

**This interview with
WILLIE NELSON
was conducted by the Library of Congress on
February 10, 2016.**



LOC: How did you come to cover Fred Rose’s “Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain” for the album “Red Headed Stranger”?

WN: I was putting together this concept album—“Red Headed Stranger”—I was gathering songs that I thought told that story. And I just thought that “Blue Eyes” was the perfect song for that spot. Simple and to the point. Beautiful, sad love song.

LOC: What version of that song was the first that you heard?

WN: I think the first version I heard was Roy Acuff’s. Fred Rose had written it. And I loved it. I’ll sing it for the rest of my life. It never gets old.

LOC: Legend has it that “Red Headed Stranger” was recorded in just five days. Is this true?

WN: Well, I recorded [the album] all in just one take. It was a concept album, it came together on the spot.

Actually, we recorded it *in two days*. It was just a brief time in the studio because I knew the material. And we had good studio musicians and that’s all that’s required. I don’t need a lot of time. I’ve never liked to spend too much time in the studio. I like to be prepared, know what I’m going to do.

LOC: Was your record company (Columbia) open to this at this time—both the idea of a concept album and such an understated approach to making and recording the music?

I had done a concept album before but concept albums are not particularly popular in the country department.

Columbia was not open to the idea of it. They wanted a big production—record companies always want a big production. They think that that equals a lot of money. I think they were always hoping to cross over to the pop field in those days. I just wanted it to be a guy and a guitar.

LOC: The production of “Stranger” has been described as “bare bones”—is that accurate, was it intentional?

WN: It was “bare bones” in that it was just me and a guitar. And a piano....

I could have put a big production behind it, but I want to keep it low key.

LOC: Were you surprised by how much the album resonated at the time with both critics and audiences?

WN: Honestly, I was not. I thought the music reflected what I was feeling at the time, what I was feeling people wanted to hear. I had been doing some of the [album’s] material at my shows and I knew the reaction I was getting to it.

LOC: Since you have had such great success with concept albums, this one in particular, do you plan others in the future? Do you think the market place would be open to them?

WN: I think the market place is open to anything that’s good. [For me,] it could easily happen. It’ll happen when it’s supposed to.

LOC: Along with “Red Headed Stranger,” your composition of “Crazy,” as recorded by the immortal Patsy Cline, is also on the National Registry--

WN: I like to tell people that the original title of the song was “Stupid.”

LOC: I assume you are pulling my leg?

WN: I could be.

LOC: Do you know how Patsy came to record “Crazy”?

WN: I was in Nashville. Charlie Dick, Patsy’s husband, was a good friend of mine. He heard that song one night and went over, took it over, to Patsy. She recorded it the next week.

LOC: I assume you were pleased with Patsy’s rendition?

WN: Oh, yeah. After she did it, no one could top that.

LOC: Are you on tour currently?

WN: I'm in Nashville right now. I'm doing a video today with Loretta Lynn. Then I'm playing a couple shows this week. Then I go into the studio....