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From love and loss to divorce, depression and a family break-up and make-up – music superstar LEANN RIMES tells *Elaine Lipworth*...

# ‘MY LIFE HAS BEEN ONE BIG COUNTRY SONG’

**I**T FEELS LIKE a scene from a spy film. I rendezvous with country music superstar LeAnn Rimes at a restaurant in a Los Angeles suburb, and she is scanning the room suspiciously. ‘There are cameras everywhere,’ whispers the double Grammy winner. She has a word with the manager, who escorts us to the quiet back patio.

LeAnn, 32, has been a household name since her teens and has sold more than 40 million records, with chart toppers such as ‘How Do I Live’ and ‘Can’t Fight The Moonlight’. Her latest project is the EP *One Christmas – Chapter 1*, a collection of carols and seasonal songs with a country twist. She’s dressed down in white Bella Dahl shorts and a tank top, yet as soon as she removes her sunglasses the tables around us fill up as if by magic. ‘Camera phones...’ she sighs. Everywhere in the courtyard people are pointing iPhones in our direction.

A woman walks over to our table and blurts out, ‘Your music means so much to me,’ before walking away in tears. Then I see LeAnn is crying, too. ‘I’m sorry, I cry at everything,’ she smiles. ‘It probably took a lot for her to come over and say hello. I get very emotional.’

An only child, she was born in Mississippi and grew up in Texas with her parents Wilbur and Belinda, who divorced when she was in her teens. Prodigiously talented, LeAnn won a song and tap competition aged five. At 14, her debut album *Blue* made her the youngest artist ever to win a Grammy.

She seems well adjusted, having lived in the spotlight since that first hit. In 2000, at 17, she sued her father, who was also her manager; alleging that he and her co-manager had misappropriated over £4 million of her earnings. The case was eventually settled under a confidential agreement. Now LeAnn says the litigation ‘had nothing to do with money. I think it was just me wanting my dad back. I wanted my dad, I didn’t want a manager; which I didn’t understand until much later.’

At 19, LeAnn married Dean Sheremet, her backing dancer. Seven years later, while filming a TV movie romance called *Northern Lights* (she has acted since childhood, having made her first TV appearance at 16 in an episode of *Days of Our Lives*), she fell for her co-star Eddie Cibrian. He was also married at the time, to reality star Brandi Glanville (*The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*), but after some complicated disentangling, Eddie and LeAnn walked down the aisle in 2011.

‘Our wedding was in Malibu at a friend’s house,’ she says. ‘We had chalkboards for guests to write messages on and I wrote, “Thank God ▶’

**Clockwise from right: LeAnn aged five; with her parents at the Annual Academy of Country Music Awards in 1997; with husband Eddie Cibrian and his two sons at a film premiere, and holding her two Grammys for Best New Artist and Best Female Country Vocal Performance in 1997**



◀ we lived through this.’ We fought so hard to be together; there’s a bond between us that I think most people don’t have.’ The following year, LeAnn checked into rehab to be treated for anxiety and stress. She subsequently poured out her emotions in last year’s very personal album *Spitfire*.

Clearly driven, LeAnn has also written several books, including the autobiographical novel *Holiday in Your Heart* (later made into a TV drama in which she starred), is planning a clothing line, and supports America’s National Psoriasis Foundation (she suffers from the condition) and the anti-bullying organisation Friend Movement.

Candid about every aspect of her life, she discusses her family, being a stepmother to Eddie’s two sons – and her hopes for a child of her own.

**I was born to sing.** I would sing everywhere. I had this gift; to connect with people through my music. My mum played a lot of Motown; I grew up on Stevie Wonder and my godmother played Barbra Streisand and Judy Garland. My dad brought me up on classic rock – Led Zeppelin, Stevie Ray Vaughan – so I was influenced by many types of music.

**We struggled financially.** But from the time I was seven I made \$125 [around £80] every Saturday, singing at a music review show in Dallas. I bought all my own clothes. At one point I supported the family. Everyone in the family quit what they were doing to work with me.

**My dad taught me to shoot. Sadly, I had a gun in my hand at the age of two.** Now I realise it probably wasn’t the smartest idea, but we’re from the South – that’s what you did. My dad had hunting dogs, so he would hunt raccoons and birds. When I was four or five, my dad put me in his lap and taught me how to steer the car. By the time I could reach the pedals I could drive.

“*Girls can be really mean, even now. It is sad that we can’t encourage each other*”

**My mum and dad were not meant to be together.** They got divorced when I was 14. I was sad but I was also fine; there was so much going on with my career that there wasn’t a lot of time to talk about it. But they instilled great values in me. I attribute my work ethic to my dad. He taught me to show up on time and know what I was doing. I have a great

reputation in this business because of that. Most people don’t come back from things like my dad and I went through [the court case]. We didn’t speak for three and a half years. But now we are close. Eddie and I take his kids to visit my dad in Nashville.

**I was super-driven as a kid.** Even though I was on the road a lot, the teachers would give me homework and I would get it all done. I look at my 11-year-old stepson Mason, and I’m like, ‘I signed a record deal when I was your age. You’re still fumbling with tying your shoelaces.’

**I always say: ‘smart, pretty... unpopular’, because girls can be really jealous.** I was terrified of school and I was bullied. When I was 11, a girl brought a knife to school and wrote me a note saying she was going to hurt me with it. Girls can be really mean, even now.

It is sad that we can’t encourage each other: I think a lot of girls get intimidated by other people’s success.

**Success wasn’t all fun and games.** It was amazing – and it was exhausting. It was hard to have the pressure of thinking: ‘I have a temperature of 104 and I’m vomiting and I still have to go on stage. If

I have to cancel, who am I disappointing?’ I was such a little warrior:

**I was meant to be with Eddie.** Fans felt as though I was their daughter or sister making a big mistake when we got together; because they’ve grown up with me. But we both acted from our hearts and that’s impossible to turn around. Trust me, we both tried. Look, I’ve said ‘I’m sorry’ and made amends.

**My album *Spitfire* was very cathartic.** It dug into every insecurity and every bit of sadness and blame; the guilt I was going through. ‘Borrowed’ was a really intense song to write, because I was talking honestly about the shame I felt, the lowest of lows. It was also my tongue-in-cheek humour; [a nod to] the cheating songs and the drinking songs. Every country song has cheating in it!

**My life has been one big country song.** I’ve gone through every emotion, especially in the situation with Eddie – I’ve felt pain and suffering and sadness and the most incredible love, all at the same time.

**I had serious depression.** People thought I had an eating disorder or was addicted to something. Not at all. I went into treatment for anxiety and depression. I had just turned 30 and I realised I couldn’t live like that any more. There were very dark moments, but



important to feel stuff. I think it's sad that our society wants to be numb and not feel things.

**Eddie is my soulmate – he and I completely get each other.** We're opposites – I want to go shopping; he wants to ride dirt bikes – but we bring out the best in each other. Divorce is not an option for us. Obviously if something horrible happened, I would have to take care of myself, but I don't see that happening.

**Eddie is a guy's guy; he likes dude things.** We just got an RV [camper van] and he's obsessed with it. He's very protective and gentlemanly. He should have been a politician. He knows how to argue a great case and he has a lot of charisma.

**I would love to have a kid with Eddie – I hope it has his dimples!** I've taken care of people my whole life, so for a long time the thought of having a child seemed exhausting, but I don't feel that way any more. I've been working my whole life on the road, and I do wonder, 'How will I juggle that with a baby? What will have to change? Everything!' But I don't want to wait too long. Having Eddie's kids around has stirred something in me.

**My mum calls me her miracle child.** She tried for 12 years to have me. Then she prayed for me one day and six weeks later found out she was pregnant.

**I've had psoriasis since I was two.** I had it on 80 per cent of my body by the time I was six – huge patches that would bleed and itch. I went through

such self-esteem issues, being in the public eye. I've been on a drug for ten years that's kept me clear; but trust me, when people tell me I have pretty skin, that's like the biggest compliment because I know how much I struggled.

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*I had serious depression. It taught me that asking for help is a sign of strength*  
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**I'm a huge Christmas person. It's a big deal to me.** I bought my first Christmas present in August, a Karl Lagerfeld cat keyring for my friend. Right after Halloween we put up our Christmas decorations. There's actually a company here that will come out and spray your garden with real snow. So much fun! I might consider it – why not?

**My new EP has heart and soul with a 'Dirty South' New**

**Orleans feel to it.** There's 'White Christmas', 'Someday at Christmas' – a huge Stevie Wonder classic – and 'Silent Night'. I came home to my husband and said: 'We rewrote "Silent Night!"' We're always taking something everyone knows and twisting it a bit, to make it sound new and interesting. There's a Dolly Parton song, 'Hard Candy Christmas' – I cut it with steel guitar so it has an ethereal sound. That song is heartbreaking and I wanted to make it even more heartbreaking!

**Dolly Parton is amazing.** I've met her a couple of times and she's a role model to me in the way she lives her life. I love her quote, 'It's hard to be a diamond in a rhinestone world.' She's got a lot of integrity: I love the juxtaposition of her being over the top, but at heart a simple, grounded person.

**Taylor Swift is super-cute – she knows how to write a great song.** I think she has handled herself very well in this crazy world. For a young girl to have the balls to say 'This is who I am' is great.

**People want to keep you in a box.** There was a moment where country radio stations in America didn't play my song 'How Do I Live', but pop radio stations played it and I had a huge hit. It's easier now country music has become so mainstream. But my pure country fans have stuck with me for ever.

**I would love to do a duet with David Gray.** And I love Ed Sheeran. Adele would be my girl choice. So maybe we'll make one of those three happen. I like my Brits. 🇬🇧

■ *Leann's new album* One Christmas – Chapter 1 is out now

I'm blessed that I had great friends I could call at 2am when I was crying. One of the biggest lessons I've learnt is that you can ask for help and it's not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of strength.

**I love therapy.** If you find the right therapist it's fantastic. It's about gaining tools to be a better person. Just by having a place to sift through things, you somehow find the answers within you. It is

## LEANN'S LOVES

### DESCRIBE YOUR STYLE...

Bohemian rock-ish classic chic. I feel like you can put the word chic after everything and make it cool!

### FAVOURITE DESIGNERS

Isabel Marant, Helmut Lang for everyday stuff, Stella McCartney. I have eight million Stella bags!

**STYLE ROLE MODEL** I love the rock 'n' roll effortlessness of Kate Moss. She's very girly but has a rough-around-the-edges vibe. And I love Nicole Richie; she has beautiful style.

### WHO MAKES YOU LAUGH?

Eddie makes me laugh. We

both have that smart-ass, dry sense of humour. If there's a joke to be had and we know we're not going to offend anyone, we'll take it. Eddie Murphy's stand-up comedy routines are my absolute favourite of all time. They're so wrong but they're so good.

### BIGGEST EXTRAVAGANCE

A one-of-a-kind Chanel handbag: my 30th birthday present to myself.

### TREASURED POSSESSION

A snow globe my godfather gave me right before he passed away when I was 15. We were

super-close, so it's special to me. It is a cool nativity scene, not one of those cheesy ones.

### ON YOUR BEDSIDE TABLE

Essential oils: I put lavender on my pillow. I also have the book *1,001 Ways to Live in the Moment* [by Barbara Ann Kipfer], a Bose iPod dock, two Jonathan Adler antelope figurines and a picture of Eddie when he was five.

**MOTTO FOR LIFE** It's a Dr Seuss saying: 'Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened.' It reminds me to stay positive.