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Bill Mack looks back on 'Blue'

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Bill Mack, looking reflective in 2001, when he did his last WBAP/820 AM show. (Star-Telegram file photo)

By Robert Philpot

DFW.com

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Longtime DFW radio fans know of Bill Mack as the "Midnight Cowboy" who broadcast a late-night country show for Truckers for more than 30 years on WBAP/820, before leaving in 2001 to host an XM Satellite Radio channel for nearly a decade.

But Mack also wrote *Blue*, the song that turned a teen-age LeAnn Rimes into a big country star (Rimes revisited the song on her recently released covers album, *Lady & Gentlemen*). He sent *Star-Telegram/DFW.com* columnist Bud Kennedy some reflections on the song, which he wrote well before Rimes was born. Bud forwarded them to us. Here they are, in an abridged version.

"It's a bit difficult for me to believe it has been 15 years since my musical composition, *Blue*, was turned into a monumental hit by LeAnn Rimes. I'll always be grateful to this little lady for having such strong confidence in a song that I had written 30 years before she chose to record it. LeAnn was 11 years old when she first heard the song. She was 13 years old when both of us received a Grammy after her rendition of the ballad was released by Curb Records. *Blue* was chosen as the Country Song of the Year in 1996. It was given the same honor by the Academy of Country Music and several other musical organizations that hand out trophies. Really grabbing my attention was

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when *Blue* was chosen as one of the "100 Best Country Songs Of All Time" at a big event in Nashville. "In the beginning, many radio stations refused to program *Blue* because they considered it to be too 'old-fashioned' A well known Dallas disc jockey informed his listeners, 'That piece of junk will never make it! It's too country!' In less than a year, he was one of the first DJs to congratulate me and request an interview after I had received my Grammy at Madison Square Garden in New York. During the interview, he shouted, "I knew you had written a hit when I first heard the song! It's one of my personal favorites!" I smiled at his DJ BS.

"Nothing inspired me to write the song. I was living in Wichita Falls, Texas in 1956 and was simply strumming on the guitar in my den. Suddenly, the lyrics and melody came to me in a matter of minutes. Jackie, my wife at the time, rushed into the den and said, "'I love that song you were singing! Where did you find it?'

"I replied, 'I just wrote it.'

"That evening, I gathered a few musicians at the Nesman Recording Studios, the only recording facility in Wichita Falls, and recorded *Blue*. As I recall, the song was produced in just a couple of takes

"My recording of *Blue* received a limited amount of radio airplay, although it was far from becoming a hit. I'll always remember 'Snuff' Garrett, who was a disc jockey in Wichita Falls at the time, considered my song as being a 'surefire hit' for the future. 'Snuff' eventually became one of our most successful music producers in Hollywood. Because of Garrett's strong belief in my song, I hired a local singer to make a demo of *Blue*. I placed her cassette recording in a stack with many other songs I had written.

"After moving to Fort Worth, I received a telephone call from a lady named Martie Rendleman. Martie was managing several up-and-coming acts in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. She informed me that she was looking for a song for a young female singer who she believed showed very strong potential. It's a fact that all songwriters have the 'perfect song' when needed ... even though they may have no idea at the time what song they will present. With Martie still on the phone, I shuffled through my cassettes and pulled "BLUE" from the stack. I said, 'I have the song you're lookin' for!'

"Martie said, 'Let's meet at the Denny's Restaurant' located halfway between Dallas and Fort Worth tomorrow. We can have some coffee, and you can hand me the cassette for the youngster to hear."

"Before closing our conversation, I asked, 'How old is this youngster?'

"Martie replied, 'She's 11 years old ... and a fantastic singer! You'll love her!'

"The next day was miserable. A heavy, cold rain was falling. I told my wife, Cindy, to call Martie Rendleman and inform her we would mail the cassette to her. I stressed the fact that I wasn't about to make a trip half-way to Dallas to deliver a cassette for an 11-year-old kid to listen to! Cindy responded with: 'Martie is a dear friend. You promised to meet her today, and we're going to Denny's ... and give her the cassette! I'll drive!'

"Within a few weeks, I received a 45 rpm recording from Martie featuring LeAnn Rimes singing my song. I was absolutely astonished! Her voice was perfect, and she sang from the heart. She was unbelievable!

"There were many detours before LeAnn finally signed with Curb Records and blessed me by making *Blue* The Song of the Year. It sold millions of CDs, breaking all sales records in 1996!

"I never dreamed of receiving a Grammy for a song that was written within 15 minutes! This gigantic event in my life would have never taken place had it not been for Martie Rendleman, my Cindy, Denny's"... and a precious little singer named LeAnn Rimes. I thank God regularly for allowing these beautiful ladies to have such a strong belief in my song, *Blue*. 'Denny's' will always be a stopping spot for me when I'm traveling!"

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