



TIME
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CONTEMPORARY
COUNTRY

CONTEMPORARY COUNTRY

The Mid-'70s • Pure Gold

1. **I Can Help** Billy Swan
2. **All These Things** Joe Stampley
3. **Love Is Like a Butterfly** Dolly Parton
4. **(Turn Out the Light and) Love Me Tonight** Don Williams
5. **The Door** George Jones
6. **Wasted Days and Wasted Nights** Freddy Fender
7. **Hank Williams, You Wrote My Life** Moe Bandy
8. **Drinkin' Thing** Gary Stewart
9. **I Never Go around Mirrors** Lefty Frizzell
10. **Country Bumpkin** Cal Smith
11. **Sweet Dreams** Emmylou Harris
12. **Faster Horses (The Cowboy and the Poet)** Tom T. Hall
13. **Love Is the Foundation** Loretta Lynn
14. **(I'm a) Stand by My Woman Man** Ronnie Milsap
15. **'Til I Can Make It on My Own** Tammy Wynette
16. **I See the Want To in Your Eyes** Conway Twitty
17. **Just Get Up and Close the Door** Johnny Rodriguez
18. **A Very Special Love Song** Charlie Rich
19. **San Antonio Stroll** Tanya Tucker
20. **If You've Got the Money I've Got the Time** Willie Nelson
21. **One Piece at a Time** Johnny Cash
22. **Convoy** C.W. McCall

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THE MID-'70s • PURE GOLD

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

CCD-08
MSD-35316



1. I Can Help 2. All These Things 3. Love Is Like a Butterfly 4. Love Me Tonight
5. The Door 6. Wasted Days and Wasted Nights 7. Hank Williams, You Wrote My Life
8. Drinkin' Thing 9. I Never Go around Mirrors 10. Country Bumpkin 11. Sweet Dreams
12. Faster Horses 13. Love Is the Foundation 14. Stand by My Woman Man
15. 'Til I Can Make It on My Own 16. I See the Want To in Your Eyes
17. Just Get Up and Close the Door 18. A Very Special Love Song
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21. One Piece at a Time 22. Convoy

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CONTEMPORARY COUNTRY

THE MID-'70s • PURE GOLD

After 20 years of struggle, Freddy Fender became an "overnight sensation" in 1975. Under his real name of Baldemar Huerta, he sang Spanish-language rock 'n' roll and rhythm 'n' blues in Texas' Rio Grande Valley. By 1959, shortly after renaming himself (after the Fender guitar) to attract a wider audience, he enjoyed a regional hit with his original swamp-pop ballad **Wasted Days and Wasted Nights**. Fender wrote the song as "Lonely Days and Lonely Nights" at the Starlight Club in Harlingen, Texas, where he was living and performing. With his marriage disintegrating and his life turning dissolute, either title pretty much summed things up for him. Fender endured a pot bust and a consequent three-year imprisonment, four years outside the music business, and several more as an itinerant musician before hooking up with Houston producer Huey P. Meaux. Though Fender hated country music, Meaux made him cut the sentimental *Before the Next Teardrop Falls*. A local hit for Meaux's

indie label, it was picked up nationally by ABC/Dot and topped the country charts. The team then remade *Wasted Days and Wasted Nights*, turning a 15-year-old Tejano R&B obscurity into one of country's hottest "new" songs.

Their triumph suggested just how far the Nashville mainstream, its flanks under assault from the progressive-country "outlaw" movement, was willing to go. But country in the mid-'70s remained—to its benefit—primarily the sound of Music City songwriters and producers. Wayne Carson was one of Nashville's more versatile figures. In the '60s, he had worked for Memphis producer Chips Moman, writing and playing guitar on pop hits such as the Box Tops' *The Letter*. Carson had also sold country songs as early as 1966, so he made himself at home in Nashville in the '70s. In 1974, his **Drinkin' Thing** introduced an unfettered Florida singer named Gary Stewart to the top 10. On the flip side was Carson's **See the Want To in Your Eyes**, which

had been inspired by a conversation with a woman whose amorous intent Carson did not share. Conway Twitty happened to hear that B side on his car radio, and decided to make the song his next single.

Columbia producer Billy Sherrill and his writers personified the Nashville establishment. Sherrill and Norro Wilson penned **The Door** at a time when the troubled George Jones was starting to be recognized as the supreme country singer. With its cataclysmic imagery dramatizing a lover walking out, the song was appropriate for Jones. Sherrill even rented a miniature door to slam shut in the studio, because he wanted an authentic sound and could not properly mike a real door. *The Door* entered the top 10 the week Jones left his wife, Tammy Wynette, and hit No. 1 four days before she filed for divorce.

Like Jones, Wynette continued to say it with music. **'Til I Can Make It on My Own** originated when George Richey, playing piano on one of Wynette's sessions, used the phrase to describe the feelings of a recently divorced person. Wynette related to that idea, and she and Richey turned it into a song that weekend at his house while munching on popcorn prepared by his wife. Sherrill himself stopped by to perfect the fi-

nal two lines. Within two years, Richey and Wynette were husband and wife. Charlie Rich's **A Very Special Love Song** began as a melodic idea Norro Wilson copped from the theme of the movie *Summer of '42*. Sherrill overheard him working it out, and wanted to incorporate it into the next Rich single. Wilson said they should write the crooner "a very special love song," and the rest came easily.

The figurehead of the outlaws was Willie Nelson, who had a genuine reverence for the past. More than a year after the death of his fellow Texan and honky-tonk hero, Lefty Frizzell, Nelson released **If You've Got the Money I've Got the Time**, which had been Frizzell's first smash in 1950. Nelson's tribute album of Frizzell songs, *To Lefty from Willie*, followed in 1977. Despite a turbulent, checkered career, Frizzell had been returning to vogue around the time he died in 1975. **I Never Go around Mirrors** was his most chilling posthumous hit, but he also wrote for others, including new Texas honky-tonker Moe Bandy. However, Bandy's tribute to one of Frizzell's earliest peers, **Hank Williams, You Wrote My Life**, came from Paul Craft, whose banjo-dominated demo had more of a bluegrass feel.

The careers of several rockers who had gone country were peaking by the mid-'70s. Joe Stampley had gained notoriety on the Louisiana frat-rock circuit as leader of the Uniques, who in 1966 charted pop with a remake of Art Neville's 1961 New Orleans R&B ballad **All These Things**. In 1976, Stampley reprised the song as a solo country artist. Ronnie Milsap was abandoning his Memphis white R&B roots for country-politan by the mid-'70s. His **(I'm a) Stand By My Woman Man** was written by Kent Robbins, who was celebrating the arrival of his first child after three years of marriage. The Wynette-inspired title phrase was originally the second line of another Robbins original that his publisher, Tommy Collins (Milsap's producer), had rejected.

Don Williams began as a song-plugger for JMI, where Bob McDill was a staff writer. When that company folded and Williams became an artist, McDill supplied many of his hits, including **(Turn Out the Light and) Love Me Tonight**. Billy Swan, the bassist in Kris Kristofferson's band, spontaneously played **I Can Help** on a portable organ given to him as a wedding present by Kristofferson and Rita Coolidge, then husband and wife. Swan improvised lyrics on the spot, and added the

cascading guitar line in the studio.

C.W. McCall was a pseudonym for Iowa adman Bill Fries, who created the characters C.W. McCall and truckstop waitress Mavis for a commercial for one of his clients, a bread company. **Convoy**, conceived while listening to his CB radio at the height of the national CB mania, resulted in sales of seven million and a new career for McCall. Emmylou Harris was the leading light of the L.A. country-rock scene, and her arrangement of Don Gibson's **Sweet Dreams** was born on the tour bus with her Hot Band guitarist Rodney Crowell. This marked the fifth appearance of *Sweet Dreams* in the country top 10.

Among the old reliables, Johnny Cash's novelty **One Piece at a Time**, about an auto worker who stole a "car" off the assembly line part by part, was his first No. 1 in five years. Writer Wayne Kemp's wife helped him shape his original idea by noting that parts taken over several years would not fit together, at which point Kemp realized that the final product would be mighty ugly even if the parts did fit. Dolly Parton wrote **Love Is Like a Butterfly** in honor of her personal symbol because, as she put it, "I'm always chasing dreams and butterflies." Tom T. Hall wrote **Faster**

Horses (The Cowboy and the Poet)

after remarking to a friend in New York that Gotham was "about faster horses, younger women, older whiskey, more money."

Cal Smith's **Country Bumpkin** neatly summarized the era. After overhearing paper-pushers at his publishing company saying they did not like his "country bumpkin-type stuff," Don Wayne quit his job and wrote the song while driving home. Veteran Cal Smith, who had just completed an album, scrapped one track so he could use *Country Bumpkin* instead. It went on to win the CMA Song of the Year award for its writer and Single of the Year award for the artist. He who laughs last, it seemed, still laughs best.

—John Morthland

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George Jones and Tammy Wynette

