

Soulful singer Aretha Franklin dies at 76

By The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 08.20.18

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Aretha Franklin performs at President Barack Obama's swearing-in ceremony at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., January 20, 2009. Photo by: Ron Edmonds/AP Photo

The great American soul singer Aretha Franklin died Thursday, August 16. She was 76 years old. The singer was very ill and her family was at her bedside.

"In one of the darkest moments of our lives, we are not able to find the appropriate words to express the pain in our heart. We have lost the matriarch and rock of our family. The love she had for her children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews and cousins knew no bounds," Franklin's family said.

Franklin had cancer. In 2010, she had cancer cells removed. She later returned to performing live. Franklin died of pancreatic cancer.

Made Soul Music Popular

Franklin is known as the "Queen of Soul." Franklin and other African-American artists made soul music popular in the late 1950s and 1960s. It combines church-style singing called gospel with jazz and rhythm and blues (R&B).

Franklin sold more than 75 million records in her lifetime and won 18 Grammy awards. She had 77 songs in the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 and 20 No. 1 R&B hits. Her last original recording was "Aretha Franklin Sings the Great Diva Classics" in 2014, which included her take on Adele's "Rolling in the Deep."

Turned Hardship And Sorrow Into Beauty And Hope

"American history wells up when Aretha sings," former U.S. President Barack Obama said at an award show in 2015. Obama said Franklin's music showed how "hardship" and "sorrow" can turn into something full of "beauty" and "hope."

After her death, other well-known figures paid their respects on social media. Former President Bill Clinton made a statement with Hillary Clinton. "She will forever be the Queen of Soul and so much more to all who knew her personally and through her music. Our hearts go out to her family and her countless fans."

President Donald Trump wrote a farewell on Twitter. "The Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, is dead. She was a great woman, with a wonderful gift from God, her voice. She will be missed!"

Singer Elton John posted on Instagram, "The loss of Aretha Franklin is a blow for everybody who loves real music: Music from the heart, the soul and the Church."

Started Singing At Father's Church

Franklin was born on March 25, 1942, in Memphis, Tennessee. The family moved to Buffalo, New York, when Franklin was 2 years old. They settled in Detroit, Michigan, two years later. In Detroit, shortly after her mother's death, the 10-year-old Franklin started singing at the church where her father Clarence LaVaughn (CL) preached. His sermons during the civil rights period led civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. to stay with the family when he visited.

CL began managing his daughter's musical career. He included her on church tours. In 1956, he helped Aretha sign for her first record, "Songs of Faith." In the mid-1960s, her music took off. Her incredible run of hits included the songs "Respect," "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" and "I Say a Little Prayer."

Won Many Awards

Franklin received the Grammy's Lifetime Award in 1994. In 2005, she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. It is the highest award a citizen of the United States can get. In 2009, she performed "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" at Obama's first inauguration.

In 2017, Franklin stepped back from performing, which was difficult. "This is what I've done all of my life," she said. She last sang at the 25th anniversary for Elton John's AIDS Foundation in New York City in November 2017. AIDS is a condition where the body can't fight off infections.

In June 2017, Franklin said she was working on a record including music stars Stevie Wonder, Elton John and Lionel Richie. It hasn't been released yet, though. Singer Jennifer Hudson will play Franklin in the upcoming movie "Queen of Soul."

Franklin influenced today's stars. "The soulfulness comes from the gospel," Beyoncé once said. "It comes from Aretha, who listened to all of that, who sang in the Church." Kanye West, Outkast and Alicia Keys used her music in their songs.

Franklin's song "Respect" became a defining song of both the women's and civil rights movements. She performed at Martin Luther King's funeral in 1968.

Franklin was the mother of four sons.

Quiz

- 1 Read the section "Won Many Awards." Which sentence from the section shows how Franklin's music was used for more than just entertainment?
- (A) She last sang at the 25th anniversary for Elton John's AIDS Foundation in New York City in November 2017.
 - (B) Singer Jennifer Hudson will play Franklin in the upcoming movie "Queen of Soul."
 - (C) Kanye West, Outkast and Alicia Keys used her music in their songs.
 - (D) Franklin's song "Respect" became a defining song of both the women's and civil rights movements.
- 2 Read the paragraph below from the section "Made Soul Music Popular." Which detail from the paragraph best supports the conclusion that Aretha Franklin's music was incredibly popular?
- (A) Franklin and other African-American artists made soul music popular in the late 1950s and 1960s.
 - (B) It combines church-style singing called gospel with jazz and rhythm and blues (R&B).
 - (C) Franklin sold more than 75 million records in her lifetime and won 18 Grammy awards.
 - (D) Her last original recording was "Aretha Franklin Sings the Great Diva Classics" in 2014, which included her take on Adele's "Rolling in the Deep."
- 3 How did Clarence LaVaughn affect his daughter's music career?
- (A) He was her manager and helped her get a record deal.
 - (B) He encouraged her to sing at his church.
 - (C) He paid for her to get singing and piano lessons.
 - (D) He wanted her to work in the civil rights movement.
- 4 Why did President Obama feel sad after Aretha Franklin's death?
- (A) because she was a dear friend of his family for many years
 - (B) because her music demonstrated how good can come from hard times
 - (C) because she was a strong supporter of the civil rights movement
 - (D) because she performed when he became president

Answer Key

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