

# MARGARET WHITING

MAGGIE ISN'T MARGARET ANYMORE • POP COUNTRY





No one quite had a career to parallel Margaret Whiting's. Most major stars of her generation followed a pattern similar to the Great American Songbook itself: they had hit singles in their 20s and 30s, then made deeper and, generally, more artistically profound albums in their 40s and 50s, and, by the time they were in their 60s and upwards, had become elder statesmen. With Whiting, it was if much of the middle section – Act II – was missing. She was revered, by younger singers especially, as something even more than an elder stateswoman, but she was a highly accessible, super friendly, incredibly down-to-earth living legend. I've often witnessed the look on a young singer's face when she realized that Queen Margaret was in the house – it was, indeed, like a royal audience – but Maggie's own presence was never intimidating. She made it her business to know every singer in the jazz and cabaret rooms in New York even into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and she inspired and encouraged all of them.

Yet one wonders, how much did they actually know about Margaret Whiting? She was a major role model to them, but compared to comparable figures from the

swing and early postwar era, like Jo Stafford or Peggy Lee, singers and indeed, listeners in the last few decades of Whiting's life had relatively few opportunities to actually listen to the full expanse of Whiting's recorded work. The young singers who tried to impress her at Danny's Skylight Room on West 46<sup>th</sup> Street undoubtedly had heard "My Ideal" or "Moonlight in Vermont," but, unlike Stafford or Lee, there was remarkably little Maggie easily available in the long-playing era, few greatest hits anthologies and even fewer original albums. Even such seminal albums as Whiting's two devastatingly beautiful songbooks, *Margaret Whiting Sings Rodgers and Hart* (recorded in 1947) and *Margaret Whiting Sings the Jerome Kern Songbook* (1960), were scarcely heard from after they were originally released. Whiting's greatness, was, alas, something that younger singers were compelled to accept on good faith. It always seemed unfortunate that, unlike Rosemary Clooney or Doris Day, Whiting never lived long enough to see any kind of comprehensive collection of her recorded work, but she was too busy, helping everyone else as well as sustaining her own career as long as she could, to mind.



*Margaret & Johnny Mercer*



Looking over Whiting's output in the long-playing era doesn't take a whole lot of time, precisely because there is relatively little there. There are hits anthologies on Capitol, where her last chart single was "The Money Tree" in 1956 (The same year as her stellar *Sings For The Starry-Eyed* LP); moving to Dot in 1957, there were also albums like *Margaret Whiting's Great Hits* and *Ten Top Hits*. From 1955 to 1957, Desilu Productions tried to channel the singer's popularity into a TV sitcom – with musical numbers – titled *Those Whiting Girls*, in which she co-starred with her younger sis-

ter – it lasted two years and 26 episodes as a summer replacement for *I Love Lucy*.

Of all the times I interviewed Maggie, she was always most keen to talk about her breakthrough period, her salad days, the war years and the early postwar period – especially Johnny Mercer, and how much he contributed to her career. In 1948, Mercer officially stepped down from his position as general overseer of Capitol's pop singles, but Whiting continued to land hits – many from a surprising place. In a series of duets with singing cowboy star Jimmy Wakely, Whiting became one of the very first "mainstream" singers to infiltrate the country and western market – even before Tony Bennett sang "Cold, Cold Heart" and other Hank Williams classics.

In her 1987 memoir, *It Might As Well Be Spring*, Whiting is the first to point out that her recording career foundered away from Mercer and then Capitol. "I guess I never found the right genius to have as a manager or agent. My mother was always saying, 'You've got to find the right person. You've got to have another Johnny Mercer to pick the right songs. You need somebody creative.' Maybe she was right, but I didn't want to listen to her."

Her last Capitol singles were recorded in 1956 – after nearly 15 years with the label. In 1957, she was then approached by Randy Wood of Dot Records, who had the idea of doing more country music with Whiting – she enjoyed a minor hit with Hank Williams’ “I Can’t Help It (If I’m Still In Love With You)” for the label – and also wound up doing a very interesting jazz album (*Goin’ Places*) in the process. In 1960, she launched an arrangement with Norman Granz of Verve Records (which was summarily assimilated into MGM Records) that resulted in the brilliant double album of Kern (and enough material for three other albums, including a decidedly different Broadway duets set with Mel Torme). She was mostly out of the studio for a few years, from 1961 to 1966, although she returned to Capitol for a one-off single release. Like many artists of her generation, she still had huge audiences all over the world, but the record industry wasn’t paying attention, and that, combined with the singer’s self-admitted lapse in taking care of business, meant that she was scarcely heard from during this period, record-wise. Instead, Whiting toured the night club circuit, performed in the far east and starred in stage musicals such as *Gypsy* and *Pal Joey* around the country.





Then, in late 1965, producer – composer – arranger – conductor Arnold Goland came into Whiting's life. He was, like so many music business movers and shakers in the 1960s, a rock and roll guy who had grown up on classic popular music and the classic American songbook. Goland and Whiting had first met in a music publisher's office when she was looking for a new arranger to do some charts, and Goland was then working as an orchestrator and conductor. She considered hiring Goland as an orchestrator; but instead, he proudly recalls, he gave her a gig and set up a record date for Whiting. He talked to the singer's manager, realized that she was at liberty (and not Liberty Records), recordings-wise, and had the not-so-nutty idea to make contemporary-style hits with a traditional pop singer. The idea wasn't quite so far-fetched: all three members of the Ratpack were frequently on the charts at the time, as were Peggy Lee, Tony Bennett, Nancy Wilson, Jack Jones, and others.

After recording a handful of songs with Whiting, Goland shopped around for a label to release the finished masters. His first choice was United Artists, where he had been connected, working with producer Jack Gold (best known as the manager of Andy Williams). Gold suggested taking the project

to London Records, where Walt Maguire was serving as company president. Goland remembers, “So I go up to Walt’s office with the demo to see if he’d release it. Well luck has it Walt is as big a fan of Margaret’s as I was.”

The three principals, Goland, Gold, and Maguire, were so firmly committed to the project – re-establishing Whiting’s commercial viability in the music world of 1966 – that even when the first single couldn’t get airplay they decided to give it another try. “So we go in and we’re looking for songs and looking for songs and one comes in that has a good title called ‘Wheel of Hurt.’ But the original [song] was terrible. So Jack and I rewrote it with permission of the writers - they’re getting a record so they don’t care. And that’s the version Margaret recorded. And Walt put it out. Lo and behold! London releases it and ‘The Wheel of Hurt’ starts to take off, but not in the pop area, in the country area. Country music was the only place in the 1960s where there was any good music.” Ultimately the song hit not only the pop top thirty but went to number one on the *Billboard* easy listening chart. It’s interesting to note that when radio DJs initially resisted the new Whiting record, strong jukebox play helped make it a hit.



*Margaret & Jack Gold*

“The Wheel of Hurt” rebooted Margaret Whiting’s recording career for about five years, from 1966 to 1970, resulting in a dozen or so singles as well as three-full length albums, *The Wheel of Hurt*, *Maggie Isn’t Margaret Anymore*, and *Pop Country*. For this brief period, Whiting was current - she was a contemporary artist once again, not a remnant of a previous generation who was only remembered by the parents of the present generation of record-buyers. For Whiting it was a mixed blessing, as Goland explains,

“Maggie never liked it that she had a country hit. She identified herself as a pop artist.” In fact, Whiting’s London singles were most successful with the easy listening stations, later known as “adult contemporary.”

The three Whiting London albums are divided up appropriately: *The Wheel of Hurt*, is roughly half country-style songs, including the title song, while the rest of the proceedings can be essentially described as pop. *Maggie Isn’t Margaret* is mostly all-pop, and there’s even room for a genuine standard, “I Remember You,” by Maggie’s mentor, Johnny Mercer. (*The Wheel of Hurt* features

a discotheque-y “Time After Time.”) *Pop Country* is, exactly as the title promises, all Nashville-oriented material, leaning heavily on country standards like “I Love You So Much It Hurts.”

As daughter Debbi Whiting points out, her mother never was in better voice. In her early to mid-40s, Whiting was at her absolute peak, which would have made it even more of a tragedy if she were entirely unable to make any records. “Now looking back at it, this was her best period, vocally. This is what is greatest about these recordings. She was in her strongest voice in these songs.”

In fact, the presence of a strong, clear voice is one of the most important elements of most of the hit records from the mid to late 1960s, a genre which is sometimes called “Producer Pop.” So many successful singles of the era are more about the producer and the production rather than the voice itself, and it makes perfect sense that many of the biggest names of the era weren’t singers at all – Herb Alpert, Sergio Mendes, Burt Bacharach – these were all bigger selling points than the names of their vocalists, like Lani Hall and Dionne Warwick – in fact, only a few hardcover pop nerds even remember the names of the vocalists with Brasil ‘66. Whiting is completely overqualified for this

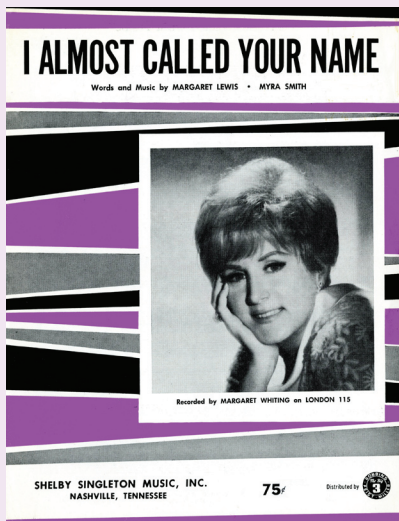


*Margaret & daughter Debbi*



job; she's more than a pretty voice, she's a major interpreter; one of the all-time best traditional pop singers out of the immediate generation that followed Sinatra. The majority of the pop-oriented recordings she made at London may not always give her a chance to do that but you can hear Whiting's superior voice on every track.

Conversely, the absolute best material of the London period – and some of the best even of her entire storied career – is the country album, even though the singer herself felt precisely the opposite. In 1949, Whiting had an unlikely hit with 'Slippin' Around,' a duet with Jimmy Wakely, one of Capitol's earliest country music stars. (In fact, "I Love You So Much It Hurts," one of the tracks on *Pop Country*, was originally one of Wakely's signature hits.) In other duets and solos in the early 1950s, Whiting established herself as a pioneer; one of the first mainstream artists to captivate the Nashville market. There would be a tradition, represented by Bing Crosby and Tony Bennett, then later Nat King Cole and Ray Charles, of non-country artists doing country songs for their own audiences, but Whiting was possibly the most successful mainstream artist to appeal to the country market itself.



*Maggie Isn't Margaret Anymore* is a mixed bag, but with plenty of exceptional moments. Whiting delivers some "covers," as the kids, say, of other artists' hits, such as "There's A Kind of Hush," a biggie for Herman's Hermits and a superior sequel to "Winchester Cathedral" on Margaret's prior London LP. "Somethin' Stupid" here is a solo reading of the Frank and Nancy Sinatra hit duet, although the guitar is so prominent as to almost be another voice. "This



*Talk show host Mike Douglas & Margaret*

Is My Song” brings us the Petula Clark smash, as composed by Charlie Chaplin, and “I Remember You” is another tricked up standard (the Johnny Mercer – Victor Schertzinger classic), while the Ed Ames-popularized “My Cup Runneth Over” (from *I Do! I Do!*) is the major show tune here. “If This Is Goodbye” is a very dramatic classical adaptation, based on the second theme (in E flat major) from Rachmaninoff’s second piano concerto (in C minor, Op. 18, I. Moderato), a theme already familiar to pop listeners, since it had already been recorded

twice by Frank Sinatra as “I Think Of You.” Of the songs that aren’t covers, “By Now” is the most like a pre-1960 “adult” pop song, except for an insistent bass line throughout that earmarks this track as being from the later rather than the earlier ‘60s; Whiting sings it as if it were by Jimmy Van Heusen or Frank Loesser, and an obliging alto sax obbligato follows her throughout.

*Pop Country* is the jewel of Real Gone Music’s two-CD reissue of Whiting’s complete London recordings; surprisingly, it’s this material, which, though outside of the

singer's traditional comfort zone, that most allows Whiting to be Whiting. The arrangements don't crowd her, and her voice is not reduced to being a mere cog in the pop music machinery on any of the selections. Whereas most of the other two albums consist of new songs, most of *Pop Country* consists of standards, only they're Nashville-style standards rather than Whiting's customary Broadway and Hollywood associations (Kern, Mercer, Arlen, Whiting Senior). Besides being in excellent voice throughout, her singing is constantly professional and often even more than that.

The country-style songs included in the album range from what Margaret's friend Mel Torme called "The RRP" (Relatively Recent Past), such as two of the biggest hits of the 1960s, "Gentle on My Mind" and "I Can't Stop Loving You," as well as vintage country classics like Eddy Arnold's "You Don't Know Me." Even in a genre far removed from her Hollywood upbringing and New York "sophistication," Whiting's interpretations are exemplary: in country music, no less than cabaret (and possibly even more than jazz), the emphasis is on telling a story, and this Whiting surely knows how to do. In "I Almost Called Your Name" she gets every shade, every nuance of the





*4 Girls 4: Rosemary Clooney, Margaret, Rose Marie, Helen O'Connell*

narrative completely right – how she could kiss one man while thinking of another, and perfectly articulates the difference between loving someone and merely being with them. She doesn't use the vocal mechanics associated with blues and country singers, the twisted notes, the bent and tortured tones, yet on a torch song, like one-time collaborator Jimmy Wakely's hit

"I Love You So Much It Hurts" and "It Keeps Right On A Hurtin'," she gets the meaning across in her own way, as when she extends the notes in the coda of "I Can't Stop Loving You" for dramatic effect.

As a bonus, this collection offers four previously unreleased masters that Whiting recorded for London, primarily ear-marked for issue on singles and

there's also a fun radio jingle from 1965 showing that Margaret could sell more than just a song.

The singer's work with Arnold Goland and London Records, though hardly resulting in "traditional" Margaret Whiting fare, was the last truly mainstream period of her recording career. She continued to work the big rooms, and her career would later be further revived by her participation in the "4 Girls 4" touring stage show, teaming up with fellow songbirds Rosemary Clooney, Helen O'Connell, Rose Marie and other rotating friends. But when she recorded again, it would be for niche and boutique labels aimed at a specialist audience, like Audiophile and DRG. Ironically, as Goland points out, Whiting truly never appreciated that her best work from the late 1960s – and some of the best of her entire catalog – was in the field of country and western music. The singer herself was, in fact, more perplexed than pleased by this fact, which merely goes to prove the old saw that artists themselves are not always the best judge of their own work. If Maggie were still around, I'd debate this point with her the next time I ran



into her at the Carlyle or Birdland. But, ultimately, there would be no need to have that discussion. Margaret Whiting was a giant in American music, and the quality of her best work, from this or any other period, speaks for itself.

~ Will Friedwald

Will Friedwald writes about jazz and nightlife for *The Wall Street Journal*. He also is the authored books on music and popular culture, including the award-winning *A Biographical Guide To The Great Jazz And Pop Singers*, *Sinatra: The Song Is You*, *Stardust Melodies*, and *Tony Bennett: The Good Life*.



## Maggie isn't Margaret anymore MARGARET WHITING

There's more to the new Maggie Whiting than a shorter name, a broader musical horizon, and an expanding career—Maggie, long one of America's most versatile and accomplished singers, has grown to even greater artistic stature. Don't call it a Comeback (there's always been room for a fine singer), it's a Go Forward!

What's in a name? When you're the daughter of Richard Whiting, one of the most spectacularly gifted songwriters America has ever produced, your name is a musical legacy and singing is a way of life. The home swarmed with famous musicians, such as Paul Whiteman, Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Fred Waring, and Johnny Mercer (later she became Mercer's protegee on radio). It is both remarkable and perfectly natural, then, that at age two Margaret could sing about two hundred songs, many by her father. Her recording of "My Ideal," a Whiting song, was her first big hit and the first of twelve Gold Records. After a series of recordings now regarded as classics—songs such as "How Deep Is the Ocean" and "Moonlight in Vermont," Margaret Whiting turned to the Western field. "Slippin' Around," her duet hit with Jimmy Wakely, sold over three million copies: from the very start of her career, this Miss Versatility has been on the lookout for new means of musical expression.

Clearly, Margaret Whiting brings to performing what her father brought to creating music: a genius for melody and a feeling for words. Just listen to such current hits as "Only Love Can Break a Heart," "This Is My Song," and "My Cup Runneth Over," where her ability to project the nuance of melodic line, her polished sense of timing, and her dramatic talent are more evident than ever. Yes, the name "Margaret" represents a great song tradition, one which she has not abandoned, but built on. Just as "Margaret" is the daughter of a great songwriter, "Maggie" is the mother of a teen—and this mother's no square! As a matter of fact, it was daughter Debbie who suggested that her mother shorten her name and get "hip" to teenage musical taste. One hearing of such up-tempo, soft-rock renditions as "There's a Kind of Hush" and "I Remember You" should convince you that the advice was well taken.

Call her "Maggie" or "Margaret"—here is one star who, like the real stellar objects themselves, need not be static to shine bright!

... Carol Lee Symons

### SIDE ONE

**ONLY LOVE CAN BREAK A HEART**  
(B. Bacharach; H. David—ASCAP—2:25)

**THERE'S A KIND OF HUSH**  
(G. Stephens; L. Reed—ASCAP—2:23)

**MY CUP RUNNETH OVER**  
(Tom Jones; Harvey Schmidt—ASCAP—2:20)

**JUST LIKE A MAN**  
(Mason; Reed—ASCAP—2:11)

**BY NOW**  
(Jack Gold; Arnold Coland—ASCAP—3:12)

**I REMEMBER YOU**  
(Johnny Mercer;  
Victor Schertzinger—ASCAP—2:14)

### SIDE TWO

**THIS IS MY SONG**  
(Charles Chaplin—ASCAP—2:17)

**SOMETHIN' STUPID**  
(Carson Parks—BMI—2:15)

**HERE TO STAY**  
(Lor Crane; Benace Ross—BMI—2:24)

**BECAUSE**  
(Dave Clark—ASCAP—2:00)

**IF THIS IS GOODBYE**  
(R. Wright; G. Forrest—ASCAP—2:15)

# Margaret Whiting

## Pop Country

If you insist on neat little labels, you'll find Margaret Whiting frustratingly talented and impossible to pin down. She's sung ballads, blues, standards, "soft rock," and country—and it's she who has stamped them with her own highly individual style. This combination of voice and versatility has made Maggie the kind of singer people never get tired of hearing.

Nevertheless, Margaret Whiting has always had a special "feel" for country music: her clear, fine voice (she doesn't need "gimmicks" to put over a song), her straightforward and sensitive way with words are perfect for it. Because she brings to country music a vast experience with many different kinds of songs, her country songs have always appealed, not just to the country western fans alone, but to the listening-

public-at-large. Case in point: her first foray into the field, "Slippin' Around," which she sang with Jimmy Wakely, sold well over three million copies. Not bad for a start!

Meantime, a lot has happened to what used to be called "country western." It has taken on the infectious beat of pop music and added to its harmonic richness, while still retaining that unique country flavor (so easy to identify, so hard to define in words). A surprisingly large number of today's hit ballads, songs such as "Release Me" and "You Don't Know Me," owe their origins to country western but must properly be called "country pop."

The versatile Maggie never wore a saddle; country western has left its old corral. A perfect pair!

... Carol Lee Symonds

#### SIDE ONE

I HATE TO SEE ME GO  
(Carter—BMD)

RELEASE ME  
(Miller; Stevenson—BMD)

I LOVE YOU SO MUCH IT HURTS  
(Tillman—BMD)

I CAN'T HELP IT (IF I'M STILL IN LOVE WITH YOU)  
(Williams—BMD)

I CAN'T STOP LOVING YOU  
(Gibson—BMD)

#### SIDE TWO

I ALMOST CALLED YOUR NAME  
(Lewis; Jacobs—BMD)

YOU DON'T KNOW ME  
(Walker; Arnold—BMD)

GENTLE ON MY MIND  
(Harford—BMD)

IT KEEPS RIGHT ON A HURTING  
(Tillman—BMD)

AM I LOSING YOU?  
(Carter; Lewis—ASCAP)

Produced by Jack Gold

Arranged & Conducted by: Arnold Goland

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LL 3510/PS 510

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**MAGGIE ISN'T  
MARGARET ANYMORE**

(London PS 510) 1967

1. ONLY LOVE CAN  
BREAK A HEART  
*(Bacharach/David)*
2. THERE'S A KIND OF HUSH  
*(Stephens/Reed)*
3. MY CUP RUNNETH OVER  
*(Jones/Schmidt)*
4. JUST LIKE A MAN  
*(Mason/Reed)*
5. BY NOW  
*(Gold/Goland)*
6. I REMEMBER YOU  
*(Mercer)*
7. THIS IS MY SONG  
*(Chaplin)*
8. SOMETHIN' STUPID  
*(Parks)*
9. HERE TO STAY  
*(Crane/Ross)*
10. BECAUSE  
*(Clark)*
11. IF THIS IS GOODBYE  
*(Wright/Forrest)*

**POP COUNTRY**

(London PS 527) 1968

12. I HATE TO SEE ME GO  
*(Curtis)*
13. RELEASE ME  
*(Miller/Stevenson)*
14. I LOVE YOU SO MUCH  
IT HURTS  
*(Tillman)*
15. I CAN'T HELP IT (IF I'M  
STILL IN LOVE WITH YOU)  
*(Williams)*
16. I CAN'T STOP LOVING YOU  
*(Gibson)*
17. I ALMOST CALLED  
YOUR NAME  
*(Lewis/Smith)*
18. YOU DON'T KNOW ME  
*(Walker/Arnold)*
19. GENTLE ON MY MIND  
*(Hartford)*
20. IT KEEPS RIGHT ON  
A HURTIN'  
*(Tillotson)*
21. AM I LOSING YOU  
*(Carter/Lewis)*

**BONUS TRACKS**

(previously unreleased)

22. I'M LOSING MY MIND  
*(Unknown)*
23. BOYS FALL IN LOVE  
*(Goland/Gold)*
24. THE HEART OF A SAILOR  
*(Unknown)*
25. BELIEVE IN ME  
*(Unknown)*

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