

'Cheatin' Heart' Pic Hank Williams' Story

Hank's Film Life

"Your Cheatin' Heart" is the story of Hank Williams, the late country music singer and composer (portrayed on screen by George Hamilton) who rose from shoeshine boy to become one of the most popular performers of his day. His recordings and songs (he wrote the music and lyrics for more than 200 compositions) have an even greater audience today, building in favor since Williams' death in 1953 at 29.

Susan Oliver, Red Buttons, Arthur O'Connell and Chris Crosby co-star in "Your Cheatin' Heart," produced by Sam Katzman and directed by Gene Nelson for MGM Pictures. The soundtrack LP will also be MGM's. CMA will sponsor the premiere in Williams' home town, Montgomery, Ala., on Nov. 4, also showings Nov. 6 in Nashville and Nov. 10 in Atlanta, Ga.

For George Hamilton, "Your Cheatin' Heart" is a bold departure from his previous dramatic screen roles, but a part he's had his eye on for years. Fascinated by the inherent drama of Williams' life and the scope of his musical accomplishments, Hamilton became a Williamsophile, learning everything possible about the singer's habits, mannerisms and philosophy. He played Williams' records by the hour, discovering much about the man from the self-revealing lyrics.

MGM had purchased rights to the Hank Williams story in 1954, but the property had remained inactive waiting for the right actor to come along. He finally did, in October, 1963. While in Nashville, Tenn., on a record promotion tour, Hamilton decided to visit Audrey Williams, the singer's widow. Impressed by the actor's intense interest in and knowledge of Hank Williams, she decided on the spot that Hamilton was the actor for the lead.

Playing Audrey Williams in "Your Cheatin' Heart" is Susan Oliver, young Broadway-TV-screen actress who recently completed a co-starring role in Connie Francis' "Looking For Love." Red Buttons, both a top comedian and dramatic star, portrays Shorty, Hank's good-and-bad-time friend. Buttons was last at MGM for the comedy "A Ticklish Affair." Arthur O'Connell has the role of music publisher Fred Rose, the man responsible for giving Williams his first boost up the ladder of fame. O'Connell recently co-starred in "7 Faces of Dr. Lao" and "Kissin' Cousins." Making his acting debut in the film is young Chris Crosby, 21-year-old son of bandleader and singer Bob Crosby. Chris first appeared on the screen singing in "Hootenanny Hoot."

Sam Katzman is one of Hollywood's most consistently successful producers. Prior to "Your Cheatin' Heart," he made "Kissin' Cousins," an Elvis Presley starrer which piled up record grosses. Director Gene Nelson chalks up his third straight MGM-Katzman picture with "Your Cheatin' Heart." The other two: "Hootenanny Hoot" and "Kissin' Cousins."

The story of Hank Williams' brief, brilliant life is underlined with 11 of his hit songs, recorded for the picture by Hank Williams, Jr., now a concert and recording star himself. The repertoire includes "Roll 'Em Pete," "Long Gone Lonesome Blues," "Just Waitin'," "I Saw the Light," "You Win Again," "Cold, Cold Heart," "Jambalaya," "Hey, Good Lookin'," "Your Cheatin' Heart," "Kawliga" and "Ramblin' Man."

The dance number, "Spreadin' the Jam," is the creation of Hal Belfer. Both Karger and Belfer were associated with Katzman on "Hootenanny Hoot" and "Kissin' Cousins."

Of special interest in "Your Cheatin' Heart" is the wardrobe which famous Western clothes-maker, Nudie, created for Hamilton. The suits are trimmed with cloth-of-gold and semi-precious stones, boots are trimmed with sterling silver and the coats are made of the finest leather obtainable. All as Hank Williams himself would have insisted. And Nudie ought to know since he was the singer's personal tailor.

From Nudie, Hamilton picked up many pointers regarding Hank Williams' stance, the way he held himself. Audrey Wil-



iams also helped Hamilton to shape his interpretation. Finally, to do the job really right, Hamilton made three separate trips to Nashville, where Hank Williams lived and scored some of his biggest triumphs, and to Montgomery, Ala., where Williams went to school and spent his boyhood. There Hamilton visited the singer's relatives, old friends, haunts and even his schoolhouse.

Armed with this background, Hamilton took a crash course in guitar-playing under the direction of Belfer.

Adding the perfecting note of authenticity to "Your Cheatin' Heart" is the fact that Audrey Williams herself served as technical advisor on the picture.

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