

# The Sound of Fury Fan Club Newsletter

## Issue 16: April 2023 - June 2023



Hi there!

We hope you enjoyed the Easter holidays and are having a good 2023.

This month we celebrate what would've been Billy's 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday on 17<sup>th</sup> April.

This edition continues our Billy Connections feature, this time it's the fantastic country legend Hank Williams.

Regrettably due to circumstances beyond our control the hoped for venue meeting booking for this April has not been possible. We are hopeful of an anniversary year meeting still during October this year so please watch out for information. Some fans will be meeting at Billy's grave this Sunday around 1pm and hopefully find a local pub for a late lunch. You are more than welcome to join.

If you do want to get in touch with us - [email soundoffurysecretary@gmail.com](mailto:soundoffurysecretary@gmail.com) or write to The Sound of Fury Fan Club, P.O. Box 157, Frodsham, WA6 1BY

## Another Billy tribute at the Cavern Club, Liverpool.

Colin Paul & The Persuaders put on a magnificent show at the famous Cavern Club (the place was really jumping), in January and the boys are doing it all over again next year - 28th January 2024, the anniversary of Billy's passing.

Tickets are £15 per person.

Doors open at 1pm. Show starts at 2pm. Finish 5pm

Don't miss out! Tickets on sale now - <https://www.cavernclub.com>



## Vintage Rock – Billy anniversary tribute special.



The February / March edition of Vintage Rock magazine as reported in the last issue, featured a brilliant 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary tribute to Billy. We have been told this is one of the biggest selling Vintage Rock issues ever!

Although no longer available in newsagents, you can still pick up a copy online - <https://www.vintagerockmag.com>



## Mill Hill Cemetery-Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2023

### (The 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary)

Having been unable for a host of reasons, not least Covid, to hold Mill Hill gatherings at the grave and hall, or indeed attend at all, since early 2020, Linda and I decided to try to get up and back on the day, something we achieved more easily than we thought, despite Saturday traffic. It was a deeply personal visit but also intended to represent The Sound of Fury Team, who, in one form or another have been at each meeting since 1996 (and personally/individually in some cases and most gatherings from 1983). We had enjoyed a great meeting on 6th October 2019 and the last one, also enjoyable was on 26th January 2020, just prior to the onset of Covid. Arriving around mid-day we were alone at the grave for a reasonable amount of time, which was very special, the first time for me in years and probably the first time for us as a couple. The grave looked neat and nice but there is only so much room for loose flowers in the holders and parts of the stonework, the dove in particular, could do with a clean-nothing urgent but something for the SOF to initiate as usual, with Billy's Lisa, in due course. As always we left our oasis with the ribbon in purple/mauve and Billy in gold lettering and noticed the flowers dropped off either earlier that day or week by fans. I would guess more fans and flowers turned up on the following day. In the event, we met local fan and friend Rebecca Cohen there and a lady we had not previously met, who had left a nice vase of flowers, gone for a walk and then came by again. I regret that, my memory being what it is, I have forgotten her name and that of the Billy/Elvis fan (lady) in a wheelchair and her family members who came along for the first time also I believe. Linda and I left to visit Danny Rivers and lovely wife Emily both buried in Hendon cemetery just down the road; they are both really missed by all of us who knew them. Returning to Billy's resting place we bumped into old friend, Billy Fan and DJ, Pierre Petrou who took a load of selfies- for face book presumably. There were around seven visitors those we knew of on 28th and perhaps several more we didn't see, but other members of our team, and I imagine, some other 'southern' fans, were either travelling to, or already in Liverpool to support Colin Paul and the Persuaders and their great performance in the music suite adjacent to the Cavern. Returning home we were shattered, as expected, but happy that we had 'done our bit' for Billy on this very special anniversary.

Chris Eley.





# THE BILLY FURY CONNECTION-ROOTS, COVERS AND INFLUENCES

## Part 6. Country Music.

**Hiram King ‘Hank’ Williams (Sep 17<sup>th</sup> 1923-January 1<sup>st</sup> 1953) -and others.**

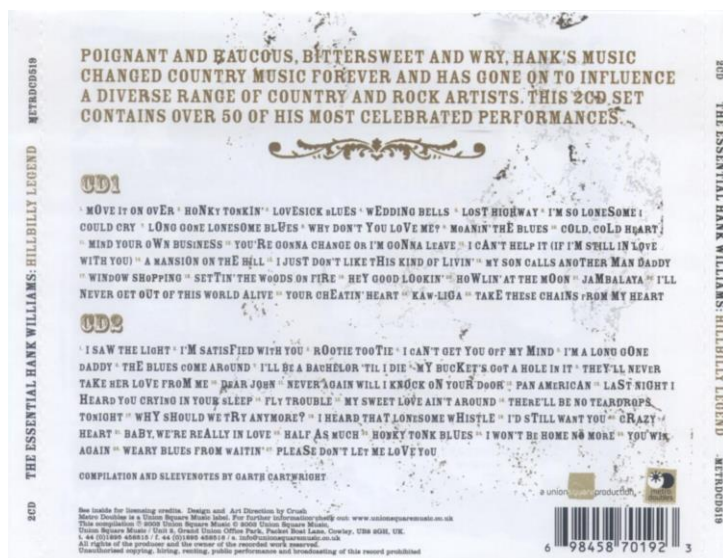
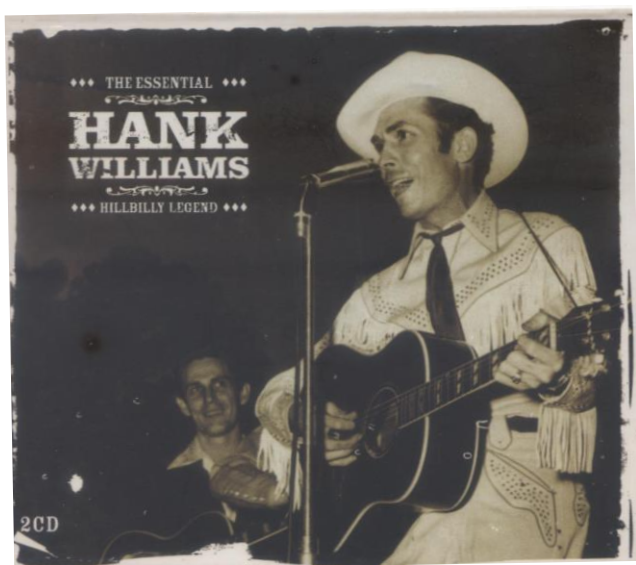
We have already referred in previous newsletters and SOF magazines to the fact that young Ronnie Wycherley, prior to October 1958, was influenced by and /or very aware of some forms of country and western music as it was generally known back then, and for many years after. In fact Billy referred to it as such during interviews as late as 1982, saying he identified with the sound and lyrics-the sense of sadness, love and loss invoked by such roots music (as opposed to the general 40s and 50s pop and novelty sounds that abounded as he grew up). He spoke of the seamen bringing such records into the Port of Liverpool from the USA, and we know from his own account that his Grandma owned a 78 rpm recording of *Give Me Your Word* by Tennessee Ernie Ford. Frankie Laine, another already featured influence on Ronnie drew mostly and highly successfully on the western side of country.



In order to get to the more ‘country’ influences on Ronnie Wycherley/Billy Fury we need to begin with the performer generally acknowledged as being the originator of country music as we know it, singer/songwriter Jimmy Rodgers. Almost certainly he would not have exerted any kind of direct influence on Ronnie/Billy, his star having waned years before, but would have done on various US country artists that followed. Known as ‘The Singing Brakeman’ or ‘The Blue Yodeller’ he seemingly deserved the epithet, ‘The Father of Country Music.’ His original style, honed by years of working on the railroad, hearing people of different races sing and play, resulted in a fusion of blues, jazz, railroad, country and western, in a recording career that tragically, due to TB, only lasted from 1927-1933. He in turn might have been some kind of an influence, most likely (due to the age gap) through others such as Gene Autrey, on the singer /songwriter who came to be known as the ‘Father of Country and Western Music’, Hank Williams, aka Luke the Drifter. Certainly Rodgers was a huge influence on Hank Snow, a major worldwide star, who was almost certainly an influence on Ronnie Wycherley/Billy Fury. Hank Williams was a tragic, self-destructive figure; drink, drugs and failed relationships blighting his life and career (perhaps fuelling his simple but effective and heart rending song writing), and eventually resulting in his death from a drug/alcohol induced heart attack in the back of his white Cadillac in 1953, aged only 29 years. There is some doubt as to where he actually died, and a strong case for saying that it was either in a hotel in Knoxville (already being dead when bundled in coat and blanket into the back of the car and not merely incapacitated), or somewhere on the road from there to Blaine, as the car headed for a gig. Officially it would be recorded as Oak Hill Virginia, his final destination. A spinal defect no doubt helped to make travelling worse, as it had rendered him frail all of his life, preventing the pursuance of a more physically demanding career, and causing great pain, in turn requiring drugs to kill the pain. As a child, Hank was fascinated by the western ‘cowboy’ culture, from films and comics, the same that would grip so many children here in the UK, including young Ronnie Wycherley, right up until the early 60s. The genre provided an escape from the harsh realities of life during the depression in the US and attendance at church brought with it the love of music, in much the same way as it would for the great southern rockers and country artists who would follow. In fact Hank would only be a country dweller until about 1934, by which time he was performing on the streets, having been given his first guitar when aged eight.

Locals taught him the rudiments of guitar and fiddle. Williams, like Rodgers, before him, also had no well-trodden route to follow, to learn from, and his self-destructive lifestyle, especially on tour would be provide a template for some of the country, hillbilly and rock'n' roll singers who would follow through the 50's and even beyond. If Rodgers had proved that white folk can sing the blues then Williams proved it all over again, as would Elvis so successfully, also without directly copying or parody of the black style. Indeed, it may be said that Hank was the first 'Elvis' style country singer, combining stage presence, trademark 'western' suit and hat, great original songs and a unique vocal intensity, to generate much excitement at his shows; with many people who witnessed his performance never forgetting 'The Day That Hank Williams Came To Town.' Admittedly, often it seems, his performance could be less than enjoyable for either himself or the audience due to impairment through pain, drink or drugs. Like Elvis his songs were a fusion of gospel, country, western, folk and blues and his songs would mirror his life; both being full of highs and lows. Despite his western attire and love of cowboy films, and the naming of his band The Drifting Cowboys, strangely, his performance of western songs was strictly limited. It appears that an influence as he cleaned shoes on the street was a local black street entertainer, and this genre would permeate subsequent recordings. Like Rodgers, he put blues into country and seemingly idolised Roy Acuff, who had already begun to pave the way for commercially successful country music. Following a stint on a minor label, in June 1947 Williams debuted on the MGM label with the self-penned up-tempo hillbilly/honky-tonk stomper classic, often cited as being akin to the rock'n' roll which would follow, *Move It On Over*. In 1949 Hank recorded a number which would become synonymous with him, even though he had not written it-*Lovesick Blues*. Both record buyers and live audiences loved Hank's performance of that song. In total during his life he enjoyed eleven No.1 hits in the US C&W charts (there were three different ones), placing thirty eight songs there. Sources vary but I have gone along with the information provided by Joel Whitburn as listed in Colin Escott's excellent 1994 book-*Hank Williams-The Biography*.

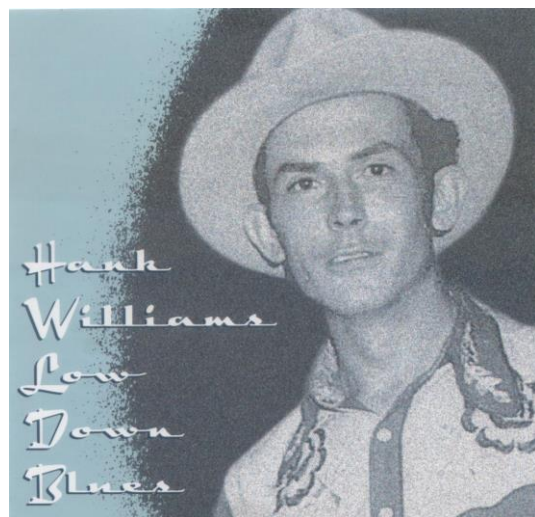
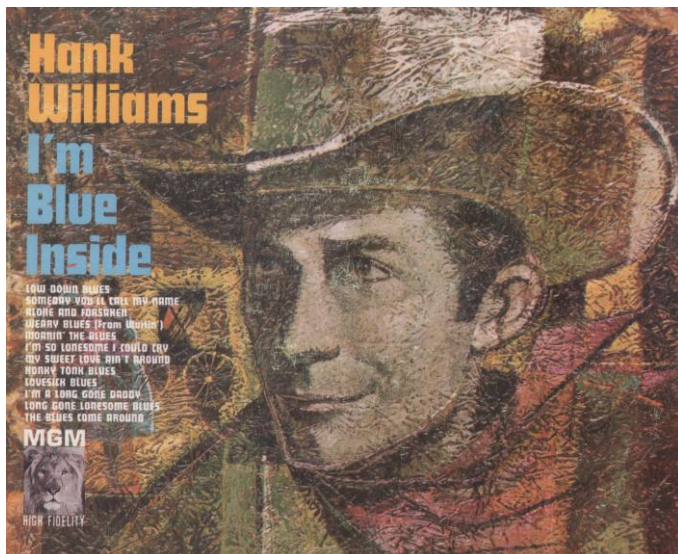
Hank wrote some of the most outstanding songs in the field of country music, covered by so many different artists including albums by such notables as Roy Orbison, Del Shannon, Charlie Rich and Ronnie Hawkins, whilst Ricky Nelson, Jerry Lee Lewis, Gene Vincent and a host of country artists covered songs by this influential artist. Johnny Cash, himself one of the biggest figures in the history of country music, was a big fan of Williams (and to a degree shared his pain). Ray Charles had the perfect voice for Williams numbers and Williams' 1952 No. 1 hit *Jambalaya* was recorded by many singers; including our very own Gerry & The Pacemakers and rock'n'roll originator Fats Domino. Perhaps two of his finest self-penned songs were *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry* and *I Can't Help It (If I'm still in love with you)*. In 1973 Elvis performed a great live version of the former whilst fine 'pop' singer B.J. Thomas made possibly the finest recordings to date of both songs. **NB:** The compilation album shown below, (Union Square Music-METRD CD 510) is one of several but gives the listener most of the tracks required except for the all-important *Lowdown Blues*.



## The Billy Fury Connection.

This is based on the country songs recorded by Hank Williams that we know that Billy recorded and/or performed live over the years. Many were also recorded of course by other artists, up to 1963 (when the phenomenal Billy Fury & The Tornados *We Want Billy* live LP was laid down at Decca's West Hampstead studio), and beyond (on Parlophone in Billy's case). There are connections of some sort, many tenuous of course, with country artists/songwriters, Slim Whitman, Ernest Tubb, George Morgan, Marty Robbins and Hank Snow (to be pursued in a future 'connection'). Country music, albeit in a livelier form was recorded by Elvis, Carl Perkins, (his fabulous *Turn Around* is an echo of Hank's self-penned classic, *You Win Again*), Jerry Lee Lewis and others at the Sun studios in Memphis and indeed elsewhere-Elvis at RCA, Carl at Columbia and Jerry Lee at Smash/Mercury. A huge influence on Billy from 1960 at the very least (especially via Eddie Cochran) was Ray Charles; a successful recorder of country music with two UK Top 5 country singles and two Top 20 Country LPs to his credit. His well-known connection to Billy will be examined in due course. As an aside, it could be argued that *That's Love* and *It's You I Need* written and recorded by Billy are country styled numbers in the Elvis Sun mode, but for now the focus is on Hank Williams.

**Lowdown Blues.** This was performed by Billy Fury with the Blue Flames on Saturday Club 19<sup>th</sup> August 1961 and again on 19<sup>th</sup> December that year and since contained on the essential Billy Fury Live at the 2006 BBC double CD, on Decca. Other than hearing other acts performing this number, and what great renditions they are, Billy could only have heard the original overdubbed posthumous demo by Williams. In Hank's lifetime only two LPs were issued, neither containing the track. It seems most likely that Billy and/or a band member such as Georgie Fame owned a copy of either the 1956 MGM LP *Moaning the Blues*, or the LP *I'm Blue Inside* (Billy would have loved that title) issued in 1961 (pictured below). The recording is available on the CD *Hank Williams -*



*Low Down Blues*-Mercury Nashville label 314-532 737-2 1996 (if deleted the track may feature on other more recent CD sets).

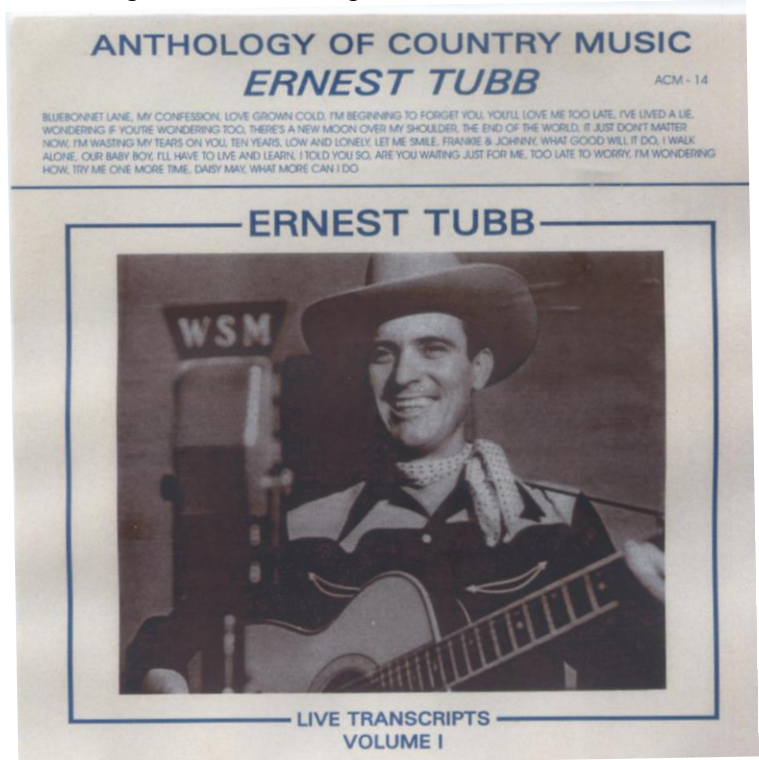
**You Win Again.** Performed by Billy Fury & The Tornados live on-air on Radio Luxembourg 1962 and contained on the 2005 Sanctuary Records release, *The Sound of Fury—Billy Fury & The Tornados Radio Luxembourg Sessions*. An excellent version by Billy and the boys, enhanced by his distinctive, authentic and sincere vocal delivery ala Hank Williams. Of course Billy could have heard versions by Jerry Lee Lewis and others but once again, the most likely source would have been either a December 1952 single arriving during the 50's via the Cunard Yanks or the 1953 or '55 Hank Williams Memorial Albums.

**Lovesick Blues.** A key Hank Williams recording and show stopper/encore song but written by Cliff Friend and Irving Mills, this was recorded by Billy with the Tornados at Decca in 1962 remaining unreleased until inclusion on the *Once Upon A Dream* CD in 1989. Billy's respectable but somewhat brief cover demonstrates his vocal versatility and is quite endearing. Did Dick Rowe find it or had Billy heard it on the Williams LPs *Moaning the Blues* or *I'm Blue Inside*, or earlier in his life from an imported 78 single. Let's not forget though that other artists covered it and that Frank Ifield had his version at No.1 in October 1962 (17 weeks on the charts) whilst Billy only recorded his on January 8<sup>th</sup> 1963. A betting man would cite Frank's hit as the influence here, but it's also more than likely that Billy would have heard US country versions beforehand-most likely on a Hank Williams MGM LP. On Jan 11<sup>th</sup> Billy recorded more country tunes for a reported country album-which regrettably turned out to be just an EP with the Tornados-and not country either-except for *Nobody's Child*, apparently not recorded by Williams. Interestingly, not credited to anyone in Decca session sheets but to Fury on the Radio Lux CD, is the very country styled weepie, *I'm Hurting All Over*, not issued until the *Once Upon A dream* CD. Another country style performance is the Radio Lux faster rendition of *I Can't Help Loving You*, (George Bellamy/ Pavey) from the Billy Fury & The Tornados EP. This EP version is quite funereal, not country in my view, but much loved by quite a few fans that I know. I personally wish the studio version had been more mid-tempo like the live version.

**Wedding Bells.** Another Hank Williams notable recording, but not written by him. Credited to Claude Boone, it was allegedly written by one James Arthur Pritchett and sold to Boone. Performed onstage by Billy Fury & The Tornados and famously captured on the *We Want Billy* LP, it cried out for a full verse Decca years studio version. It was not until Billy's switch to Parlophone from 1966-71 that he got to record a full version. Good though it is we can only mourn the Decca version that should have formed part of the 1962 album that never was-The Billy Fury Country & Western Album/Billy Fury Sings Country. Billy could have heard several versions, from a 1948 Williams 78rpm dropped in to the family, ditto the 1950/51 ten-inch album, *Hank Williams Sings*, the 1957 Tommy Steele Stage Show album, or a Marty Robbins album/EP version. The most likely source was probably either *Hank Williams Sings* from 1951, or more likely the 1957 Williams album, *Sing Me A Blue Song*.

**It Just Don't Matter Now.** This country jogger was written by Ernest Tubb, aka The Texas Troubadour, most famous for *Walking The Floor Over You*, self-admittedly not having a good voice, bringing great artists such as Patsy Cline and others to the fore, and for his famed record store in Nashville (presently under threat of development as 'new' country and heaven knows what takes over downtown Nashville). It formed the B-side to Billy Fury's *Suzanne In The Mirror*; a Parlophone 45 issued in September 1967. The recording by Billy was later available on *The Missing Years* LP, 1983, *The Complete Parlophone Singles-Peaksoft* PEA 009 CD 2010 and most recently *The Missing Years* double CD, Peaksoft PEA 022 from 2016. Written by Ernest Tubb, it was recorded by him in 1945 but apparently not issued until the 1990s I

found a version on a suspect looking CD with no credits or information-Anthology of Country Music-ACM 14, Ernest Tubb, Live transcriptions Vol 1.



Billy's version is more 'pop' but retains a country feel, in the vocal at least. Billy would most likely have heard it from The MGM album from 1960-The Lonesome Sound of Hank Williams.

**Take These Chains From My Heart.** Performed on Radio Luxembourg by Billy Fury & The Tornados during 1962, this fine version (off-air variable quality excepting-which is a shame) has yet to be released. Hank Williams had a No.1 hit single with it in November 1953 and it was on his 1955 album, The Rambling Man. The Ray Charles hit single version did not chart in the UK until April/May '63 when Billy would most certainly have bought a copy. He would not have heard it on an album he surely would have owned-Ray Charles-Modern Sounds in Country Music-residing at the No.6 slot in July '62, because this track was not on it. It would not be on an album until January/February '63 with the charting of Charles' second collection of country music-Modern Sounds Vol 2. It is therefore most likely that Billy knew of the original Williams version from his youth and chose to perform it. How regrettable that there was no studio cut.

**Acknowledgements:** Wikipedia, Guinness Book of Hit Singles and Albums, Paul Pierrot (*Low Down Blues*), writer Garth Cartwright; but primarily author Colin Escott-With George Merrit & William MacEwan. I highly recommend their highly readable Hank Williams Biography. ISBN 0-316-24986-6

