Named Sue."

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

Johnny Cash was born in nineteen thirty-two in the southern state of Arkansas. His parents were poor cotton farmers. He worked in the fields alongside his parents, three brothers and two sisters.

He also listened to country music on the radio. He began writing songs and he performed on radio programs. After high school, he joined the United States Air Force. He served as a radio operator in Germany.

He returned to the United States in nineteen fifty-four and married Vivian Liberto. They moved to Memphis, Tennessee. He got a job selling kitchen equipment and went to school to learn how to be a radio announcer.

Cash formed a band with two friends and performed at local events. They began recording for Sun Records in Memphis. One of the songs Cash wrote became the first country music hit record for the company. It was "Cry, Cry, Cry."

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

Johnny Cash continued to record on his own for Sun Records. He performed all across the United States and Canada. He also appeared on radio and television shows. His next big hit record sold more than one million copies. It was a hit for a second time in nineteen sixty-eight after Johnny Cash recorded it live at Folsom Prison. It was "Folsom Prison Blues."

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

By nineteen fifty-eight, Johnny Cash was a successful recording artist, songwriter and singer. He was invited to perform at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee. He performed his music in front of live audiences in the United States and in other countries. But he was often afraid to perform in front of a lot of people. He began using drugs to help him perform and quickly became dependant on the drugs. His serious drug problem caused the end of his marriage.

Johnny Cash said he took drugs regularly for seven years during the nineteen sixties. Then he would drive cars and boats too fast and get into dangerous accidents that almost killed him. He finally decided that he needed to stop taking drugs. One of his best friends, country singer June Carter, helped him through this difficult time. The Carter family is considered one of the earliest country and western singing groups.

Johnny Cash and June Carter recorded together. They won a Grammy award in nineteen sixty-eight for best country and western performance by a group. The song was "Jackson."

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

Johnny Cash and June Carter were married in nineteen sixty-eight. They performed many times with the Carter family. She also helped him re-discover his Christian faith.

Years earlier, June Carter had written a song about her feelings for Johnny. His record of that song became one of his biggest hits, "Ring Of Fire."

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

Johnny Cash had his own television show and also acted in movies. He published two books about his life. He won many awards, including eleven Grammy Awards and the Kennedy Center Honors. He was elected to both the Country Music Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. He also received a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.

Johnny Cash suffered many health problems as he got older. When June Carter Cash died in May, two thousand three, his friends feared the worst. But Cash decided to continue recording.

He recorded more than fifty songs in the four months before he died on September twelfth, two thousand three, in Nashville. He was seventy-one years old.

VOICE ONE:

Fans say that Johnny Cash's music was important because it told simple stories about life and death. They say he cared about social issues and continued to express support for those who are poor and without political power. One of the last songs he recorded was one made popular by the rock and roll group Nine Inch Nails. It is called "Hurt."

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

A reporter once asked Johnny Cash what he hoped people would remember about his music. Cash said he hoped people would remember that his music described the feelings of love and life. That it was different. And that it was honest.

(MUSIC: "I Walk The Line")

VOICE ONE:



**June Carter Cash**

This Special English program was written by Nancy Steinbach. It was produced by Lawan Davis. Our studio engineer was Suleiman Tarawalay. I'm Faith Lapidus.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Doug Johnson. Join us again next week for another PEOPLE IN AMERICA program on the Voice of America.