

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF LEFTY FRIZZELL
MUSIC, MEDIA AND MODERN COUNTRY SINGING

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An Abstract
Presented to the
Graduate and Research Council of
Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Speech, Communication and Theater

by
James Isaac Elliott

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ABSTRACT

This study was made to determine how William Orville "Lefty" Frizzell has influenced modern country music, the role of mass media in his career, and the years he spent in Nashville. His contributions to the popular music form as a songwriter are significant, but his greatest impact is in the way he sang his songs. Frizzell's unique vocal technique has often been imitated and many of today's major country singers openly acknowledge his influence.

This study was made to provide a more complete history of the life and career of Lefty Frizzell. Interviews with family members, friends, and fellow country music stars reveal a clearer picture of country music's supreme song stylist.

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by James Isaac Elliott entitled "The Life and Legacy of Lefty Frizzell: Music, Media and Modern Country Singing." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Speech, Communication and Theatre.



Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:


Second Committee Member


Third Committee Member

Accepted for the Graduate and
Research Council:


Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the musical career of William Orville "Lefty" Frizzell in an attempt to determine how he has influenced modern country music. This examination will include his songwriting, recording, performing, and most importantly, his way of singing. The current project will not only examine the role of the mass media in the career of Lefty Frizzell but will also provide insight into the years he lived in Nashville, Tennessee.

One may question the need to study the career of Lefty Frizzell. Certainly there are other names in country music that are more widely recognized as major contributors, such as Jimmie Rodgers and Hank Williams. The fact that Lefty Frizzell has often been overlooked only serves to strengthen the need for this study. There are many singers who have a more impressive chart history when looking at numbers alone, but few, if any, can match the influence Lefty Frizzell's music continues to have on country music.

Virtually every major male country singing star today, almost forty years after his heyday, recognizes the importance of Frizzell. Many have emulated his intimate singing style and cite Lefty as a major influence. As a struggling young man in California searching for direction in life, Merle Haggard discovered Lefty Frizzell. "Lefty was ninety percent of the reason that I'm in the business. He

was my inspiration, and I feel that he was the most unique thing that ever happened to country music" (Haggard). Randy Travis took the country music world by storm a few years ago with his back to basics sound. When he was developing his popular style he studied the genius of Frizzell. "Back when I was a kid working the clubs, in the beginning I would learn Lefty Frizzell songs and try to copy them note for note, you know, and try to learn all the licks and the phrases that he would use in his songs" (Travis).

The importance of Frizzell's music is also recognized by country music scholars. Author Charles Wolfe places great importance on the work of Lefty Frizzell: "I can't imagine modern country singing existing without Lefty; I think his impact was that profound. It was marvelous, in some ways more than Hank Williams" (Wolfe). In their chapter on honky-tonk music in The Listener's Guide to Country Music, authors Green and Oermann also have high praise for Lefty:

Frizzell possessed one of the most heart stopping voices in country music history. His vocal influence on modern country music is incalculable. Although not regarded as such at the time of his death in 1975, he is now being recognized as the most influential country vocal stylist of the honky-tonk genre. (Green/Oermann 69)

Although Lefty Frizzell is cited in most books on country music, only one work is devoted to him alone. Lefty

Frizzell His Life His Music by Charles Wolfe is an excellent book that traces Frizzell's beginnings in Corsicana, Texas, in 1928 to his rise to fame in the 1950's to his untimely death in Nashville in 1975. Unfortunately, this book is not widely available as it can only be purchased as part of a fourteen record boxed set of Frizzell's music from Bear Family Records in West Germany. Mr. Wolfe is currently updating his companion book for a future reissue of the complete Frizzell collection on compact disc.

There is a very limited amount of literature to review on the life and influence of Lefty Frizzell. The file on Frizzell at the Country Music Foundation consists primarily of the singer's obituary notices from fourteen newspapers on microfilm and some random articles and record reviews written after his death. A majority of the research for this thesis was compiled from personal interviews with family members, friends, and associates of Lefty Frizzell. Their insight into the life and music of Lefty Frizzell has been invaluable in preparing this work.

CHAPTER 2

From Texas Schoolboy to Country Music Superstar

"If You've Got the Money, I've Got the Time"

Every singer learns to sing by hearing others and Lefty Frizzell was no exception. As a six year old boy in El Dorado, Arkansas, he immersed himself in the music of Jimmy Rodgers. He rushed home from school to sit in front of the record player and memorized every word and lonesome yodel. As he got a little older and started singing himself, he would imitate Rodgers and soon discovered people liked to hear him sing.

Jimmie Rodgers became one of America's most popular performers and country music's first real "star." In 1928 two original Rodgers compositions, "Blue Yodel" and "Brakeman's Blues," sold one million copies each. He was promoted as "The Singing Brakeman" or "America's Blue Yodeler" in his heyday and now bears the illustrious title of "The Father of Country Music." Rodgers became the first to be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame when it was founded in Nashville. The 1961 inscription on his plaque recognizes his significance. "Jimmie Rodgers stands foremost in the country music field as the man who started it all. ...Although small in stature, he was a giant among men, starting a trend in the musical taste of millions" (Ewen 309). Jimmie Rodgers lost his life to tuberculosis on May 26, 1933, at the age of thirty-six. His life and music would

serve as an inspiration for generations to come. One of his first disciples was a little boy destined for stardom himself.

William Orville Frizzell was born on March 31, 1928, in Tuckertown, Texas, the first of nine children for Naamon and A. D. Frizzell. Because he was their firstborn, the young couple called him "Sonny." Naamon Frizzell worked in the oil fields and often moved his growing family from one boom town to the next.

When Lefty was about two years old, the family moved to the biggest new oil discovery in El Dorado, Arkansas. Business was booming and the developing southern city was home for Lefty for nearly ten years. It was there his love of music was born from his mother singing old folk songs in the kitchen to the 78 RPM records of Jimmie Rodgers and Roy Acuff.

Lefty sang for the first time in public when he was eleven at the Parker's Chapel Hill School social. He was invited to sing after a schoolmate heard him singing and told a teacher what a good voice he had. Because Lefty had not learned to play the guitar at the time, he rehearsed his number with a piano player. "South Of The Border," a popular Gene Autry song, was the selection Lefty chose to perform. Lefty's mother recalled her son's singing debut: "...he sang the song pretty good, and everybody clapped and hollered and everything. He was thrilled to death, and he talked about it all the way home" (A. D. Frizzell).

Another important event in the musical development of the young Frizzell occurred later in his eleventh year. On weekend visits to his uncle's house he discovered an elderly black man who lived nearby and who had an old guitar. Lefty loved to go and visit him to pluck around on the guitar. Eventually Lefty's uncle bought the beat up instrument for about two dollars and gave it to Lefty. He spent many hours learning to play the guitar and was assisted by strumming along with the old Jimmie Rodgers records.

In 1940 Lefty made his debut on radio on KELD in El Dorado. He was only twelve at the time and became a regular singer on the station's children's show. Even then Lefty knew that making music was his purpose in life: "I knew when I was twelve years old what I was gonna do, I was gonna sing. Jimmie Rodgers, absolutely, just his voice, the guitar, and the yodel shaped my part in life" (Wolfe 11).

By the time Lefty was fourteen, the family had relocated to Paris, Texas. His father was in Europe serving in the war effort in the Army Air Corps and Lefty was back on radio. He landed his own fifteen minute Saturday morning show on the one thousand watt KPET. His repertoire included the popular songs of his favorite singers, most notably Jimmie Rodgers and Ernest Tubb.

Ernest Tubb had a major impact on the musical development of Lefty Frizzell. Tubb was also a Texan and a serious disciple of Jimmie Rodgers. He developed an important friendship with Carrie Rodgers, the widow of his

hero. Mrs. Rodgers lent Tubb one of Jimmie's guitars and helped him land a recording contract with Victor Records. Ernest Tubb released his first record in 1936, but his breakthrough came in 1941 on Decca Records when "I'm Walking The Floor Over You" sold a million discs.

As a pioneer of the Texas honky-tonk sound, Tubb took country music all the way to Carnegie Hall and was fondly known as "The Texas Troubadour." He joined the Grand Ole Opry in 1943 and was elected into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1965. Tubb is recognized as the first country performer to use an electric guitar and was one of the first artists to record in Nashville. The distinctive Texas drawl that Ernest Tubb captured on record influenced thousands of aspiring country singers. The earliest radio air checks of Lefty Frizzell show that he had gotten pretty good at imitating Ernest Tubb. Lefty also followed his hero by trying to write his own songs.

About the time the young Frizzell was experimenting with words and music, he was tagged with his famous nickname. Although widely reported that the name came as the result of a knock-out he delivered in a Golden Gloves boxing match, that account is disputed by family members. Lefty's father recalled the name came as the result of a fight that ensued when a local bully got in a schoolyard tangle with his son. "He forgot that Sonny was left-handed, and the first thing you know, he was laying off over there, and from then on it was Lefty Frizzell" (Wolfe 12). This account is confirmed by

Lefty's younger brother, David: "That's exactly where my Dad says it comes from, and I say the old man has got to be right. I don't recall Lefty ever fighting in the ring. I do recall him fighting a lot" (D. Frizzell).

In 1944 Lefty was sixteen and living in Dallas. He had completed his first original song called "Please Be Mine, Blue Eyes," and performed it at a local talent contest called "Wayne Babb's Stage Show." That event was one Lefty always remembered:

There were a lot of girls and women sitting on the front row and all of them must have had blue eyes because it wound up a tie between me and a little kid who hardly stood up to my knees but who had brought the house down. When they asked the audience to choose between us, I looked down at the front row and got a bigger applause than the other boy, so I won the prize. (Wolfe 13)

The win boosted the young singer's confidence and made him five dollars richer.

Lefty had written his prize winning song about the blue eyes of his sweetheart, Alice Harper. The two were married at the tender age of sixteen on March 12, 1945, just nineteen days before Lefty's seventeenth birthday. It was a marriage that would endure thirty years and Alice became the inspiration for many of Lefty's classic compositions.

Within a year Lefty and Alice were the proud parents of a baby girl and lived near Roswell, New Mexico. In 1947

Lefty became a local favorite via his hourly weekly show on KFGL radio.

To make ends meet, Lefty joined his dad in the oil fields and was soon making about \$250 a month. Although the satisfaction of a steady paycheck caused Lefty to abandon his music for a short time, it was not long before he got back to pursuing his dream.

In the summer of 1948 Lefty took a trip east to Shreveport, Louisiana, home of a new country show on KWKH radio called the Louisiana Hayride. On the same day that Lefty arrived to audition for the show, another young hopeful had come in from Alabama - Hank Williams. Naamon Frizzell recalled the events of that day: "Hank had three guys with him and they hired Hank and told Sonny, 'We can't put you to work, you don't have a band. And you need a little more practice'" (Wolfe 16).

Lefty returned to Roswell and spent the next two years playing his music in the honky-tonks and dance halls of New Mexico and Texas. After working for awhile with house bands, Lefty formed his own group and landed a regular job at the Ace of Clubs in Big Spring, Texas. Lefty Frizzell and his Westerners developed quite a local following and soon his fans were encouraging him to make some records. Next stop was the Dallas studio of recording pioneer Jim Beck.

There are conflicting stories about what actually happened that first day in Dallas. Some reports maintain that Lefty recorded some demos that April day in 1950 that

Jim Beck eventually played for some record companies in Nashville. Naamon Frizzell maintained that Beck had Lefty and his band audition for several major label talent scouts that day. Lefty's father claimed that Don Law from Columbia Records had little interest in Lefty but expressed a genuine interest in his original song, "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time." After hearing a verse and chorus of the song, Law wanted the song for the label's hottest new act, Little Jimmy Dickens. According to Naamon, Lefty refused and told Law, "No, if I can't do it, won't nobody do it" (Wolfe 18). Within two months Don Law signed Lefty to Columbia Records.

Alice Frizzell remembers the day differently, but her account also reveals the initial interest in Lefty was his songwriting talent. Her account of that day in Dallas makes no mention of Don Law being present at Lefty's first recording session with Beck.

Jim Beck was interested in the songs, not in Lefty being on record. That's where the money was. If the song was published and somebody recorded it, and if his (Beck's) name was on it, he gets half the royalties. So he made the little session there and he had "I Love You A Thousand Ways" and asked him if he had anything up-tempo, and he said, "Not really, I don't write anything but ballads. Well I do have this little thing I was kicking around, "If You've Got the Money." "Well, that's good, can you

finish it?" Well yeah, so Sonny finished it.

(Wolfe 19)

It appears that Don Law was not in Dallas for that first demo recording session of Frizzell's. He first heard of Lefty in early May 1950 when Jim Beck took one of the songs from the session to Nashville. Beck took the song, not in hopes of securing a recording contract for Lefty, but to pitch the song to be included in Little Jimmy Dickens' upcoming recording session. Law liked the song, but his main interest was in the mystery voice singing it. Within two weeks, Law was on his way to Big Spring, Texas, to offer Lefty a recording contract.

When Don Law arrived in Big Spring, he liked what he saw and heard when he attended Lefty's performance that night. He had a feeling he was witnessing the label's next big superstar. Lefty recalls the day he was offered the contract with Columbia: "When Don Law and I agreed on the contract, he gave me a handshake and said, 'That's your contract until we get it to you'" (Wolfe 20).

In 1950, 4 percent of 90 percent was the royalty rate most established artists received. That was something Lefty Frizzell didn't know and he was glad to get the rate of 2 percent offered him by Law. The Columbia contract dated June 15, 1950, "was a standard two-year contract calling for Lefty to do four sides per year, at a royalty rate of 2% of 90% per record, with 2 one-year options calling for an increased royalty rate of 3%" (Wolfe 20).

Jim Beck played a major role in the early career of Lefty Frizzell. Not only did he bring him to the attention of Don Law that resulted in a recording contract, but he also served as his first manager and booking agent. Beck also helped himself to 50 percent of the writing credit and royalties on Lefty's first hit songs. It was a common practice in that era for songwriters to give away portions of their song rights to those guiding their careers. It is doubtful whether Beck actually contributed to any of the songs where he is listed as co-writer. Billy Walker was recording for Capitol Records at the time and was a good friend of both Lefty and Jim Beck. Walker was in the Beck studio on July 25, 1950, for Lefty's first Columbia session and he claims that Lefty wrote those songs by himself. Many years later Alice Frizzell noted that Lefty was bothered by the shared credit all his life. She said it was a matter of "composing pride" to Lefty. A possible exception to the true authorship of the early Frizzell compositions may be his first hit, "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time." In his discussion on this matter Wolfe notes:

...a number of sources (including Mrs. Beck) say that Beck did in fact help Lefty to polish up the song; some evidence for this derives from an odd discrepancy between the lyrics of "If You've Got The Money" as they appear on the original demo and as they appear in the final released recording. In the demo, the first two lines

read, "There ain't no use in marrying and having those love pains, We'll spread joy, oh boy, oh boy, without these ball and chains." This was obviously a pretty gamey assertion in the early 1950's, a generation before the sexual revolution, and it was toned down to a more sedate, "There ain't no use to tarry, so let's start out tonight," with a corresponding change in the next line. (Wolfe 20, 21)

Whether Beck contributed or not to Frizzell's songs, he shares co-writing credit on his first five hit songs. The date of the first copyright filed with the U.S. Copyright office in Washington is July 7, 1950.

Jim Beck and Don Law enlisted the talents of the best musicians in Dallas for Lefty's first recording session for Columbia on July 25, 1950. Along with the standard string bass, lead guitar, steel guitar, and fiddle, Beck recruited a musician who became a key element in the Frizzell sound: honky-tonk piano player Madge Suttie. Lefty provided acoustic rhythm guitar and, most importantly, the lead vocal. Of the four songs recorded that day, three would become big hits for Lefty. "If You've Got The Money, I've Got the Time" and "I Love You A Thousand Ways" were both number one hits later that year. "Shine, Shave, Shower (It's Saturday)" was a top ten hit in 1951. The fourth song on the session was "Cold Feet" and was not released until after Lefty's death.

Columbia released "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time" on September 4 and by October 28, 1950, it rocketed to number one on Billboard's "Most Played Juke Box Folk (Country & Western) Records." Lefty's debut single was listed at number two on both the "Best Selling Retail Folk (Country & Western) Records" and the "Country & Western Records Most Played By Folk Disc Jockeys" in Billboard.

By November the future honky-tonk classic had generated record sales of 500,000 copies. When Lefty received his first royalty check for "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time" later in 1950, it was reportedly in excess of \$30,000.

The flip side of the Frizzell smash also became a big hit. "I Love You A Thousand Ways" took over the number one chart position in Billboard on November 4, 1950. Columbia purchased a half-page ad in the trade magazine with the headline, "A Double-header that's a runaway." In an effort to capitalize on the almost instant fame of Lefty Frizzell, Columbia took Lefty back in the studio less than three weeks after his debut release. The unprecedented move by the label was reported in the September 21, 1950, issue of the Dallas Times Herald newspaper:

Two Vice Presidents of Columbia Records will be in Dallas Friday to record two special sessions with their newest star, up and coming Lefty Frizzell. Columbia has recorded many artists here, but their policy has been only to record a

contracted artist about twice a year, if the talent is considered worthy. These sessions were conducted first by Don Law, Vice President in charge of Folk, Western, and Hillbilly talent, or his agent, Jim Beck of Dallas. This will be the second plane trip Mr. Law has made to Dallas within three weeks to record Frizzell, whom he calls Columbia's find of the year. Arthur E. Satherly, Vice President in charge of studios in Hollywood, is also on route to Dallas for this special session. (Wolfe 25)

Of the four songs Lefty recorded on that September 21 session, Columbia released only one, "Look What Thoughts Will Do." In March of 1951 it became the third hit single for Lefty, notching in at number four on the Billboard "Disc Jockey" chart and obtaining top ten status on both the "Jukebox" and "Best Seller" listings.

The surprising explosion of Lefty's music on the popularity charts yielded another important benefit for the new star. After the September meeting in Dallas, Columbia renegotiated Lefty's contract that "increased his royalties from 2% to 3% on 90% of sales, and gave the company options for four years instead of two" (Wolfe 26).

Before Lefty was to reap the rewards of his recording debut, he suffered a very lean two month period. The events of that period are significant because they point to a hallmark of Lefty's career - poor management. Jim Beck

prohibited Lefty from performing in any local Dallas clubs, preferring that he wait until the record came out. He maintained, and rightly so, that he could demand more money for Lefty's performance when he had a hit song. Beck did not, however, take very good care of the young singer and his family in the interim.

Lefty, Alice, and daughter Lois were staying in a little bedroom above Steve South's Roundup Club in Dallas. South gave them a place to stay in exchange for Lefty keeping an eye on the large nightclub which was closed.

Lefty had a lot of time on his hands and his only income was small loans from Jim Beck. At one point Lefty's desperation led him to try and find some work himself at a local night spot. He auditioned for Pee Wee Reid's Round Up Cowboys but didn't get the job.

Even as "If You've Got The Money, I've Got the Time" was becoming one of the most popular songs in the country, Lefty had no money and headed back to west Texas. On the 1980 documentary album on Lefty compiled by his brother, Allen, Naamon recalls the night his son returned home. It was one hour past midnight when Lefty knocked on the door of his parents' house. Naamon recalls Lefty's pleading words, "Daddy, I've come down and I've got to have some help. This old car I've got, I owe sixty dollars note on it, and don't have it. We've been living on soda pop and a hot dog a day" (N. Frizzell).

Lefty's parents were distressed to see the shape Lefty was in and the next day took some steps to change his dire economic condition. Based on the popularity of Lefty's record, Naamon was confident Lefty could be making good money in the clubs. To prove his point he took Lefty to his old stomping ground of Big Spring to a club called "George's." George was thrilled to see Lefty and offered him \$125 to play at his club. Lefty thought that was for two nights and accepted gladly. When he found out he would receive \$125 for Friday and another \$125 for Saturday night he was ecstatic. The crowds were so big the two nights that the club owner offered Lefty \$100 for a one hour Sunday matinee show. Lefty's total take for the weekend was a much needed \$350.

Back in Dallas the slump was over and it was common for Lefty to earn \$300 a night for his performance. As his fame grew and his records dominated the radio and jukeboxes of the nation, his fee would climb to \$1,000.

Lefty's third recording session for Columbia took place on January 11, 1951, at Jim Beck's Dallas studio. He cut four songs that day and two of them became number one hits later that year. "I Want To Be With You Always" entered the Billboard charts in the spring of that year and eventually spent eleven consecutive weeks at number one of the "Disc Jockey" chart. The single was also a chart topper on both the "Best Seller" (six weeks) and "Jukebox" (five weeks) charts. Lefty appealed to the popular music fans as well with the song and it made it to number twenty-nine on the

Billboard pop chart. The other number one hit from the January recording session was "Give Me More, More, More (Of Your Kisses)." It entered the Billboard charts in December 1951 and held the number one spot on all three charts for three weeks. It would be thirteen years before Lefty would reclaim the coveted number one chart position.

As Lefty's fame grew, there were increasing demands on him and he was not happy with Beck's handling of his career. Lefty wanted someone with more experience on the promotion side of the music business and enlisted the services of Jack Starnes in Beaumont, Texas, on January 26, 1951. One of Starnes' first acts was to line up a guest spot for Lefty on the Louisiana Hayride in Shreveport.

Although Starnes was probably a better manager for Lefty than Jim Beck, he too was not equipped for the task of handling a property as hot as Lefty. Alice Frizzell remembered that many people were after Lefty and that Starnes signed him "because he saw him as a hot property" (Wolfe 31). A few years after his brief association with Lefty, Starnes discovered George Jones, who by the way was a Lefty Frizzell impersonator at the time. Jones' biographer described Starnes as:

...a local Southeast Texas wheeler-dealer who favored diamond rings, long cigars, and big shiny cars. Operating on the assumption that if you can spell the word "manager" then you can paint it on a sign and hang it out and become

one, he had hustled his way into the hurly-burly
Beaumont music scene. (Allen 70)

Although Starnes did much to further the career of Lefty Frizzell, the price was high. His arrangement with Lefty gave him 50 percent of all the singer's income - both royalties from record sales and money earned from personal appearances. When Lefty signed with Starnes in 1951 he thought the contract was for one year, but the shrewd Starnes attached a two year renewal option. Feeling that Starnes was taking too much of his money, Lefty wanted to renegotiate the contract. Starnes refused and the rift caused him to file a lawsuit on June 28, 1952, seeking \$22,250 in damages from Lefty charging he had broken the contract. He also sought a court order preventing Lefty from making any further public appearances without Starnes' consent. Starnes also sought to block Lefty from collecting any record or publishing royalties or earning any income from personal appearances not arranged by Starnes. Attorneys for Starnes and Frizzell reached an out of court settlement the following month, but Lefty lost most of his royalties on record sales up to that point.

Lefty's fourth session for Columbia took place on May 24, 1951. Once again he cut four sides and two were destined to become perennial Frizzell favorites. The first song was one he wrote on a road trip with band member Blackie Crawford. By that time Lefty's dad was traveling with him as his driver and they hit a detour on a trip to Shreveport.

The side trip put them off schedule and Lefty commented to his father that his driving was going to make them late. Lefty's dad replied: "'You ain't never worried about being on time or being late.'" And Blackie Crawford said 'Lefty, there's a title for a song, Always Late.' And I said 'Yeah. Always late with your love.' 'No, no, no,' he said, 'kisses.' I said 'Love, man, love.' He said, 'Always late with your kisses.' Finally I said, 'I think you're right'" (Wolfe 39).

Right he was. "Always Late (With Your Kisses)" hit the Billboard chart on August 4, 1951, and quickly rose to number one where it remained for twelve consecutive weeks. The second song from the session to become a big hit was the touching "Mom And Dad's Waltz." It was the flip side of "Always Late (With Your Kisses)" and although it failed to reach number one, it did hold the number two spot for eight weeks. Lefty wrote the song during those difficult days in Dallas when he was waiting for "If You've Got the Money, I've Got the Time" to be released.

It was two or three months, like forever coming out, and I got to thinking. My mother and dad lived in west Texas at the time, he was in the oil fields...We got plenty hungry and it was natural to think of mom and dad out in west Texas. I was thinking that I'd be glad to walk miles to see mom and dad, maybe for a good

Sunday dinner or something, and it just eased out. (Wolfe 53)

Lefty did more than pay tribute to his parents in "Mom and Dad's Waltz." He donated all his royalties from the song to them and convinced his manager to donate his share as well. Years later Alice Frizzell confirmed that A. D. and Naamon Frizzell did receive the royalties from the song.

There was no one hotter than Lefty Frizzell in 1951, not even Hank Williams. In the October 13, 1951, issue of Billboard, Lefty had four songs in the top ten, a feat never duplicated by any other country artist. (The Beatles matched the record with four songs in the top ten on the pop chart in 1964.) "Always Late (With Your Kisses)" was number one, "Mom And Dad's Waltz" was number two, "I Want To Be With You Always" was number seven, and a song co-written by his idol Jimmie Rodgers, "Travelin' Blues," was at number eight. What makes this accomplishment even more astounding is that at the time Billboard only listed the top ten records. Today the trade magazine lists seventy-five records on its "Hot Country Singles & Tracks" chart with an additional listing of twenty-five records on a new chart called "Hot Country Recurrents."

As Lefty took count at the year's end, it was a remarkable year to say the least. As Billboard tabulated the year's top releases, Lefty was on top. In the issue of January 12, 1952, Lefty had a record seven songs on the list of the best selling records of 1951. He dominated on every

hand: radio, retail, jukeboxes, and concert stage. Lefty had joined the Grand Ole Opry in July and was on top of the "Hillbilly Music World."

Billboard published the first chart recognizing country music success on January 8, 1944. The chart listed two to eight records, was based on the popularity of songs on jukeboxes, and was titled "Most Played Jukebox Folk Records." For a three month period in 1947, Billboard renamed the chart "Most Played Jukebox Hillbilly Records." The magazine returned to the original name of the chart in 1948 and increased its number of listings to between nine and fifteen. The same year Billboard introduced a chart to reflect sales, called "Best Selling Retail Folk Records." The chart debuted on May 15, 1948, with a listing of ten records. The following year Billboard added in parenthesis the term "Country & Western" to both charts. In December of 1949 a third chart was introduced to report on the growing popularity of country music on radio. The chart initially listed eight to ten records and was titled "Country & Western Records Most Played By Folk Disc Jockeys" (Whitburn XIII).

The multiple chart listings began a move to a single chart when the "Jukebox" chart was published for the last time on June 17, 1957. The following year the "Best Sellers" and "Disc Jockeys" charts also came to an end with a final listing on October 13, 1958. Billboard expanded its listing to thirty records with the debut of the all-encompassing "Hot C & W Sides" chart on October 20, 1958. Four years later the

name of the chart was changed to "Hot Country Singles" and in 1964 was expanded to a listing of fifty records. In 1966 Billboard increased its listing to seventy-five and then one hundred records in 1973. In 1990 Billboard lists seventy-five records on the "Hot Country Singles & Tracks" chart with an additional listing of twenty-five singles on a new chart called "Hot Country Recurrents." The new listing reflects "titles which have already appeared on the top 75 Singles & Tracks chart for 21 weeks" (Billboard 36).

In 1952 Lefty placed four songs in the top ten, but none reached number one. Early in the year Lefty quit the Opry, having been a member less than seven months. Part of the problem with the Opry for Lefty was logistics. He continued to live in Beaumont and making his scheduled Opry appearances became tiresome. Perhaps more importantly, Lefty could make a lot more money making personal appearances - up to \$1,000 per night. Much of the pressure to quit the Opry came from Starnes, who wanted his \$500 per show that Lefty played. Many historians feel that leaving the Opry was one of the biggest mistakes of Lefty's career.

By the end of 1952, Lefty had moved to California where he lived until his 1961 move to Nashville. He began a ten-year business relationship with manager Steve Stebbins and was hoping his career would take an upswing. His west coast move proved beneficial in that it provided exposure for Lefty on a new television show called Town Hall Party, on which he became a regular. Other significant events from his

years in California include becoming the first country star to be enshrined on Hollywood's famous "Walkway Of The Stars." Another milestone was being the first country singer to perform at the famed Hollywood Bowl.

Lefty's magnificent entry into the country music world in 1950-51 had begun to cool by 1953. From 1953-55 Lefty only landed one song per year in the top ten on the Billboard charts. Lefty's limited chart success also had a negative effect on his personal appearances and his concert fee dropped substantially.

The tremendous impact of rock 'n' roll in 1956-57 also hurt the career of Lefty Frizzell and many other country stars. Faron Young recalls the drastic loss of revenue he experienced: "Rock 'n' roll knocked the block out from under us; some of us went from making \$350,000 to \$400,000 a year down to \$50,000 a year" (Young). Radio stations by the hundreds quit playing country music in favor of the new sensation of rock 'n' roll. In 1958 Frizzell returned to country radio with a top thirteen hit written by Marty Robbins called "Cigarette and Coffee Blues."

As Lefty's career cooled in the mid 1950's, his younger brother started traveling with him. By then Lefty no longer had a band and David would help drive, tune his guitar, and make sure he had stage clothes to wear. According to David, the conflicts with bad management took their toll on Lefty and that was one of the reasons his career suffered. "After all the early stuff happened to him and he went to court, he

never trusted anybody else to ever be close to him. He needed some guidance and he needed some help, and he simply didn't - he was afraid - to trust anybody" (D. Frizzell).

Lefty was earning less than one-third of the money he had received a few years earlier and was back to playing in the little clubs where he cut his musical teeth. He stayed busy working on the road though he lacked the enthusiasm and his discontent grew.

By 1959 Lefty was recording in Nashville and his March 3rd session provided his best chart success in four years. "The Long Black Veil" was written by Nashville tunesmiths Marijohn Wilkin and Danny Dill and landed at number six on Billboard's top ten that summer.

Most of Lefty's money was gone by 1961 and he decided the time was right to move to Nashville. The Tennessee capital was growing in country music significance and Lefty hoped he might find greener pastures in the town that had welcomed him with open arms a decade earlier. In August he moved his family to Nashville; it became the final stop on his roller coaster country music ride.

CHAPTER 3

The Nashville Years

"I Never Go Around Mirrors"

Lefty's decision to make the move to Nashville was influenced by several factors. In 1960 the Town Hall Party television show had been cancelled, closing an important avenue of exposure for Lefty. All his recording was being done in Nashville because Lefty was not happy with the results he got in the Hollywood recording studios. He accused the process in the west coast studios of being too "mechanical" and lacking the "feeling" he needed to make a record.

Another key reason for Lefty's departure from California was that his booking had hit an all-time low. He was scheduling many concert appearances himself and still relying on house bands to back him up. Lefty was earning \$300 on a good night and often the money was much lower.

Gib Gilbeau has been a member of the country-rock group, The Flying Burrito Brothers, since the 1970's. He and band mate John Beland were big fans of Lefty Frizzell and started a campaign to get him elected into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1981. Twenty years earlier Gib was playing fiddle in the house band at the Hinkley Valley Grange Hall in Barstow, California. That's where he first met Lefty and backed him up one night during a concert performance. Gilbeau was impressed with the brilliant talent Lefty possessed but what

is most vivid in his memory is what took place when the music stopped that night. "I saw what he got paid and it was thirty-five bucks and I couldn't believe my eyes" (Gilbeau). Gib was paid \$20 for his fiddle playing and recollects on why the singer who was on top of the world a decade earlier made only \$15 more than the members of his pick-up band. "That was a very, very low point in his career, 'cause Lefty had done great things and that was the time when Elvis and everybody was so big and these guys couldn't work" (Gilbeau).

Bill Anderson was an aspiring country singer in 1960 who was living in California at the time. He worked many shows with Lefty and also recalls that time being a low point of his career.

I worked with Lefty quite a bit in the early 1960's before he moved to Nashville. I was with him during some very, very bad times in his career when a fellow named Steve Stebbins in California was booking him anywhere for any amount of money. I remember, I think one of the first, if not the first time I ever performed with Lefty, we played in the window of a furniture store. Now I was just getting started in the music business and I was glad to play anywhere. (Was this the early 1960's?). I think it was the year 1960. I was living in California. I moved out there for awhile and was working some dates for Steve Stebbins.

Steve was booking Freddie Hart, Lefty Frizzell, Johnny and Joni Mosby, me, and two to three other acts, probably off the Town Hall Party television show. I don't remember which one of the little towns around L.A. it was, it's immaterial, may have been Glendale, may have been Pasadena, I don't know where it was, but one of the southern California towns on a Friday or Saturday night. I remember it was kind of a Spanish section of town and there weren't a lot of people there. And there was a band and me and Lefty Frizzell and Freddie Hart singing in the window of a furniture store. I was glad to get to sing anywhere in those days, but what a comedown that must have been for Lefty. I don't know how much longer it was after that that he moved to Nashville, but it couldn't have been too long I don't think. (Anderson)

One of the first business moves Lefty made in Nashville was to sign with the Jim Denny Artist Bureau for bookings. Denny was a former WSM radio executive who was awarded the key role as talent director for the Grand Ole Opry in 1951. He was also the founder and co-owner of the Cedarwood Publishing Company, whose first successes included Lefty's 1959 hit, "Long Black Veil." One of Cedarwood's key writers was a recent transplant from Florida named Mel Tillis. He wrote such classics as "Detroit City" and "Ruby Don't Take

Your Love To Town" for Cedarwood and became one of Lefty's best friends. Lefty recorded four Tillis compositions but only one made the charts. "Gator Hollow" made a disappointing show at number fifty in 1965.

By 1961 Denny had left the Opry to concentrate on his thriving booking agency and publishing company. Denny had several agents who handled the booking of his impressive line-up of country talent. Jack Andrews, Larry Moeller, and W. E. Moeller shared the booking duties on Lefty. The money was a little better than he had been making on the west coast but not by much.

One of the first bookings the Denny agency arranged for Lefty was in Kansas City, Missouri, at the Chestnut Inn. Lefty was contracted to play three thirty minute shows a day for four days - September 20-23, 1961. The club owner agreed to pay Lefty \$675 for the four day stint. After the agency received their 10 percent (\$67.50), Lefty was paid \$607.50, or about \$50 per performance (Denny, 1961).

Lefty's concert fee varied from \$200 to \$450 his first two years in Nashville. It's interesting that the high end of the pay scale came from a date Lefty worked in Canada, a region where he had never spent much time performing. On September 23, 1962, he was booked to perform at the Palace Pier in Toronto, Ontario, for \$450. Although he had commanded \$1,000 per night twelve years earlier in Texas and Oklahoma, he now averaged only \$250 per night.

The Jim Denny Artist Bureau represented a majority of Nashville's biggest names and a common practice was to put several artists on tour together in "package" shows. Lefty worked several of those type shows and a review of Denny agency booking sheets reveals a typical line-up and who was paid the most. On October 28, 1962, Lefty was booked on a show in Des Moines, Iowa, at the KRNT Theater along with Ray Price, Tex Ritter, Roger Miller, and Bill Monroe and his Bluegrass Boys. The fact that Lefty had not had a hit record in more than three years is evident in the pay scale; Price got \$825, Ritter got \$440, Monroe got \$400, Miller got \$300, and Lefty got \$250 (Denny, 1962).

Lefty extended his business relationship with Jim Denny when he signed with his Cedarwood Publishing Company. That proved to be a good move for Lefty for several reasons. It seemed to revive his interest in writing songs again and teamed him up with several of Nashville's premier songwriters. Although Lefty was an expert songwriter himself, for the first time in his life he was associated with a small group of people who earned their living writing songs. Lefty had the opportunity to write songs with great writers like Wayne Walker, Mel Tillis, Marijohn Wilkin, and Danny Dill.

Although Lefty was once again writing, his next big hit came from the pens of two others. Lefty was preparing for an upcoming recording session in the summer of 1963 when he stopped by Tree Publishing to review some material. Song

plugger Buddy Killen played several songs for Lefty but none of them really caught his ear. As Lefty was about to go, Killen urged him to listen to just one more song. The song was "Saginaw Michigan" and Lefty recorded it on October 21, 1963. The session took place at Columbia's famed Studio B with Don Law and Frank Jones sharing producer duties. Lefty was in great voice and the backing musicians were Nashville's finest: Grady Martin, Harold Bradley, and Ray Edenton on guitar, Joseph Zindan on bass, Buddy Harmon on drums, and Floyd Cramer on piano (Wolfe 106).

"Saginaw Michigan" made its Billboard debut on January 11, 1964, and quickly rose to claim the number one spot for four consecutive weeks. Lefty had regained the coveted top slot on the country charts for the first time in thirteen years.

The composer credit on "Saginaw Michigan" lists Don Wayne and Bill Anderson. Wayne was a leading Nashville songwriter and Anderson was one of country music's fastest rising new stars. Anderson was well known for his songwriting talents, too, because of hits like Ray Price's "City Lights," and the debut hit for Connie Smith, "Once a Day."

Songwriters had greater access to recording artists in the Nashville of 1963. Because he was a writer himself, Anderson often frequented the music publishing companies in town. Don Wayne thought "Saginaw Michigan" would be a good song for Anderson's upcoming recording session for Decca.

Don Wayne played me the song and when he played it for me it wasn't finished. He did not have the ending on it, the hook ending of sending the old man up to Alaska. And he wasn't really sure where to go with the ending of the song so I took the song and put the ending on it and Don liked it a lot. I did not ask, nor did I expect to receive any part of the song 'cause I was gonna record it myself. I took it to a recording session and I also had another song with a city in the title called, "Cincinnati, Ohio" that I took to this session, and then I had a ballad. I forget what the ballad was, but I did the ballad first and then we had our choice whether to record "Cincinnati, Ohio" or "Saginaw Michigan." And I remember Owen Bradley (producer) saying to me, "Cincinnati is a bigger town, we'll sell more records there (laughs) so, I recorded "Cincinnati, Ohio" which was before the Connie Smith record of it (top five hit for Connie Smith in 1967). And then I fully intended to record "Saginaw Michigan," but before I could do it, Don Wayne or somebody at Tree Publishing pitched it to Lefty and Lefty cut it. And then Don Wayne did what I thought was a very honorable thing. Even though had I recorded it I would not have taken part of the

writers' credit, when Lefty recorded it Don Wayne offered me one third of the writers' credit on the song, which I appreciated because I think I legitimately wrote a third of the song. (Anderson)

When reflecting on Lefty and "Saginaw Michigan," Anderson's most vivid memory is not on the great success of the song or the fact that it was Lefty's first number one hit in thirteen years. All those aspects are obviously part of his memory, but it's a surprising incident that is first in his mind. The setting is a large auditorium in St. Louis, Missouri, in early 1964. Bill was performing on a package show with several other country stars, including Lefty Frizzell.

Lefty was on the show and "Saginaw Michigan" was number one in St. Louis and everywhere. And Lefty went out on the show that afternoon at the Keel Auditorium and did his great hits - "Always Late" and "I Love You A Thousand Ways" and "Mom and Dad's Waltz" - all these great things from the fifties, and he left the stage. Then the people started hollering "Saginaw Michigan! Saginaw Michigan!" and the M.C. brought him back out and the people are screaming "sing 'Saginaw Michigan!'" and Lefty stood there in front of those people, number one record in the country, and said, "I don't know it." He had not learned

it and could not sing it and it was the number one record in the country...I thought that was sad. (Anderson)

Bill Anderson worked with Lefty on several more package shows the next few years. The two singers never became good friends and twenty-five years after the song he co-wrote ruled the country music charts, Anderson still wonders about its absence from Lefty's repertoire that night in St. Louis.

I didn't know him well enough to know whether he was lazy, just wouldn't learn it, or whether he didn't think it was important or whether it was just something he just didn't think to do. I don't know the motivation behind why he didn't do it, all I know is he didn't do it...he disappointed the fans, and disappointed me. I wanted to see him do it and I never quite understood why he wasn't able to. (Anderson)

According to Frizzell biographer Charles Wolfe, "Saginaw Michigan" was the biggest selling single record of Lefty's career. Although "Always Late" held the number one position on the chart three times longer, it had been thirteen years earlier. By the mid 1960's not only had the population grown, but more people had record players and in turn more record stores opened to supply the demand for product.

Lefty's friend Faron Young called "Saginaw Michigan" "the perfect comeback song. Who could have ever found a better combination than Lefty Frizzell and 'Saginaw

Michigan'" (Young). Eventually Lefty did learn the song and played it live for his faithful fans. The fact that he performed the song is substantiated by a 1965 appearance on the "Porter Wagoner" television show.

"Saginaw Michigan" remained on the country chart for a total of twenty-six weeks and became only the second song (the first was "I Want To Be With You Always," number twenty-nine in 1951) to cross over to the pop chart where it hit number eighty-five on Billboard's top one hundred. Lefty followed up his 1964 number one with another song written by Don Wayne. "The Nester" made a fair showing in August that year at number twenty-eight and remained on the chart for eleven weeks.

As 1965 began, Lefty's personal appearances were earning him more money because of his recent number one song. He hoped to keep his radio airplay consistent, but the new year got off to a disappointing start. The Mel Tillis composition "Gator Hollow" was released in January but was gone from the chart almost as quickly as it appeared. At number fifty, it became one of the lowest charting singles of Lefty's career and was absent from the chart after only two weeks.

Lefty bounced back in May of 1965 with a song written by one of Nashville's most successful songwriters, Harlan Howard. His compositions include many country standards like "I Fall To Pieces" (Patsy Cline), "Heartaches By The Numbers" (Ray Price) and "Pick Me Up On Your Way Down" (Charlie Walker). The Harlan Howard song Lefty chose to record was

"She's Gone, Gone, Gone" and it made it all the way to number twelve and stayed on the Billboard chart for fifteen weeks. Lefty had two more songs on the chart later in the year, but neither remained long or achieved a position on the chart above thirty-six.

The following year Lefty only managed to place one single on the chart. "I Just Couldn't See The Forest (For The Trees)" made its debut in Billboard on October 15, 1966, and peaked at a discouraging fifty-one, remaining on the chart for only six weeks. Lefty's absence from the chart for most of the year was not because he was not trying. In 1966 he completed four sessions for Columbia that yielded a total of sixteen songs.

The slump Lefty experienced in his recording career during the mid 1960's can be attributed to several factors. The record business was more complex than it had been when Lefty ruled the charts in the early 1950's. There were more new artists recording and vying for the coveted top ten positions in Billboard. It seems that Lefty was no longer a priority for Columbia Records. Their roster also included other major country stars and they were getting the push of promotion money from the label. Charles Wolfe's review of the trade magazine Music City News during that era reveals that it "was full of ads for Johnny Cash, Flatt & Scruggs, and other acts - but not Lefty" (Wolfe 88).

Lefty was discouraged by the lack of promotion his singles were getting from his record company. His drinking

increased and no longer was he writing his own songs but relying on his producer to find material. Often the songs Lefty recorded were not really suited to him and his voice and he was just going through the motions in the recording studio.

Country music was going through some major changes at the time and Lefty was caught right in the middle. Some key elements he helped establish more than a decade earlier were being challenged, as pointed out by historian Paul Hemphill:

One of the traditions of country music has always been that the songs are written by the same people who sing them...up until the mid-sixties, when "pop-fever" set in, most of the hit country songs were written by the people who recorded them: Hank Snow ("I'm Moving On"), Lefty Frizzell ("Always Late"), Don Gibson ("Oh Lonesome Me"), Floyd Tillman ("Slipping Around"), Ernest Tubb ("Soldier's Last Letter"), and Bill Anderson ("Still"). (That was) the nature of country music, going back to the days when it was more of an expression of a way of life than something intended to make money. The appeal of the early commercial country singing stars was, then, that they were writing what they knew and putting it on record, and if it sold that was fine with them. (Hemphill 66)

Between 1967 and 1970 Lefty recorded twenty-eight songs for Columbia; of these only two were written by him. Of those, only one was a new song, "Hobo's Pride," co-written with Abe Mulkey and Jack Kirch. The other Frizzell composition recorded in that era was a remake of his first hit, "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time." Lefty re-recorded the song as a duet with June Starnes and it was released by Columbia under the name of "Agnes and Orville." Neither song made an appearance on the Billboard chart. During the three year period from 1967-70 Lefty did place five singles on the chart, but none of them made it above forty-nine. ("Watermelon Time In Georgia" was forty-nine, debuting on August 22, 1970.)

The discontentment between Lefty and Columbia Records continued to escalate as the 1970's began. In 1971 he only did one recording session for the label on July 14th. In contrast to the usual four songs on a session, Lefty only recorded two - Don Reid's "Honky Tonk Stardust Cowboy," and his own "What Am I Gonna Do." Neither song met with success and Lefty's name was absent from the Billboard country chart for the entire year.

Allen Frizzell was born the year his brother was king of the country music world, 1951. Although he missed the excitement of the early years in Lefty's career, he spent a great deal of time with him in Nashville. He remembers how discouraged Lefty was about his dwindling success. The many years of one-night-stands had taken their toll and when Lefty

did work the road he usually did the least he could. If he was scheduled for two shows, he most likely only showed up for the second. He just didn't care anymore and Allen recalls one day when the depression had Lefty extremely low:

I'd never seen him down like that. He was always joking; even if he was down he joked about it. But this time he was talking and he had a few tears coming down and he was talking about how he'd had it with the business; he just kinda wanted to get out somewhere in the country and do some songwriting. (A. Frizzell)

Allen spent the entire day with his brother and an interesting thing happened after Lefty's reflection of this state-of-affairs. "He had talked himself to where he was so down and before he got through he had talked himself up and told me just what he was going to do, which he did" (A. Frizzell). Lefty planned to concentrate on writing songs again and in the years that followed he composed some of the greatest songs of his career.

Lefty completed his final session for Columbia on June 14, 1972, twenty-two years after it all began back in Dallas. The session was rather uneventful with the exception of the song "You Babe." It became his final single for Columbia and although it peaked at number fifty-nine, it marked the beginning of a great chapter in Lefty's life.

Sanger D. "Whitey" Shafer moved to Nashville from Texas in 1967 at the urging of fellow songwriter friends Dallas

Frazier and Doodle Owens. He arrived in town with three new songs and two of them, "Between My House And Town" and "I'm A New Man In Town," were recorded by George Jones. Whitey landed his own recording contract with Musicor and then RCA Records but failed to find much success as a recording artist. He did continue to have success with his songs and on June 13, 1972, garnered up enough courage to pitch a song to his favorite singer - Lefty Frizzell.

Whitey lived about a block away from Lefty and heard he was looking for material for his final Columbia session. With a tape in hand of several new songs, Whitey walked down the street and knocked on the door of the Frizzell house. His timing was right and a friendly Lefty greeted him as Shafer recalls: "He said, 'hey, come on in here.' He had a beer in his hand. I just caught him right. I think Alice was gone and he was home by his self" (Shafer). After introducing himself, Whitey told Lefty he picked out a song he thought might be good for his upcoming session. After hearing the first song, Lefty wanted to hear the whole tape and when it was done playing selected Shafer's "You Babe." To Whitey's surprise and excitement, Lefty told him he was recording the next day and invited him to the recording studio.

June 14, 1972, was a very special day for Whitey who remembers hearing Lefty singing his song as he pulled in the parking lot of Columbia's Music Row studio. Whitey had been a Frizzell fan since he was a Texas schoolboy who spent all

his lunch money playing "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time" on the jukebox the first time he heard the song. He eagerly awaited every Lefty Frizzell record and loved each and every one of them. Twenty-one years later to have his idol singing one of his songs was a highlight of his life. Before long the two became good friends and started writing songs together, including Lefty's first single for ABC Records, "I Can't Get Over You To Save My Life."

Lefty was excited about his new recording contract with ABC. It was a chance for a fresh start and the opportunity to try some things in the studio that he had been prevented from doing at Columbia. Shortly before his split with his label of twenty-two years, Lefty reflected on how the business had changed from the early days.

When I started in 1950 I thought country music was commercial even then. But things are a lot different now. It was easier to have a number one record because there was much less competition. But when you got a number one, it seemed to mean more because it stayed number one a lot longer and sold more copies. Nowadays, number one records come and go almost every week, it seems, and they don't really have to sell that much to be number one. (Wolfe 88)

Rather than being bitter about the changes, Lefty seemed to be encouraged and excited about the new possibilities that were emerging.

But the only changes I can see in country music are for the better...There are so many more things to write and sing about. When I had my number one records, a lot of subjects were off-limits. So I just cut regular commercial songs; there was no real depth to them, such as you find in today's songs. (Wolfe 88)

Some would argue that Lefty's early hits had "no real depth," but the subjects were pretty mainstream; love, sweethearts, and mom and dad. Many suggest that "I Love You A Thousand Ways" is among the best love songs ever written and the touching tribute to parenthood in "Mom and Dad's Waltz" will never go out of style. Nevertheless, some of the issues in life that Lefty was experiencing in the 1970's - loneliness, separation, and the devil in the bottle - were no longer taboo subjects for country singers. Lefty wrote and sang on these issues, but he also reflected on the bright side and wrote (with Shafer) songs like the enduring love ballad, "That's The Way Love Goes."

One of the main provisions of Lefty's 1972 contract with ABC is that it allowed him to record entire albums rather than just singles. The plan was to record a complete album, perhaps even a concept album, and select two or three songs from the album to be released as singles. This was an appealing concept to Lefty and marked another change in the Nashville way of doing things. Lefty Frizzell was one of the first country artists to record a concept album. In 1951 he

recorded a Jimmie Rodgers tribute album for Columbia. One of the albums Lefty hoped to record for ABC was a "honky-tonk gospel" group of songs he wanted to write with songwriting buddies Whitey Shafer, Doodle Owens, and Dallas Frazier.

All the record companies had previously been "singles" minded. Rarely would an artist go into the studio to record an entire album, but instead an album was released when the label had accumulated enough singles. The focus was always on the single release, for both airplay and sales purposes.

As the cost of singles increased, more consumers looked for a better bargain by purchasing ten songs by their favorite artist instead of a single record with only two. To meet the growing demand for albums, the labels would often rush their artists into the studio to record an album to be released with their latest radio hit. For example, in the late 1960's artists like George Jones were releasing three albums per year. The problem was that the artists often found themselves recording "filler" material just to complete the album. Many consumers felt short-changed and eventually the record companies realized the need for albums to contain more than one hit song.

In the fall of 1972 Lefty prepared for his first album for ABC. It was the first time he entered the studio planning to record an entire album. It was also the first time he recorded a song co-written with new friend Whitey Shafer. Not long after their initial meeting, Lefty stopped by Whitey's house on his way to town. Before he left, the

two had completed their first song together. Whitey recalls: "I had this song started called 'Lucky Arms' and I had a verse and part of the bridge and some melody to it. He stopped by the house one day and I just played it for him on the piano and he stayed and we finished it" (Shafer).

On several occasions Lefty invited Whitey to perform with him. No longer travelling with a band, the on stage line-up featured Lefty on guitar, Whitey on piano, and a pick-up drummer. According to Whitey, Lefty was earning about \$500 per appearance in 1972. That amount was about double what he earned a decade earlier but still quite low in light of Lefty's accomplishments.

Lefty's career was on an upswing in 1972 with his new recording contract, increased bookings, and appearances on the television shows of Porter Wagoner and Bill Anderson. But his personal life was becoming strained by his chronic drinking. Alice would no longer allow his drinking in the house so Lefty moved into a much smaller house nearby, often referred to as the "little house," or as brother David called it, the "dog house." In spite of the separation, Lefty and Alice still cared a great deal for each other and David recalls they saw each other almost every day.

A typical occurrence leading up to the separate residences is told by Mel Tillis in his 1984 autobiography, Stutterin' Boy. The scene is the trip back home after a night on the town that included too much drinking: "He asked me to go home with him to help break the ice, so I did. When

we got there his wife, Alice, threw us both out along with an old buffalo head with one of its horns missing" (Tillis 132).

Another factor in the separation of Lefty and Alice may have been that she joined the church pastored by the Reverend Jimmy Snow. According to Faron Young, Snow admonished his members not to cook supper or clean up the house if their husbands would not stop drinking. Another of Snow's suggestions was followed by Alice and it greatly angered Lefty. Young recalls:

He told all those women whose husbands weren't treating them right to go to their savings accounts and get all your money and give it to the Lord, and damn if she didn't go and get all their money out and give it to Jimmy Snow. Now they didn't have much money at the time, a few thousand dollars at the most. Lefty was checking around and found out about it and called Jimmy Snow and said, "Jimmy this is Lefty, what do you mean...my wife has took what few dollars we have left and brought 'em and give it to your church!" He said, "Well I can't help that Lefty, the Lord told me to do that." (Lefty said) "Well did the Lord tell you when I find you I'm gonna whip your ass and nobody will ever recognize you again?!" (Young)

As his relationship with Alice grew strained, his friendship with Whitey flourished. Almost every day the two

songwriters were together: "I kinda kept him company, he was pretty lonely. Most people have to work and at the time I was just writing songs. My wife was working and I didn't have much else to do but go to his house, so I did" (Shafer). According to Shafer, the songwriting they did together was not planned but rather a by-product of the time they spent together.

We never did really try to write, you know as far as sitting down and say "let's write a song." We always got together and had a few beers or something and, you know, shoot the bull and if something come up and we got to feeling just right, we'd just go ahead and write. We made kind of a fun time out of it you know; it wasn't really work. (Shafer)

The one exception to their collaboration method produced a song in 1973 that was destined to become a country music classic. On that particular day Lefty and Whitey decided they would write a song. Instead of writing at Lefty's place, they traveled out in the country to the log cabin of a fellow songwriter, Dallas Frazier, located "in the boondocks up in north Hendersonville." Shafer recalls how "That's The Way Love Goes" was written: "I had the first couple of lines to it and kind of a melody that I'd had for a long time. I sang it to him and he just said, 'that's the way love goes.' And after that - there's only a verse and a bridge you know - it just got written, and it was easy to do" (Shafer).

Lefty had a good feeling about the song and recorded it on his July 17, 1973, session for ABC. The other two songs on the session were also songs he'd written with Shafer - "I Can't Get Over You To Save My Life," and "I Never Go Around Mirrors." Lefty wanted to release "That's The Way Love Goes" as the first single but it wound up as the B-side of "I Never Go Around Mirrors." "I Never Go Around Mirrors" proved to be his best chart success in nearly a decade when it reached number twenty-five on the Billboard chart in early 1974. The song was masterfully crafted and strikingly autobiographic with the picture of a man growing old who avoids mirrors because the reflection is too sad: "I never go around mirrors-I can't stand to see me without you by my side-I never go around mirrors 'cause I got a heartache to hide (and it tears me up to see a grown man cry)" (Frizzell-Shafer).

The success of "I Never Go Around Mirrors" was welcomed by Lefty, but the regret over not releasing the B-side as a single grew. Johnny Rodriguez was a new artist recording for Mercury who had learned to sing listening to Lefty Frizzell records. He rushed into the studio to record "That's The Way Love Goes" and it quickly rose to number one. The songwriting royalties he earned on the song did little to ease the despair Lefty felt over not having the number one himself. He felt that the song was strong enough that it could have been the comeback single he needed to regain the coveted top of the country chart. Lefty was probably right. The enduring greatness of the song was proved in 1983 when it

became number one a second time. It was Frizzell disciple Merle Haggard with the hit and his great performance earned him a Grammy Award for best country vocal performance by a male from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences in 1984.

Following the success of Lefty's debut single on ABC in early 1974, the Label released two more songs from the album later in the year. "Railroad Lady," a song written by Jimmy Buffett and Jerry Jeff Walker, spent nine weeks on the chart that summer, peaking at number fifty-two. In September ABC released "Lucky Arms," the first song Frizzell and Shafer teamed up on back in 1972. The up-tempo happy song with driving piano throughout connected with country music fans. The song stayed on the chart more than three months and rose to number twenty-one in Billboard.

All of Lefty's recording sessions for ABC were produced by Don Gant. He was a young producer who had already worked with Roy Acuff and Roy Orbison. Lefty took a liking to him right from the start. Gant encouraged Lefty to write new songs and also helped him find some of the best songs on music row being written by some of the new writers in town.

Lefty was very happy with his debut album for ABC titled The Legendary Lefty Frizzell. Don Gant was also pleased with the project and remembered how moved Lefty was when the recording was ready for release. "When we'd finished the first album, he listened to it, and cried - openly - he was just overcome that it could be that good" (Wolfe 91).

Whitey Shafer was also delighted with the album and grateful to have several of his songs included. But Shafer was not happy about Lefty's growing disregard for the high blood pressure he had developed. "He just wouldn't take his medicine. I don't know if he was afraid to take it with vodka, or what, but he wouldn't take his medicine right" (Shafer). Shafer recalls one day when he accompanied Lefty to see his doctor who was angered over Lefty's actions: "The doctor told him to get out of his office before he died" (Shafer).

In the spring of 1974, it was time to prepare for the second album for ABC. Once again Lefty and Whitey wrote some songs together and two of them were included in the first session that year. On April 30, 1974, Lefty recorded "She Found The Key" and "My Wishing Room," co-authored with Shafer. The third song on the session was "I Wonder Who's Building The Bridge," a song by Doodle Owens and Roger Burch that didn't make it on the album.

Two more recording sessions took place for the album that year on August 14 and October 22. The session in October was to be Lefty's final recording session.

Lefty's second LP for ABC was titled The Classic Style of Lefty Frizzell and was released in the spring of 1975. Lefty appeared tired and worn in the publicity photographs for the album and much older than his forty-seven years. Journalist Geoff Lane commented on the 1975 Lefty: "His face is scarred - he was once in a serious automobile accident -

but the scars you notice come from the inside, and they're there in the pain lines etched deep in his forehead and around his eyes" (Wolfe 91).

A series of concert appearances was scheduled to help promote Lefty's new album on ABC. One of the first stops scheduled was a show with Skeeter Davis and Stonewall Jackson on July 19 at the Delaware State Fair in Dover. It was to be Lefty's first appearance in the eastern state, but he never made it. Lefty suffered a massive stroke before his scheduled departure and was rushed to Nashville Memorial Hospital. The doctors were unable to reverse the damage from the hemorrhage and Lefty died that night at 11:20. He was taken to the Cole and Garrett Funeral Home in Nashville where the service was handled by the pastor of Lord's Chapel in nearby Brentwood, the Reverend Billy Ray Moore. The service was attended by many of his fellow country music stars and his pallbearers were six of his songwriting friends: Whitey Shafer, Doodle Owens, Dallas Frazier, Abe Mulkey, Rusty Adams, and Tommy Smith. Internment took place on July 22 in Forest Lawn at Goodlettsville.

The news of Lefty's death went out on the U.P.I. wire and was carried by newspapers across the nation. A review of the Country Music Foundation Archives reveals Frizzell's obituary in the following newspapers on July 21, 1975: Oakland Tribune, Oakland, CA; St. Petersburg Times, St. Petersburg, FL; Minneapolis Star, Minneapolis, MN; Houston Post, Houston, TX; Fort Worth Star Telegram, Fort Worth, TX;

Democrat and Chronicle, Rochester, NY; Chicago Daily News, Chicago, IL; Columbus Citizen Journal, Columbus, OH; Chicago Tribune, Chicago, IL; Delaware State News, Dover, DE; Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia, PA; The New York Times, New York, NY; The Nashville Tennessean, Nashville, TN; and The Nashville Banner, Nashville, TN.

The story in The Nashville Tennessean was headlined: "Frizzell Praised As One Of A Kind," and featured comments from Don Law, who signed Lefty to Columbia in 1950 and produced all of his early hits: "Lefty was a unique character; he was really a unique genius - he was a stylist with a style all his own - he wasn't like anybody before or since" (The Nashville Tennessean). Both the Philadelphia Inquirer and New York Times recounted his record-breaking feat in 1951 of placing four songs in the top ten simultaneously and carried a quote from Lefty taken from an interview shortly before his death: "When I sing a song, I want to make it sound like the last thing I ever say in my life" (The New York Times).

Lefty Frizzell was gone from this earth, but his legacy was destined to live on for generations to come. No serious student of country music can overlook his major contributions to the art form.

CHAPTER 4

Lefty Frizzell and the Mass Media

"I Love You A Thousand Ways"

The career of Lefty Frizzell involved, in varying degrees, all forms of mass media. Before he was a national star, Lefty gained regional popularity performing on local radio stations. His first big impact on the mass media came via the jukebox. In the early 1950's the music of Lefty Frizzell played constantly on the music boxes in honky-tonks and restaurants across the nation. At the same time, he impacted the popular mass media of radio through his records. Because of his tremendous rise to stardom, Frizzell also gained exposure in the print media, with major stories in popular newspapers like the Times-Herald of Dallas, Texas, and trade publication, Billboard magazine. In the mid 1950's Frizzell's mass media proliferation expanded to television and in the mid 1960's he appeared in two motion pictures.

The American public's insatiable appetite for music in the early decades of the twentieth century can be clearly seen in the enormous popularity of radio. The scientific work done in the late 1800's by James Clerk Maxwell and Heinrich Hertz became the foundation that men like Oliver Lodge, Guglielmo Marconi, and Nikola Tesla built upon to create the enormous mass media of radio. It was the pivotal decade of the 1920's "when the advent of public broadcasting transformed radio from a means of point-to-point

communication, competing with the wired telegraph, into the agency of mass communication it is today" (Aitken 3).

When radios were first mass produced in 1920 they quickly became the most important medium of entertainment in America. The dramatic increase in amplitude-modulated (AM) radio sales were phenomenal that decade.

From a relatively modest figure of \$60,000,000 in 1922, sales rose to a total of \$842,000,000 in 1929, and some observers estimated that radio had penetrated every third home in the country. According to the federal census of 1930, 12,078,345 families owned radio sets. (Malone 32)

While radio manufacturers enjoyed tremendous sales, the record business experienced a severe loss in revenue. From a record high in excess of 100,000,000 record sales in 1929, the number plummeted to 6,000,000 discs sold in 1932. The loss was only temporary and the record companies saw sales pick up significantly in the mid 1930's. By the end of 1939 the combined sales of records passed the 140,000,000 mark (Ewen 283).

Electronic television was the brainchild of American inventors Philo T. Farnsworth and Vladimir Zworykin. RCA paid Farnsworth \$1,000,000 in 1934 for the rights to use his electron optics invention. Zworykin led the famed Camden, New Jersey, research team that combined engineers from RCA, General Electric, and Westinghouse. At the 1939 New York

World's Fair, RCA displayed its first modern television to the U.S. public (Head-Sterling 76).

Nine years later commercial television in America experienced significant growth with the number of stations on the air expanding from seventeen to forty-eight. The exciting new mass media quickly surpassed radio at the consumer level as sales of television sets increased more than 500 percent from 1947-48. "Increased opportunities for viewing in 1948 multiplied the audience in one year by an astonishing 4,000 percent" (Head-Sterling 84). When Lefty Frizzell made his first network television appearance in the early 1950's, there were more than 800,000 television sets in the United States with a potential audience of more than 4,000,000 (Ewen 506).

Lefty Frizzell had a long, and for the most part very good, relationship with the mass media. The courtship began in 1940 on KELD radio in El Dorado, Arkansas, when Lefty was twelve. Although the details are unclear, it appears that he was a regular guest on the station's weekly children's show. Two years later the Frizzells had relocated to Paris, Texas, and for the second time Lefty was back on the air. This time he had his own fifteen minute show every Saturday morning on KPET. The one thousand watt station was a daytime operation with a listening radius of about fifty miles. Lefty performed his version of favorite songs by popular stars like Jimmie Rodgers, Ernest Tubb, and Roy Acuff.

The next time Lefty was heard on radio was five years later in 1947. He was married with a baby daughter and was living near Roswell, New Mexico. The town had a population of about 30,000 at the time and was served by two radio stations, KSWS and KGFL. Lefty approached the manager of KGFL and, based on his previous experience at KPET and KELD, was given his own half hour show. The show was so successful that Lefty found it easy to solicit his own sponsors and quickly expanded his show to sixty minutes per week.

When Lefty Frizzell was heard on the radio again, he was no longer performing live. The year was 1950 and his recording of "If You've Got the Money, I've Got The Time" was heard many times each day on every station in the nation that played country music. That song was his first release for Columbia Records and it soon captured the number one spot in America. The flip side of the record was "I Love You A Thousand Ways" and it too became a number one smash.

Another important mass medium in 1950 was the jukebox and there were thousands in honky-tonks, restaurants, and other public places. One of the leading manufacturers of jukeboxes was the Wurlitzer Company who introduced their first coin-operated phonograph in 1928. Following the repeal of Prohibition in 1934, sales of jukeboxes increased drastically as taverns and beer joints opened up by the thousands. Further innovations of the automatic music machine also helped boost sales, such as "remote control devices (that) permitted song choices without leaving one's

booth or stool" (Malone 154). Thirteen years after the introduction of the first electrically amplified jukebox in 1927, sales of the music machine passed the 300,000 mark by 1940.

Although the jukebox has lost the significance it once had, it was a major source of entertainment when Lefty Frizzell launched his career. The entire nation of jukeboxes was playing Lefty Frizzell records as fast as he put them out. Faron Young remembers the predominance of Lefty's songs in the early 1950's, citing a simple drive down the street as a case in point:

You didn't have to have a radio, 'cause if you had your windows down, you could hear somebody else's radio or you could hear the jukeboxes on the outside of the honky-tonks as you went by and you could hear Lefty Frizzell. I don't care if you drove for a hundred miles; you'd always hear Lefty Frizzell on some car around you or from a club loudspeaker. (Young)

The importance of the jukebox in the mass media is evident in the fact that there was a separate chart for the jukebox popularity of records in the important trade journal, Billboard magazine. The listing was as follows: "Most Played Jukebox Folk (Country & Western) Records." The criteria for listing were printed above the week's top ten records: "Records listed are Country and Western Records most played in jukeboxes according to Billboard's special

weekly survey among a selected group of jukebox operators whose customers play Country and Western records" (Billboard 1951). Lefty's two releases in 1950 and his seven in 1951 all appeared on the Billboard "Jukebox Chart" and many of them held the number one spot for multiple weeks.

Lefty's name first appeared in Billboard on September 2, 1950, under the advance record release column. It was simply a listing of his record number, Columbia 20739, and, oddly enough, appeared not in the Folk section but under the "Rhythm and Blues Records" listing.

Another key element of Lefty Frizzell's mass media debut was the release of his music on record. At the same time his first release was constantly playing on jukeboxes, thousands of fans were rushing out to buy the hit record. "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time" sold more than 500,000 copies in less than three months. Many of the records that followed sold equally as well for Lefty.

The print media found great copy in Lefty Frizzell. The Times-Herald in Dallas reported in its September 21, 1950, issue that Frizzell was being rushed back into the studio by Columbia because of the enormous success of his first two singles. A key point in the story was the journey of two of the label vice-presidents to Dallas to meet with their new star. Billboard magazine named Lefty their "Discovery Of The Year" in 1950: "From out of nowhere a new hillbilly artist has skyrocketed to the top" (Billboard).

Lefty's debut and media blitz were so significant that many other artists got on the Frizzell bandwagon. More than forty other artists recorded "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time," including pop music star Jo Stafford who scored her own hit with Lefty's composition. Lefty's indirect impact via the mass media was heard by millions when totalling all the artists who recorded his songs, even in 1950.

With the advent of his recording star status, Lefty began to interact with the media in a new way - interviews. His first experience probably came in Nashville when his manager at the time, Jim Beck, brought him to town to promote his new record. Hugh Cherry was one of Nashville's leading disc jockeys at the time and he recalls that Beck was very protective of the young star: "He reminded me of a Hollywood hype man, with a touch of Texas cockiness. He always seemed afraid for Lefty to speak for himself. He had great confidence in Lefty's commercial potential, little in his ability to articulate" (Wolfe 30). Another reason cited for Beck's close watch on Lefty was the fear that some of Nashville's leading agents and managers might try to sign Lefty away from him. By early 1951 Beck's fear came true when Lefty signed with a new manager named Jack Starnes. Starnes was not a Nashville power broker but rather a promoter in Lefty's home state of Texas.

It appears that Starnes was responsible for arranging Lefty's first national network radio appearance. The date

was January 27, 1951, just one day after Lefty signed a personal management contract with him. Lefty performed live over high-powered KWKH radio in Shreveport on the famous Louisiana Hayride. Lefty must have felt a deep sense of accomplishment remembering his attempt to perform on the radio show about two and a half years earlier. It was Hank Williams who got the spot on the important show before he moved up to the grand daddy of country radio shows, The Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. By the summer of 1951, Lefty joined Hank Williams as a member of the Opry.

The management at the fifty thousand watt KWKH was impressed with Lefty's performance of the January 27th Louisiana Hayride. Because the show had recently lost two of its leading acts, Johnnie & Jack with Kitty Wells, and Leon Payne, they were anxious to add some hot new stars to their popular radio show cast. The February 24, 1951, issue of Billboard reported that Lefty was negotiating with several high-power stations for a regular spot, with Shreveport's KWKH a leading contender. Lefty's manager, Jack Starnes, was handling the negotiations and when the deal did not materialize with KWKH, he turned his attention to landing Lefty a spot on WSM's Grand Ole Opry.

Another powerful radio station vying for Lefty's affiliation was KRLD in Dallas. This undoubtedly had a major appeal for Lefty because he was living and recording in the Texas city. Another important plus for the station was that Dallas was, at that time, the recording center for Columbia.

Beck's studio was considered one of the best in the nation and the major stars who recorded there included Marty Robbins, Little Jimmy Dickens, Ray Price, Billy Walker, Maddox Brothers and Rose, Wayne Raney, Ted Daffan, Leon McAuliffe, and The Callahan Brothers.

The plan was to create a radio show in Dallas that would rival Shreveport's Louisiana Hayride and Nashville's Grand Ole Opry. With Columbia an affiliate of the powerful CBS network, station management at KRLD hoped for their support of the show. In May 1951 KRLD recruited popular disc jockey Johnny Hicks (who was also a singer and songwriter) to host a show they called the Columbia Country Caravan. The audition show they recorded that spring featured a who's who of Dallas talent: Lefty Frizzell, Ray Price, Billy Walker, Leroy Jenkins, The Light Crust Doughboys, and newcomer Betty Johnson (from North Carolina). The show opened with a lively brief version of the "Steel Guitar Rag" and lots of hooting and hollering from those assembled in the studio. Next, an enthusiastic Johnny Hicks introduced the show "featuring five of America's outstanding folk music recording artists and starring the young man whose first three Columbia records are now three of the biggest hits in the whole hillbilly world, Lefty Frizzell!" (Columbia Country Caravan). Lefty launched into a rousing version of "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time," and then joked with Johnny, who questioned Lefty about writing the song. "Did you work on it very long?" Hicks asked. "I'd say about thirty minutes," Lefty replied.

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"I wrote it one day on the way to Dallas from way out in west Texas" (Columbia Country Caravan). Next, Lefty told Johnny of a special verse he'd written especially for the show and was of course invited to sing it:

"If they got the money, we got the time
We'll pick and sing for CBS, each Friday night at nine
We got lots of talent, I know they'll like just fine
So if they got the money, we've got the time."

After Lefty's song, Johnny introduced Billy Walker and the two talked briefly before Billy sang "Beautiful Brown Eyes." In reality Billy Walker was not really there that day in Dallas. He was out of town so the producer of the show "got someone they said sounded like me to talk and then they played my record" (Walker). After a song from Leroy Jenkins, a comedy bit by Toby Tolliver, and an up-tempo instrumental by the Light Crust Doughboys, Lefty sang another song with a special dedication: "I'd like to dedicate this particular song to all them fellers up at CBS listening to this show; it's called 'I Want To Be With You Always'" (Frizzell). That song was Lefty's current single that spent eleven weeks at number one after it debuted in Billboard on April 14, 1951. Following his performance, Lefty helped Johnny introduce Ray Price who sang his current release, "If You're Ever Lonely Darling," a song written by Lefty Frizzell.

In the closing moments of the audition show, Johnny Hicks made a strong appeal to the CBS executives in New York:

A conservative count of the available nationally known recording artists (in Dallas) would be about twenty groups. With this amount of talent that is now available, and with what the show would draw, we could make the Country Caravan the biggest folk music show in the whole United States of America, bar none! (Columbia Country Caravan)

Although CBS seriously considered the proposal, they decided not to sponsor the show. Perhaps they didn't want to go up against the two shows already established, WSM's Grand Ole Opry and WKXH's Louisiana Hayride.

When the Columbia Country Caravan did not materialize, Lefty decided to accept the invitation to become a member of the Grand Ole Opry. Red Foley introduced Lefty that summer night in 1951 on the stage of the Ryman Auditorium and the applause was thunderous and long. Lefty pleased the crowd with "I Love You A Thousand Ways" and it took Foley several minutes to quiet down the ecstatic audience. Lefty returned later in the show to perform the number one song in the nation, "I Want To Be With You Always," and was once again rewarded with extended and deafening applause.

Lefty's appearances on the Grand Ole Opry were important from a mass media perspective because the show was broadcast on clear-channel WSM radio. The high-power station carried the country sounds north to Canada and south to Florida and all the way to Texas. On a clear night the signal of the

fifty thousand watt station would reach into about twenty-six states.

Although the Grand Ole Opry was considered a major factor in a country artist's career, Lefty opted to end his affiliation with the prestigious show about eight months after his debut. One of the reasons was that he still made his home in Texas and travel to make the required appearances was often difficult. Another factor was a financial one: Lefty could make \$1,000 for a performance on a Saturday night versus the standard Opry pay which was probably less than \$100. Also, with the unprecedented success Lefty was having with his records, he might have felt he just didn't need the Opry to insure his continued good fortune. Lefty addressed this point himself in an interview shortly before his death in 1975 when recalling a conversation he had with Opry member Hank Williams:

I forgot where we were at the time, but one day he said, "You need to join the Opry." I looked at him and said, "Look, I've got the number one song, the number two song, the number six, and the number eight song on the charts. And you tell me I need to join the Opry?" Hank thought about it for a few seconds, then laughed and said, "Darned if you ain't got a heck of an argument." (Wolfe 57)

Wolfe points out a chronological problem with the story: Lefty did not have four songs in the top ten until after he

joined the Opry. He concludes that Hank was trying to convince Lefty to stay at the Opry. Wolfe also notes the irony in the situation, pointing out that Hank Williams was soon after asked to leave the Opry for his alleged abuse of alcohol.

Lefty developed a habit early in his career of visiting radio stations to promote his records. He was a favorite of many country disc jockeys and remained good friends throughout his career with several of them. During a trip to El Paso, Texas, in 1953, Lefty was accompanied by rodeo star Jack Skipworth. They stopped off to see some old friends in New Mexico, including Ray Patterson who recorded the visit on audio tape and eight millimeter home movies. Lefty performed a shortened version of his current release, "Run 'Em Off," and introduced a new song he'd written for son Ricky and daughter Lois called "My Little Her And Him." The home movies show Lefty singing at a microphone outdoors in the New Mexico sunshine with buddies Jack and Ray standing nearby. It is believed by the author that Patterson taped Lefty's visit for a show he produced for a local radio station.

The first television exposure for Lefty Frizzell came in the fall of 1951 while touring in California. He was a guest on Hometown Jamboree in El Monte, California, a weekly Saturday night live combination concert and television show. The producer of the successful television broadcast was recent Country Music Hall of Fame inductee Cliffie Stone, who has fond memories of Lefty's reception that night:

It was my great pleasure to present Lefty Frizzell for the first time on television. ...The first night that Lefty performed on the show the mail, phone calls and attendance at the show tripled. Lefty's easy, natural, down-home ways were immediately captured by the cameras, and the viewers at home loved him. (Stone)

After an eleven year run with Hometown Jamboree, Cliffie Stone began a new television show that originated from Compton, California, called Town Hall Party. Lefty became a regular guest on the show that featured an impressive cast, including Merle Travis, Spade Cooley, Tex Williams, Joe and Rose Maphis, Wesley Tuttle, and Eddie Kirk. The Saturday night show was first broadcast over KFI, later expanding to KTTV. The popular program was also regularly heard on Los Angeles radio and sometimes carried on the NBC radio network.

Town Hall Party was part of a trend in the 1950's to meet the programming need created by the expansion of the medium.

During the 1950s, country TV programming expanded dramatically in the context of America's postwar economic boom. As the average household's disposable income grew, television ownership rose sharply, from 1 percent of the nation's homes in 1948 to 50 percent in 1953. (By the early 1960s this figure would pass 90 percent). Networks, local stations, and

syndicators scrambled to fill airtime, and country shows took their place within a burgeoning number of news, dramatic, and entertainment programs. (The Country Music Foundation)

The expansion of Town Hall Party proved to be a key factor in Lefty's mass media exposure. The show became so popular that it generated the spin-off show Western Ranch Party (AKA Ranch Party). The production began in 1957 and thirty-nine half-hour shows were scheduled that season. Western Ranch Party was recorded on film and distributed by the Columbia Pictures subsidiary, Screen Gems. The show even took the music of Frizzell and other guest stars to the military masses when it was picked up by the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service.

By 1957 movie star and country singer, Tex Ritter, was the regular host for Western Ranch Party. Regulars on the show were listed as the Collins Kids, Joe and Rose Lee Maphis, Fiddlin' Kate, Skeets McDonald, and Carrot Top Anderson. Lefty Frizzell was listed as a guest star along with Patsy Cline, Merle Travis, Tex Williams, Eddie Dean, and Jimmy Wakely.

"Not long ago a young singer came out of west Texas and set the record industry on its respective ear," are the words Tex Ritter used to introduce Lefty on show number twenty-five. Ritter's platitudes continued as he described Frizzell as one of the "most individual singing artists we

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have in the recording industry today." In the final words of his introduction, Ritter commented on the many great songs composed by Lefty and brought him on with, "he has written one song that I think will live forever, 'Mom and Dad's Waltz' - Lefty Frizzell!" (Western Ranch Party).

Lefty performed his 1951 hit with ease and was accompanied by some of the west coast's finest musicians. The group was comprised of two fiddles, guitar, bass, piano, and accordian. Two members of the group were stars in their own right, Fiddlin' Kate and Joe Maphis.

Strumming his trademark Bigsby Gibson guitar with his name on the pick guard, Lefty looked like a star. The rhinestones on his fringed cowboy suit glistened in the bright lights of the television studio and when he began to sing his unique voice was filled with emotion. The expressions on his face displayed the sincerity of the love song written for his parents.

The regular guest appearances on the southern California based television show came at a good time for Lefty. His hit records had slowed in 1955 with only one Frizzell song, "I Love You Mostly," making the charts. The following two years Lefty's name was absent from the pages he had dominated a short five years earlier. There seem to be several factors for the lack of chart success Lefty experienced in those years. The increasing demand on Lefty's time had slowed his creative flow and he was writing very few songs during that period. Although Lefty recorded fifteen songs in 1954-55,

only four were original. The single song that charted in 1955 was one co-authored by Lefty. Another key factor was the tragic death of Jim Beck, Lefty's longtime studio engineer who helped create the trademark Dallas sound. In a strange twist of fate, he was poisoned by carbon tetrachloride during a routine cleaning of his recording equipment. The loss of Beck shifted Lefty's recording to Nashville and the change in location and sound may have been part of the reason for Lefty's nearly three year absence from the Billboard charts.

Lefty's regular guest appearances on Western Ranch Party kept him before his many fans and probably brought some new admirers. About the same time, Lefty was a featured guest on another California country music television show called Country-America that was telecast on KABC-TV. He was also a guest on the very popular Perry Como Show which served to help Lefty expand his audience. The popular singer's variety show featured a wide range of talent and drew a more diverse audience than the narrow casting of a country music show. Another important network appearance for Lefty was on the Mitch Miller Show. In a 1972 radio interview, Lefty recalled being on the radio show and Miller asking him about writing his big hit, "Mom And Dad's Waltz."

The Governor, Minnie Pearl, a gang of us was on there...Bobby Lord, and I was asked why (I wrote the song). First of all Don Law said, "Lefty, be easy on what you say; it's network." Mitch

Miller started talking and said, "Here's a guy that wrote a song that sold two million copies, and he wrote it to his mother and dad." Then he said, "Lefty Frizzell!" The first thing I said was "Mitch, would you have someone to lock the door while Don Law is still in here - I never got paid for that many copies." And he said, "Why did you write it?" and I said, "I was hungry, I was thinking of mom and dad." (Music City U.S.A.)

After recalling the humorous incident on the 1972 radio show, Lefty told host T. Tommy Cutrare, "I think I've only played about one show in all these years that I didn't do 'Mom And Dad's Waltz'" (Music City U.S.A.). After the record of the famous song was played, Lefty recalled the time on the Miller show with fondness and joked with T. Tommy, "I got more laughs than Minnie" (Music City U.S.A.). Lefty's guest spot on the Mitch Miller Show was probably in 1951 when he was a member of the Grand Ole Opry. Miller came to town, Minnie Pearl recalls, and broadcast his show from the Andrew Jackson hotel.

The fact that Lefty Frizzell was a guest on both the Perry Como Show and the Mitch Miller Show is very significant and reveals a marked change in the acceptance of country music by network power brokers. In a study titled "Country Music Television Programming, 1948-1987: A Preliminary

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survey," commissioned by The Nashville Network and Group W Satellite Communications, this point is clearly made.

Executives of the Fifties realized that whether rural or urban, the country music fan was growing more affluent, more educated, and more sophisticated. "The typical country dweller today," claimed Music Reporter in 1958, "no longer goes around with hay in his hair and manure on his boots. Likely as not his stock is pedigreed, his farm electrified with his home air conditioned...He's definitely not a cornball, and he won't listen to a program which talks down to him...He likes country music if it's up to date, and he's got plenty of fellow admirers from the big cities who never saw a cow." (The Country Music Foundation)

When Lefty moved to Nashville in the early 1960's, many opportunities for television exposure were developing. In 1964 the Grand Ole Opry was producing a weekly thirty minute show sponsored by Pet Milk that featured most of the Opry stars on a rotating basis. In 1965 the sponsor changed and the show adopted the name National Life Grand Ole Opry. The shows were being filmed in color by 1966 and the syndication of the program was growing. Because Lefty was not an Opry member at the time, he never appeared on any of the Opry television series.

Another popular country music program was the Porter Wagoner Show. The Grand Ole Opry star was at the peak of his popularity and helped launch the careers of several popular artists, most notably Dolly Parton, who was a regular member of his show for seven years.

Lefty Frizzell was already a big star when he appeared on Porter's show in 1965. He sang two songs that day and was backed up by Porter's band, The Wagonmasters, featuring Buck Trent on electric guitar. Lefty sang the Harlan Howard song, "She's Gone, Gone, Gone," which made sense as it was his current hit single. (The song reached a chart high of twelve in the spring of 1965). Abe Mulkey, Lefty's friend and songwriting partner, joined him on camera to sing harmony. When Lefty finished the song, Porter walked over to him and asked him to introduce his partner and a surprised Lefty looked away with a funny grin on his face. Porter caught him off guard with the question and Lefty drew a blank on Abe's name. It all happened pretty quickly and when Lefty's memory returned, he introduced a smiling Abe Mulkey. Later in the show Lefty returned to perform his smash hit from 1964, "Saginaw Michigan." His third number on Porter's show that day was an abbreviated version of his trademark, "Always Late (With Your Kisses)."

By the late 1960's Lefty's longtime friend, Billy Walker, had his own weekly television show called Billy Walker's Country Carnival. Billy hosted the show in 1968-69 and it debuted in about thirty markets. Lefty appeared on

show number three of the 1968-69 season and chose to perform two of his early hit songs. His single releases for Columbia in the late 1960's were disappointing with only one charted record on the low end of the chart both years. In 1968 "The Marriage Bit" peaked at fifty-nine and the following year "An Article From Life" only made it to sixty-four.

In his introduction Walker said, "Gaze into the eyes of the man who had six of the top ten songs at the same time, Lefty Frizzell!" (The actual number was four of the top ten.) Lefty's first number was his big hit from 1950, "I Love You A Thousand Ways." A review of the performance suggests Lefty had been drinking before the television taping and his vocal performance was not up to the quality one usually expected from Lefty, as he struggled to hit the high notes in the song. Lefty was also having some trouble keeping rhythm as he played guitar and sang the song. He did manage to complete the song and even if Lefty was little bit "off," he was still better than most at singing a country song. Lefty had less trouble later in the show when he sang the more up-tempo "I Want To Be With You Always."

Billy's show that day also featured the talent of Jean Sheppard. To close the show, the trio of Billy, Jean, and Lefty were assembled together on camera. Lefty launched into his ever popular "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time," joined by Jean and Billy who sang the second verse. All three were singing on the final chorus and as the show

WALKER ARTIST ADV

came to an end, it must have been a relief for Lefty, who probably would rather have been somewhere else that day.

Del Reeves took over hosting duties of the television show in 1970 and appropriately the name changed to Del Reeves' Country Carnival. The popularity of the country music show was growing and its coverage had more than doubled to sixty-three markets. It also helped fill a need for entertaining the troops and was telecast worldwide to twenty-one American military bases via the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service.

Lefty taped the Del Reeves' Country Carnival on January 26, 1970, and performed two songs. Once again he opted to draw on his powerful songs from the past rather than promote a current struggling single release. Lefty was in good spirits and looking sharp, dressed in a brown leather fringe jacket. Gripping his Fender guitar he sang a rousing version of "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time." He dedicated his second selection to all the moms and dads in the audience, and the song was, of course, "Mom And Dad's Waltz."

Whether Lefty made additional appearances on the Nashville based television shows is doubtful. One exception may be a reported guest spot on a show hosted by Bill Anderson. It is unclear whether Lefty was not invited to appear more often or that he was invited, and decided not to. In light of his great popularity, it seems the latter may be true. It is possible that his appearance "under the

influence" on Billy Walker's show could have discouraged some producers from wanting him on their shows. As his personal life became more complex in the 1970's, Lefty probably had little desire to go to the effort of preparing for a television show.

Lefty always liked radio. From the early excitement of performing live over KELD as a boy to having hundreds of stations playing his records, radio was always a friend. In the 1960's Ralph Emery hosted a very popular all night show on high-power WSM radio. It was the era before disc jockeys were required to follow an automated play list and radio was more personality oriented. Emery was one of America's favorites and a regular feature of his show was country music stars dropping by to chat. Along with his visits from big stars, Ralph is credited with helping expose many new artists who would drop by the studio with their latest singles. Ralph would usually play the record over the airwaves and spend some time talking with the young hopefuls over the clear-channel powerhouse. Many artists liked the hours Emery kept on the air; he started about midnight. Bill Anderson recalls that Lefty became good friends with Ralph and spent many nights in the WSM studio with him. Some nights Lefty would visit with the audience but many times he was just there to "hang out" with Ralph.

Music City U.S.A. was a syndicated daily radio show hosted by veteran country music disc jockey, T. Tommy Cutrare. The format of the show was country music and a

guest host who joined T. Tommy in reflecting on the songs and the artists singing them. The daily hour program was produced for about six years and was heard in about 120 markets. T. Tommy and his guest host would go into a Nashville studio and spend the day taping five one hour shows that were delivered to the stations on disc and played Monday through Friday.

Lefty co-hosted Music City U.S.A. in the fall of 1972 and the shows were broadcast the third week of September. One of the reasons Lefty probably agreed to do the show was his longstanding friendship with T. Tommy. They first met in Houston, Texas, in 1951 when Lefty travelled to radio station KUZZ to promote a new record called "Always Late (With Your Kisses)" and T. Tommy was a disc jockey at the station. It was the beginning of a friendship that lasted until Lefty's death.

T. Tommy and Lefty had a good time taping the radio show and Frizell fans were treated to dozens of interesting and humorous stories. Music City U.S.A. number 623 featured a story about the upcoming wedding of Lefty's youngest brother, Allen. Lefty talked with anticipation about his mom and dad driving to Tennessee from Tipton, California, in their motor home for the celebration.

When questioned about his favorite type of song, Lefty told T. Tommy he liked love ballads the best. He also spoke of his fondness for blues music. Lefty also responded to a question about his method of songwriting with a comment that

his favorite time to write was late at night. Sometimes, Lefty explained, he worked on songs while he was driving to a concert or waiting to go on stage.

Before T. Tommy played the latest release by Hank Williams, Jr., he asked Lefty how it felt to work with Hank Junior after working with Hank Senior twenty-two years earlier. "Well it almost makes me feel like I'm getting old or something," Lefty said. T. Tommy joked, "And you have more hair than Hank Junior." "That's what happens when ya wear a hat," Lefty joked, and then gave a great endorsement of Hank Junior. "He's terrific; he puts on a good long show" (Music City U.S.A.).

The hour long daily radio show Lefty co-hosted with T. Tommy also featured several of his recordings. Some of the songs included in the shows were "You Babe," "Through The Eyes Of A Fool," and the classic composition from 1951, "Always Late (With Your Kisses)."

T. Tommy asked Lefty if, after more than a quarter of a century of performing, he ever got nervous about going on stage. "The only thing I get nervous about," Lefty replied, "is waiting to go on, as a rule." "Do you ever forget the words?" T. Tommy questioned. "Yes, I just rewrite it right on the spot," Lefty replied with a chuckle. He continued the thought with a humorous reference to his singing style. "The way that I write my songs I can get on one word and hang in there right on through the most of it anyway" (Music City U.S.A.).

Lefty worked again with T. Tommy Cutrare on a television show pilot taped at a music park in northern Alabama. The taping probably took place in 1973 or 1974 and was produced by Webb Pierce. Pierce taped a series of shows with numerous country stars in hopes of securing a syndication deal. Lefty sang three songs on the show that day in the hot Southern sun. He continually wiped the sweat from his brow as he went through his numbers. Lefty performed two of his hits from the 1950's - "I Want To Be With You Always" and "Mom And Dad's Waltz," which he dedicated to all the parents in the crowd. His third selection was the Hank Williams composition, "My Bucket's Got A Hole In It."

It is apparent in viewing the videotape that Lefty was not feeling too well physically. His face appeared puffy and his voice revealed some strain, but Lefty was a trooper and performed his songs with all the classic Frizzell charm he could muster. The television pilot, owned by Webb Pierce, is one of Lefty's last appearances, if not the last, that was captured on videotape. Plans for the performances of Lefty Frizzell have not been disclosed by Webb Pierce Enterprises.

Lefty was recruited to appear in two motion pictures that were filmed in Nashville in the mid 1960's. In 1965 he was featured in Second Fiddle To A Steel Guitar and the following year made a cameo appearance in the film Road To Nashville.

Although country music has never had as much exposure in the film medium as pop music, there have been some notable

cases. Lefty's two favorite singers both took advantage of the developing mass media. Jimmie Rodgers was probably the first country music singer to appear in a talking picture, when he was the subject of a short feature movie in 1929. That was one year after the debut of the first all-talking motion picture, Lights Of New York, and two years after the historic 1928 Warner Bros. movie musical, The Jazz Singer, starring Al Jolson.

Lefty's other singing idol, Ernest Tubb, starred in four motion pictures in the 1940's. Two of these "B" movies, Fighting Buckaroos and Ridin' West, were musical westerns and the other two, Jamboree and Hollywood Barn Dance, were country music features. Tubb was following in the footsteps of Hollywood's three major cowboy singing stars: Gene Autry, Tex Ritter, and Roy Rogers (Mason 397).

Roy Acuff also traveled to Hollywood in the 1940's to make a series of five movies for the industry giant, Republic Pictures. The Grand Ole Opry star made another three films for Columbia Pictures.

Two other country music stars who were lured to the big screen were Eddy Arnold and Jimmie Davis. Davis made history with the 1947 Monogram Pictures release, Governor Jimmie Davis Louisiana, making the first film to portray the life story of a country music star. Two years later the "Tennessee Plowboy" was in Hollywood where Arnold starred in the feature film, Feudin Rhythm.

Road To Nashville made its debut in Charlotte, North Carolina, on September 21, 1966. The musical comedy motion picture was written and directed by Will Zens and produced by Robert Patrick Productions. The 109 minute feature film starred comedic actor Doodles Weaver and several country music stars, including Connie Smith and Lefty Frizzell.

When Lefty first appears on camera, he is greeted by Connie and she introduces him to Doodles Weaver. "Why do they call you Lefty?" Weaver asks, and Lefty answers with his obviously scripted reply, "Because I pick this left handed guitar right handed." After a brief reaction to his line from Doodles and Connie, Lefty delivered his next sentence of dialogue. "Say, I understand ya'll are making a movie around here." Doodles confirms Lefty's statement and informs him they want him to do a "guitar number." Then Weaver launches into a silly version of "Home On The Range" with parody lyrics. He expresses his desire to perform a song with Lefty, but Frizzell kindly declines the offer. "Oh, let me do it by myself. Let me do it my own way" (Road To Nashville).

As the musical track begins, it is instantly recognizable as his number one smash from 1950, "I Love You A Thousand Ways." Lefty was dressed in one of his custom cowboy suits with embroidered musical symbols, and strummed his trademark Bigsby guitar effortlessly. The director had Lefty sit on a table top in the nightclub setting surrounded by other tables with bar stools turned up on their tops.

during his emotional performance, the film director recorded a few cut-a-way shots of Doodles and Connie listening attentively. When Lefty finished singing, he thanked Connie and Doodles for their kind remarks and his work in Road To Nashville was complete.

A videotape copy of Road To Nashville is housed in the archives of The Country Music Foundation in Nashville, Tennessee. The other movie Lefty appeared in, Second Fiddle To Steel Guitar, is more difficult to find. Avid Frizzell fan, Harvey Pitts, advertised for many years in various country music magazines in hopes of securing a copy of the movie. Although the movie has never surfaced, Harvey did obtain a large poster for the movie with pictures of all the country artists who starred in the film. The line-up reads like a 1965 who's who in country music: Homer and Jethro, Kitty Wells, Del Reeves, Sonny James, Minnie Pearl, Webb Pierce, Faron Young, Bill Monroe, George Hamilton IV, Dottie West, Billy Walker, Little Jimmy Dickens, Connie Smith, Johnny Wright, and of course, Lefty Frizzell. Some of the songs featured in the movie were "Young Love," "Abilene," "Hello Walls," "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels," "Careless Love," and "Don't Let Me Cross Over." There is no listing on the poster for the song Lefty performed, but a good possibility would be his number one hit from late 1964, "Saginaw Michigan."

The main actors in the film were Arnold Stang as Jubal A. Bristol and Pamela Hayes as Jubal's wife. Best known for

their comedic work as "The Bowery Boys," Leo Gorcey and Heintz Hall also starred in the film as stagehands. The plot of Second Fiddle To A Steel Guitar is stated in the film's entry in The Motion Picture Guide:

Stang is put in a bind when the Italian opera company hires his wife for a benefit that cancels at the last minute. Being a fan of country music, he gathers up a number of country-western performers. Things get out of hand when Gorcey and Hall cause some confusion by dressing up in the Italians' wardrobes."

(Nash, Ross 2793)

Lefty Frizzell wrote and performed music for the common man. His accurate portrayal in song of life's joys and sorrows became very popular with the masses. Countless nickels and dimes were dropped in jukeboxes to hear the brilliant vocalizing of Frizzell. Radio stations were flooded with requests for his songs in the 1950's and Lefty found an even greater audience in the 1960's with exposure on television and in motion pictures.

The recordings of Lefty Frizzell have been available nearly every year since his Columbia disc debut in 1950. With the dawning of every decade, new singers discover the music of Frizzell. What they find is one of country music's greatest treasures who showed the world a new way of expressing emotions in a song and created a vocal style all his own.

CHAPTER 5
The Supreme Song Stylist
"Always Late"

Lefty Frizzell may be the most influential singer in country music history. Since his first records appeared forty years ago, multitudes of aspiring singers have tried to sing like him. Although Lefty was a superstar in the early 1950's, many other country music artists have had bigger careers and sold more records. However, no one has had a greater impact on how country singers sing their songs than Lefty Frizzell.

The enduring significance of Frizzell's vocal style was the subject of an article in The Houston Post in 1986 by music critic Bob Claypool: "The ghost of Lefty Frizzell still haunts country music. In fact, more than a decade after his death, Frizzell's influence can still be heard everywhere" (Claypool).

The respected country music journalist cites Merle Haggard, Johnny Rodriguez, John Conlee, and George Strait, all of whom are very vocal in their admiration for Lefty. He challenges the "oft-repeated, carved-in-stone critical dictum that says, 'George Jones is the greatest country singer'" (Claypool), pointing out that before Jones had his own style, he, too, was a Frizzell imitator.

Many of the newest names on the country music scene today are playing and singing traditional honky-tonk music,

the music Lefty Frizzell pioneered. In 1990 the Frizzell influence is alive and well in artists like Dwight Yoakam. A Billboard review of Yoakam's If There Was A Way album clearly makes the connection. "This latest Dwight flight finds him still circling his honky-tonk roots and sounding like Lefty Frizzell on jumper cables" (Billboard 17 Nov. 1990, 76). Record company biographies for singers like Clint Black, Alan Jackson, Doug Stone, and Garth Brooks don't mention Lefty Frizzell, but they all talk about the influence of Merle Haggard. When they talk about the way Haggard sings, they're talking about Lefty Frizzell.

I first saw Lefty Frizzell in 1951 at the Rainbow Gardens in Bakersfield. I believe he was twenty-two years old at the time, and he was the hottest country artist in the nation. No one, not even Hank Williams, was as hot as Lefty was then. He was just dynamic on stage, and he really inspired me to try and sing a song. A year or so later, he came back to Bakersfield and I was introduced to him. I sang a couple of songs for him, and he got me up on the stage - that was one of the greatest thrills of my life, to be on stage with him. From then on when I'd get on stage, and I'd wonder how I should do a song, and maybe I'd be in doubt, I'd just mentally try to remember how Lefty would do it, and that pulled me out of a lot of holes. We

became close friends. Years later someone said to me, "Merle, that guy sounds a lot like you." I can remember when having someone say that about Lefty was a dream beyond ever coming true. (Haggard)

In 1970 Lefty only managed to place one song on the Billboard chart. The Harlan Howard composition, "Watermelon Time In Georgia," peaked at number forty-nine on August 22nd. Although disappointing, it did better than his sole chart records from the previous two years. In 1968 "The Marriage Bit" peaked at number fifty-nine and the following year "An Article From Life" struggled to a chart ranking of sixty-four.

Meanwhile, the California singer who idolized Lefty had become the biggest star in country music. He dominated the country charts with self-composed songs like "Swinging Doors," "Branded Man," and "Okie From Muskogee." In 1970 he was named "Entertainer of the Year" by both the Academy of Country Music and the Country Music Association. Haggard was now the king of the kingdom that was ruled twenty years earlier by his favorite singer and major source of musical inspiration.

Although Lefty was flattered by the adulations from Haggard and many others, he was not always comfortable with the implications. It is important to remember that Frizzell was still a recording artist and wanted to be back at the top of the charts where Haggard had taken up residence. Merle

Haggard had so closely emulated the intimate singing style of Lefty that he even fooled Lefty's wife, Alice, as she recalled for Charles Wolfe.

She was in the kitchen at their house in Nashville and a new Haggard song came on the radio. She was just sort of walking around the kitchen working and kinda humming to it, and Lefty came in from the bedroom wanting some coffee since he'd just gotten up, and she said something like, "Sonny I didn't know you had a new record out!" And (Lefty) looked up and said, "That's not me, that's that blankety blank Haggard!" And he was sort of amused but at the same time slightly irritated. (Wolfe)

Allen Frizzell met Merle Haggard when he accompanied brother Lefty on a visit to Haggard's Bakersfield home in 1974. Merle was thrilled that his idol had accepted the invitation to his home and nervous about how the meeting would go.

When Lefty, Allen, and other family members arrived, Merle gave them a tour of his spacious dwelling. Haggard's fascination and love affair with trains was immediately evident with multitudes of replicas throughout the house. Trains were mounted on the walls and placed along the staircase that led up to one big room packed with elaborate scale model railroad trains. Part of Haggard's obsession with the railroad undoubtedly stems from his fascination with

the life and music of Jimmie Rodgers. A deep admiration for the legacy of Rodgers was shared by Lefty as well.

Surrounded by a sundry of miniature trains, it seemed the perfect setting for Merle to compliment Lefty on his current single, "Railroad Lady." (The song, written by Jimmy Buffet and Jerry Jeff Walker, peaked at number fifty-two on June 15, 1974). Lefty's response to Haggard's praise of the song revealed his unique sense of humor. "I don't care for it; I think they oughta let Johnny Cash, or somebody like him do the train (songs). I don't even like trains" (A. Frizzell).

Since Lefty didn't like trains (he was being sarcastic, according to Allen), they left the collection and moved to the listening room. Merle was anxious to play Lefty his version of some early Frizzell hits. In search of the magic of Lefty's early sessions, Haggard travelled to Dallas to record at the same studio Lefty had used in 1950. He even sought out some of the same musicians in an attempt to duplicate the classic Frizzell sound.

Lefty listened attentively to the Haggard recordings and Allen recalls they were very good. When the music finished playing, Lefty had an immediate response. "Hey, if I knew you was going to go to all that trouble, why didn't you just call me. You could have just put your name on some of my old records and it wouldn't have cost you. You wouldn't have had to go to all that trouble" (A. Frizzell).

When Haggard responded with his explanation of wanting to do a tribute, Lefty's reply was, "I thought you did a tribute when somebody was gone...I'm still here" (A. Frizzell). Lefty must have understood the desire to record in honor of a musical hero as he did of Jimmie Rodgers' songs back in the 1950's. Of course Rodgers was dead at the time and following Lefty's death, Haggard did record that tribute to Lefty. He paid his debt to both Lefty and Hank Williams with the Capitol album The Way It Was In '51 that included the touching song, "Goodbye Lefty."

By the time Merle Haggard was a superstar, there was no way he could stop singing like Lefty. His star was shining much brighter than Lefty's in the early 1970's, but Haggard always knew there would have been no light without Lefty. In spite of his generous admiration, Lefty could not help being a little upset with Haggard's cloning of his amazing voice. Charles Wolfe recalls a story of Lefty riding in the back seat of a car when the latest Merle Haggard hit came booming over the radio. "Lefty leaned forward over the seat and turned the radio off. And somebody said, 'Well, Lefty, that's Merle. He sounds just like you,' and Lefty said, 'Yeah, I know,' then he sat back and said, 'You can copyright a song but you can't copyright a style'" (Wolfe).

If Lefty was sometimes annoyed by Haggard's adaptation of his vocal techniques, he was also impressed with his songwriting. Frizzell built his career singing his own songs and the emotions he portrayed lyrically were a big part of

his success. Lefty loved a well-written song and was impressed with the quality of songs Haggard was generating.

Allen Frizzell remembers when he was staying with Lefty and a package arrived one day from Bakersfield. Merle had sent Lefty a box full of his records and Allen recalls an incident that happened soon after the arrival.

He came in and woke me up one time and he got the guitar and he sang (the Haggard composition) "Today I Started Loving You Again," and it just knocked me out, you know, and I never heard him sing it again. Then he says, "You know people say that he really sounds a lot like me and so forth, but I know he's a good writer and I like that song." (A. Frizzell)

Lefty paid Merle a great compliment by recording his song, "Life's Like Poetry," on October 22, 1974. Adding to the significance of his idol singing his composition was the fact that it was Lefty's final recording session. "Life's Like Poetry" was another disappointment on the chart for Lefty (number sixty-seven on February 22, 1975), but for Merle Haggard it remains one of his greatest achievements.

There have been many attempts to describe and detail the creative genius of Lefty Frizzell's vocal technique. One of the first to tackle the task was Thurston Moore in a 1952 fan magazine called Scrapbook of Hillbilly and Western Stars: "Lefty's hallmark of his singing style is his pronunciations of 'way-yaays' (ways), 'day-yaays' (days), and 'lay-yaate'

(late). He explains this is due to his mixed-up accent, which comes of being born in Texas, raised in Arkansas and Louisiana" (Wolfe 93).

Twenty years later writer John Pugh offered this description of Lefty's mystique: "The Frizzell style that has had such an influence is a compelling, ethereal, transcendent vocal quality that has produced some of the most hauntingly beautiful sounds ever to emanate from a pair of human vocal chords" (Wolfe 94).

In 1982 music journalist Robert K. Oermann had high praise for Frizzell in a review of the Rounder Records release, "Treasures Untold: The Early Recordings of Lefty Frizzell," in Country Rhythms magazine. "His spine-tingling off-the-beat phrasing, note-curling, and bluesy effects make him one of country music's most absorbing, involving vocalists of all time" (Oermann 56).

In The Illustrated History of Country Music, Patrick Carr describes Lefty's singing technique and its direct influence on Haggard and others.

His sliding, drawling phrases and rich vibrato can be heard in the singing of Merle Haggard - an admitted admirer - and Johnny Rodriguez and a dozen more, and the way country singers have had of saying "wie" for "way" (listen to Buck Owens, for example) traces back to the strange, innovative, and unique phrasing and pronunciation of Lefty Frizzell. More than

this, Lefty Frizzell could be intimate with a song. He wasn't a smooth singer in the cowboy or western swing tradition, and he wasn't a singer with a big, emotive voice like Roy Acuff or Hank Williams. There was an immediacy and warmth and a depth of subtle feeling to Frizzell's voice that was spellbinding. It could literally send shivers up your spine.
(Carr 210)

Bob Claypool equates Frizzell's vocal mystique with that of pop music sensation Frank Sinatra. He notes that Lefty, like Sinatra, "was a wonderfully intimate singer who intuitively understood the value of a new technology (new microphone and recording techniques)" (Claypool). When Lefty recorded a song it was as if he were singing it personally to each and every one of the millions who bought his records. The individual bond his listeners formed with him changed forever the expectations of a country singer from his fans. "In one brief flurry, Frizzell made the old barn-dance, whoop-'em-up vocals sound painfully outdated and passe" (Claypool).

Frizzell's style was a modern replacement for that - it was a direct, one-to-one style of vocalizing that made people think he was singing directly to them. Added to this was a wonderful array of vocal slurs, bends and glides off the note that were very expressive. ...The

technique has been one of the most imitated in all of country music, and for good reason - it's a tremendously emotional technique. (Claypool)

The fact that Lefty Frizzell changed the way a country song was sung is also echoed by superstars of the modern era, including Randy Travis. "Lefty kinda started a style of singing that had never been done before. The little licks he would sing within lines, and take a one syllable word and make three or four syllables out of it" (Travis).

Country music legend Hank Snow met Lefty in 1950 while touring in Texas. He too recognized something very special in Lefty's vocal presentation. "Lefty had a very unusual voice. I mean he was really different and you can tell, the same as they told me they can on me; I could tell Lefty's voice over the radio from a thousand other voices" (Snow).

Fellow Grand Ole Opry star and Country Music Hall of Fame member, Little Jimmy Dickens, echoes the words of Hank Snow. "A great part in his success and selling records was his style, and when you heard a record by Lefty Frizzell, there was no question who that was" (Dickens).

Ricky Skaggs' main influences were bluegrass pioneers like The Stanley Brothers and Bill Monroe. He is also a fan of Lefty Frizzell and offers some thoughts on the immense popularity of Lefty's music. "Lefty was a very unique singer and I think people loved to hear him sing because he was very emotional" (Skaggs).

Fellow Texan Michael Martin Murphey heard the music of Lefty Frizzell as a young boy growing up in Dallas.

I personally will always remember him for his phrasing. He had this way of half cracking, half yodeling a line that his voice just broke a certain way. It was a warm kind of sound, this feeling of whoever is singing that line is a little world weary, a little tired, had a little wear on 'em, a little experience, and it makes you believe the song more. (Murphey)

David Frizzell equates his brother's amazing voice with a fine musical instrument. "Lefty had a voice like a Martin guitar; there's just nothing else quite like that" (D. Frizzell).

Charles Wolfe suggests Lefty Frizzell opened a door with his vocal technique that virtually all other country singers have passed through.

He is the person who actually showed country singers the small, interesting, intricate things they could do with the vocal changes and phrasing especially. ...The musicians sometimes listened to him more closely than the fans did. He was, in jazz, what they call a musician's musician. Anybody who was serious about country music singing listened to Lefty. Whether it was somebody who was trying to imitate him back in the 1950's or 1960's, or whether some of the

people who never even heard him in person but just heard his records. (Wolfe)

Keith Whitley was born and raised far from Texas in the hills of eastern Kentucky. In the rural region where bluegrass was the dominant musical expression, a young Whitley was introduced to Lefty Frizzell through his parents' record collection. Those songs he heard as a child had a great impact on Whitley's musical development, as he noted in an interview for The Nashville Network's This Week In Country Music in the summer of 1988.

The biggest influence on me musically was a gentleman from Texas by the name of Lefty Frizzell. And I have a lot of people ask me how he became such a big influence on me, given my age. My momma had a lot of old Lefty Frizzell records when I was a kid and I can remember sitting in front of the record player when I was very, very young trying to emulate Lefty's style. He was then, and still is, my favorite singer. (This Week In Country Music)

Unlike many other country music stars of the 1980's who reflect Lefty's influence filtered through Haggard, Keith Whitley went to the source directly. During a taping of the PBS show, Austin City Limits, Whitley proudly proclaims "90 percent of the reason I got into this business was Lefty Frizzell" (Austin City Limits). He then introduced his version of the Frizzell/Shaffer composition, "I Never Go

Around Mirrors," as "the best song to introduce somebody to country music that had never heard it before" (Austin City Limits). The original version of the song, as recorded by Lefty in 1973, had only one verse and a chorus. Whitley desperately wanted to record the song on an album he was completing for RCA in 1988. The record company believed the song needed a second verse and they teamed up with Whitley in convincing the co-writer of the song, Whitey Shafer, to compose another verse.

It was no easy task for Shafer to go back to a song he had put to rest fifteen years earlier. He completed the new verse just a few days before Whitley recorded it and remembers some strange events in the process.

When I wrote it, I was sitting out in the den and I said, "Lefty, my co-writer's passed away here; I need a little help." And all of a sudden, I'm a little spooky about spooky stuff, but it came to me and it came out good. So I don't know if he...well, he always looked over my shoulder. (Shafer)

When Shafer finished the new lyric he called up Whitley and read it to him over the phone. Keith loved the new lines and had one more request for Shafer - directions to Lefty's grave. After the record was released, Keith Whitley explained to reporters why he needed those directions. "Apparently, he went to the Tennessee cemetery where Lefty

was buried, read the new lyrics over his grave, and then went back to Nashville and recorded the song" (Coleman).

Keith was very pleased with the version of the song he captured in the studio. Adding to the Frizzell magic was Lefty's brother, Allen, providing the haunting harmonies. Although Whitley's first introduction to Lefty was his big hits of the 1950's, the song he carefully picked to record himself was from Lefty's final years. Writing in The Journal of Country Music, Mark Coleman notes the significance of the song Whitley chose to pay tribute to the musical legacy of Lefty in his own career.

Keith acknowledges his debt to Lefty with Don't Close Your Eyes' cover version of "I Never Go Around Mirrors" and pays in full. On the Somewhere Between reading of the same song, Keith respectfully echoes Frizzell; six years later, he underlines the places where their styles intersect, and where they diverge. Significantly, "I Never Go Around Mirrors" is late-period Lefty; the key lines "I can't stand to see a good man go to waste" foreshadow the harrowing, introspective turn Whitley himself would take on his next record. (Coleman)

Keith Whitley was very vocal in his admiration of Lefty Frizzell and his heavy influence is evident in most of his recordings. Whitley shared something else with Lefty that neither was proud of - a weakness for alcohol. At the height

of his popularity on stage and in the charts, Keith Whitley died of alcohol poisoning on May 9, 1989.

Another country star of the 1980's who emulates Lefty Frizzell is John Anderson. In 1982 he recorded Lefty's classic, "I Love You A Thousand Ways," and copied Lefty's vocal "way-yaays" and all. The single only went up to fifty-four on the Billboard chart, but it put the country music world on notice that Lefty was Anderson's hero. When he hit paydirt in 1983 with the number one gold selling single, "Swingin," the influence of Lefty Frizzell was clear. The note-bending style of Lefty was taken to the limit as Anderson enunciated the refrain, "just a swaaiinngin."

John Anderson is often linked with Lefty Frizzell, as in a review of a single record release in the September/October 1990 issue of Country Music magazine. "'Who's Loving My Baby' glistens with echoes of 1950's Lefty Frizzell, its loping beat perfect for one whose voice still carries the Frizzell influence" (Kienzle 62).

Whitey Shafer was a fan of Lefty Frizzell long before he was a friend and co-writer of the great singer. He recalls a conversation they had in which he questioned Lefty about his innovative singing style.

I said, "How can you just start that way-yaay and all that stuff?" He said, "Well when you can't hold a note you gotta go somewhere." So that's what happened, that was his philosophy with it. If you can't hold a note too long, you

might as well kinda curl it around a little bit and that's what he did. (Shafer)

In an interview shortly before his death, Lefty talked about his landmark vocal styling and of the impact Jimmie Rodgers' music had on him. "I'm about the first one that slurred, but I'd trade all my yea-yeahs and slurs for his yodeling anytime" (Lane 42). In his conversation with Geoff Lane for Country Music Magazine, Lefty's admiration for Rodgers continued. "I can truly say he was the biggest influence on my life. Frustrations you can't talk about, you can sing about, and that's the story of my life" (42).

Lefty's love of Rodgers' vocal technique never waned and his desire to sing like his hero remained firm. "I'd give anything if I could yodel and sing like Jimmie Rodgers...I did yodel, but I'm like Ernest Tubb. My voice changed till I couldn't yodel good no more" (42).

When Lefty talked about the way he sang, which rarely occurred, he focused more on his philosophy of singing than on the actual technicalities of his unique style. Two months before his death Lefty made several profound statements about the urgency and emotion he sought to express when he sang:

When I sing, to me every word has a feeling about it. I had to linger, had to hold it, I didn't want to let go of it. I want to hold one word through a whole line of melody, to linger with it all the way down. I didn't want to let

go of that no more than I wanted to let go of the woman I loved. I didn't want to lose it.

For years I've been saying "I love you, I love you, I love you." Sometimes it takes a long time so you can go through life not being understood. Some people can't talk and express themselves; with me expression comes in the form of a song, and it makes me very happy. So I'd lose my blues, hang on to what little I had and it became a style. (Lane 63)

The enduring importance of the style Lefty Frizzell created may be best summed up by Bob Claypool: "Simply put, Frizzell was a unique, highly individualistic singer who, more than any other single artist, brought country singing into the modern age - dragged it into the mid-20th century, if you will" (Claypool).

A review of Billboard's "Hot Country Singles & Tracks" chart for the week ending October 6, 1990, proves that Frizzell's influence continues. The chart that he dominated nearly forty years earlier still bears his indelible mark. The unmistakable Frizzell vocal style can be heard in twelve of the hit songs. Merle Haggard is at number seventy-three with "When It Rains It Pours," newcomer Alan Jackson is at sixty-three with "Chasin' That Neon Rainbow," and Willie Nelson is at number fifty with "Ain't Necessarily So." Alan Jackson is on the chart a second time at number nineteen with his former top five hit, "Wanted," and the Randy Travis and

George Jones duet of "A Few Ole Country Boys" is at number eighteen after only five weeks. Clint Black is at seventeen with "Nothing's News," the Keith Whitley and Lorrie Morgan duet, "Till A Tear Becomes A Rose," holds the number fourteen slot and Doug Stone is at number twelve with "Fourteen Minutes Old." There are four more artists in the top ten who owe a great deal to Lefty Frizzell. Ricky Van Shelton is at number nine with "I Meant Every Word He Said," at number six it's George Strait with "Drinking Champagne," and Mark Chestnutt holds the number five spot with his debut single, "Too Cold At Home." At number one is "Friends In Low Places" by 1990's biggest country music success story, Garth Brooks, who cites Merle Haggard and George Jones as major influences. The living legends who inspire the young stars of today were heavily influenced in their early days by the vocal genius of Lefty Frizzell.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

A Fading Star With a Lasting Legacy

"I Want To Be With You Always"

When Lefty Frizzell wrote and recorded "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time" in 1950, he had no idea how his life would change. It brought him a major contract with powerful Columbia Records for whom he recorded for twenty-two years. He was catapulted from a struggling bar room singer to a certified country music star. Lefty went from earning \$40 a week to \$1,000 a night and his life was never the same. Frizzell's twenty-five year roller-coaster career produced a body of work that is foundational in country music. From his songwriting to performing to his innovative singing style, the importance of Lefty Frizzell is monumental.

Historically, Lefty Frizzell had his share of significant country music firsts. Lefty was the first and only artist to place four songs on Billboard magazine's top ten chart at the same time. He was the first country artist to perform at the Hollywood Bowl. In 1951 Frizzell headlined (along with Ernest Tubb) a concert at Griffith Stadium in Washington, D.C., that set a record for a one-show appearance in country music. The "all-star" concert that also featured bluegrass greats, Flatt and Scruggs, drew fourteen thousand fans (Malone 264).

Lefty Frizzell was the first country singer to be included in the prestigious Walkway of the Stars in Hollywood. Two other major achievements came from Billboard magazine where Lefty's name rarely missed an issue in the early 1950's. Billboard hailed Frizzell as their "Discovery of the Year" in 1951 and the following year named him "Country Artist of the Year."

Lefty's new-found stardom was a dream come true and he made up for all the years of financial struggles with flamboyant style. He bought expensive cars, a tour bus, and even an airplane to carry him to his many fans. This high-living honky-tonk lifestyle took a major toll on Lefty. While the impact of rock 'n' roll in the mid 1950's is often blamed for Lefty's absence from the charts during that period, there were several major factors. Shortly before his death in 1975 Frizzell was candid about the underlying cause of his career stalemate. "It wasn't so much the travelling, though that got to me. ...It wasn't so much the drink and it wasn't so much the rock 'n' roll. It was private problems at home. Too much success too soon probably played its part" (Lane 42).

Another unfortunate hallmark of Lefty Frizzell's career was bad management. He had virtually no business sense and blindly trusted those he charged with guiding his career. Lefty's longtime friend and producer, Don Law, recalls the tremendous interest in Lefty as a "hot property" and how nearly everyone took advantage of the young star. "Everybody

wanted to publish his songs. Everybody wanted to be his manager. I was never his or any other artist's manager. I was simply his record producer, friend, and would-be counselor" (Law).

Don Law produced Lefty's records for sixteen years, including the very first session in Dallas that included "I Love You A Thousand Ways" and "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time." Before long Lefty had lots of money and everyone wanted his time. Law remembers a call he got from Lefty one day in Dallas while he was there to produce some more records for Lefty. The incident reveals Lefty's total lack of business knowledge and how a few friends like Law rescued him from complete financial disaster.

One morning in Dallas he called me up and said, "Don, last night I done something I shouldn't oughta done." "What was that Lefty?" I said. "I signed another contract." ...We discovered that if he lived up to all the contracts he had signed, he would be paying out 110 percent of what he earned. This really shook him up and he used one of his favorite expressions. "Golly Bum," he said, "what'll I do now?" I said, "Lefty, as I see it, the only thing to do is get a good lawyer and buy some of these contracts up." This he did. It cost him a great deal of money which fortunately he had at that time, and got him back on a relatively even keel. (Law)

Merle Haggard first saw Lefty Frizzell perform in 1951 and equates the experience with the phenomena of an Elvis presley performnce. "He was one of a kind and had charisma plus...he had a lot of Presley about him, you know. He could walk on stage and men liked him and the women went crazy" (Haggard). Haggard further suggests that musical history might have been rewritten if Presley's legendary manager had discovered Lefty. "He didn't fall into the right management hands and had Colonel Parker picked him up first, (there) might never have been Elvis" (Haggard).

If Lefty had been able to find a competent and caring manager early in his career, his success would probably have been much greater; greater in terms of consistency of hit records, concert appearances, and mass media exposure. Lefty had the incredible talent but could not find the direction he needed. After his painful personal and financial troubles with early management, Lefty became suspicious of all managers. The men and companies who directed his career in later years were more of a service or clearing agency. They would book his personal appearances or hire someone to handle that but did little to further the career of Lefty Frizzell.

With proper management, Lefty could have made a much greater impact in the mass media. He did make several appearances on national radio and television but as popular as Frizzell was at the time, there should have been many more. Many of Lefty's contemporaries landed their own television shows. Eddy Arnold, Tennessee Ernie Ford, and

Gene Autry all had network television shows in the 1950's. Lefty may not have been comfortable with his very own show, but he certainly should have been a guest on the above mentioned shows.

When Lefty returned to the top of the country charts in 1964 with "Saginaw Michigan," a good manager would have capitalized on the success in the mass media. There were several major network television shows at that time that often featured country stars, including The Joey Bishop Show, The Dean Martin Show, The Mike Douglas Show, and The Jimmy Dean Show. We have no record of Lefty appearing on any of these major programs.

Although Lefty did make several appearances on syndicated television on shows like Billy Walker's Country Carnival and The Porter Wagoner Show, his guest spots were few. Country music was flourishing in syndication and more than a dozen stars had their own television shows. Flatt and Scruggs, Ernest Tubb, Bill Anderson, Leroy Van Dyke, and Carl Smith all hosted programs that featured country music entertainment. There is no record that Lefty Frizzell ever was a guest on these shows. Although Lefty may not have wanted to do it, he should have been given the opportunity to host his own country music show.

When Lefty's twenty-two year association with Columbia Records came to an end in 1972, he was devastated. The shock of being released from the label seemed to jolt Lefty back to one of his greatest talents, songwriting.

The results of his renewed commitment to songwriting were evident in his first album for ABC released in 1973, entitled The Legendary Lefty Frizzell. The album produced his highest charting single in nine years with the autobiographical song Lefty co-wrote with Whitey Shafer, "I Never Go Around Mirrors."

The song was a top twenty hit. Lefty was back one more time. He was back to songwriting, back to recording, and back on country radio where he belonged. Lefty only had four more singles on the chart before his death in 1975.

Lefty's three albums for ABC hold great significance in terms of his influence on aspiring country singers. While the sales of his later records did not match those of his early single releases, the people who studied those recordings include some of today's major country songwriters and singers.

The music of Lefty Frizzell was released on compact disc for the first time in 1989 in a collection of ten of his biggest hits from the 1950's and 1960's in a Columbia Records series called American Originals. Two more major releases are scheduled for 1991. California based Rhino Records plans to release a collection of twelve to fifteen Frizzell songs on compact disc and cassette. The most complete collection of Lefty Frizzell recordings is scheduled for release in 1991 by Bear Family Records in Bremen, West Germany. The package is a reissue of every available recording Lefty Frizzell ever made. The set was first released in 1984 and the 1991

reissue will be offered on compact disc and will feature more than a dozen previously unreleased recordings Lefty made for Columbia in the 1960's.

Lefty Frizzell's total career success in terms of Billboard charts is overshadowed by many other country music pioneers. In Joel Whitburn's exhaustive history of country music on the Billboard charts in Top Country Singles 1944-1988, every artist is given a number ranking based on the number of charted singles, position, and longevity. Eddy Arnold is number one, George Jones is second, Johnny Cash third, Merle Haggard fourth, and Conway Twitty fifth. Lefty Frizzell is ranked number seventy-six.

Several of Lefty's first single releases sold in excess of 500,000 copies, the amount certified "gold" today by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). The RIAA was not in existence in the early 1950's so no sales awards were given to Lefty. There is no public record of total records sold by Lefty Frizzell during his career. Repeated calls to the New York office of Columbia Records failed to yield any information on sales figures for the twenty-two years Frizzell recorded for the label. The discography in Wolfe's Lefty Frizzell His Life His Music lists 132 releases on Lefty Frizzell from several labels on 78 RPM, 45 RPM, and long play phonograph albums. In trying to arrive at an estimate of record sales, the figure of 100,000 units per release was used to generate a suggested career record sale amount of 13.2 million units. Some of the individual record

releases sold far more and some probably less, but it gives an idea of numbers sold.

Many other country music legends can boast total record sales in excess of fifty million. Few country music singers, however, can match the stylistic genius of Lefty Frizzell. His unique, intimate, classic way of singing made a lasting impact on country music. Lefty set a new standard by which all other country singers who followed would be measured. Lefty's vocal magic cannot be measured by charts and numbers. His tremendous influence on modern country vocal technique can be heard in many of today's most popular country stars. While Lefty Frizzell's personal career was marred by a series of bad business deals and continual hard living, the way he sang became a phenomenon and country music singing was forever changed.

Lefty Frizzell's honest portrayal of life's joys and sorrows produced some of country music's greatest songs. From the happy-go-lucky "If You've Got The Money, I've Got The Time" to the quintessential love ballad, "I Love You A Thousand Ways," to the loving tribute to his parents with "Mom And Dad's Waltz," Lefty's early compositions are a study in country songwriting. Lefty's songwriting in the early 1970's produced a group of songs that include the classic number one (for both Merle Haggard and Johnny Rodriguez) and Grammy Award winning, "That's The Way Love Goes" (co-written with Whitey Shafer). In 1972 Lefty Frizzell received an

honor that he cherished deeply; he was elected into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

Country music's highest honor evaded Lefty Frizzell during his lifetime but seven years after his death, Lefty finally got his due. He was elected into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1982 and joined his idols, Jimmy Rodgers and Ernest Tubb, in the hallowed halls. Country music fans for generations to come can discover Lefty in the Hall of Fame and country singers can continue to absorb the wonderful legacy of the supreme song stylist. As long as the human voice gives expression to the emotions of the heart in a country song, the influence of Lefty Frizzell will prevail.

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