

**This interview with
TONY BENNETT
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on October 18, 2019**



Tony Bennett

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: Do you recall the first time the song “I Left My Heart in San Francisco” was presented to you? What did you think of it?

Tony Bennett: We were in Hot Springs, Arkansas, performing at a club called The Vapors and after the show was over, the place was emptied out except for the bartender who was cleaning up, my long-time pianist and musical director, Ralph Sharon, pulled out this sheet music and showed it to me. Ralph had found it in a drawer while he was packing for our tour and since we were playing San Francisco during the run he tucked it into his suitcase thinking it would be a fun song to perform when we were at The Fairmont. So Ralph plays the song and I sing it and, after we were done, the bartender says to me, “If you make a record of that song, I’ll buy it.” So that was the first “review” of my signature song.

LOC: I believe “I Left...” was first released as a B-side. Was that, originally, something you agreed with? Did you have a say?

TB: That’s correct. I had recorded a beautiful song from the play, “All American” called “Once Upon A Time,” which I was convinced would be a hit so we put that song on the A-side and then “I Left My Heart in San Francisco” on the B-side. I was doing a promo tour when the record was released and at all the radio stations I was mentioning “Once Upon A Time” in the interview. I then got a call from the promo fellow at Columbia and he said to me, “Tony, turn the record over—‘San Francisco’ is going to the hit!”

LOC: Do you sing the song any differently—do you approach it differently—today than you did, say, 50 years ago?

TB: I usually end my show with the song or put it close to the end and I each time I sing it the beauty of the words and melody inspire me so it feels like I am singing it for the first time at each show. It conveys such a poignant sense of longing that I think it communicates to everyone.

LOC: Why do you think the song, your version particularly, has endured for so long?

TB: I think it was beautifully crafted and, again, it has a universal message, so I am very thankful that the public has embraced it for so long--I couldn't ask for a better signature song.