

R.I.P. Aretha Franklin



Aretha Franklin died today at age 76 after an eight-year struggle with pancreatic cancer. Franklin's publicist Gwendolyn Quinn said in a statement the iconic singer passed away at 9:50 AM ET surrounded by family at her home. In her five decades as the Queen of Soul she helped pioneer the genre, won 18 Grammys, was the first woman inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame and had her voice declared a national treasure. Her reworking of Otis Redding's "Respect" is considered one of the songs to exemplify the Civil Rights Movement. She had the most Billboard entries (73) for a woman until 2017 and had over 52 top 10 hits on the Hot R&B Sides chart now known as Hot R&B Hip-Hop Songs. Her commercial achievements matched her cultural relevance through the years. She sang at some of the most important events of the 20th and 21st century including Martin Luther King Jr.'s funeral, and inauguration festivities for Presidents Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter. Franklin's gospel-rooted soul became synonymous with America, a home-grown creation admired and emulated around the world. A peerless singer and outstanding piano player, Franklin's influence extended through the generations with Lauryn Hill penning "A Rose Is Still A Rose" for her in 1998.

Franklin's career started when she was a youngster singing in her father's church. The Reverend C.L. Franklin was famous for being one of the first ministers to utilize radio broadcasts. His relationships with gospel singers Clara Ward, Mahalia Jackson and Sam Cooke had a huge influence on Aretha Franklin's development as an artist. Her first album was a gospel one on an independent but by 1960 she was signed to Columbia where she recorded a string of successful pop and R&B hits. It is her time with Atlantic Records in the late '60s when she made her legend as the Queen of Soul with songs like

"I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Love You)" "Chain Of Fools" and "Ain't No Way."Â

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In the '70s, she asserted her power with the release of Amazing Grace which is the biggest selling live gospel album of all time and secular singles "Spanish Harlem," Day Dreaming" and "Rock Steady." It was during the '70s that Franklin offered to post bail for jailed activist and intellectual Angela Davis and sheÂ told [Jet](#) magazine why:Â

"My daddy (Detroit's Rev. C.L.Franklin) says I don't know what I'm doing. Well, I respect him, of course, but I'm going to stick by my beliefs. Angela Davis must go free. Black people will be free. I've been locked up (for disturbing the peace in Detroit) and I know you got to disturb the peace when you can't get no peace. Jail is hell to be in. I'm going to see her free if there is any justice in our courts, not because I believe in communism, but because she's a Black woman and she wants freedom for Black people. I have the money; I got it from Black peopleâ€"they've made me financially able to have itâ€"and I want to use it in ways that will help our people.â€"

Franklin worked with Curtis Mayfield in 1976 on the soundtrack to the film *Sparkle* which put her back on the R&B and Top 40 charts. *Sparkle* became a cult classic and so did the soundtrack because of Mayfield and Franklin's genius collaboration. Franklin's career was reignited in the '80s with new sounds and collaborators. Luther Vandross and Marcus Miller wrote "Jump To It" for her and she had more success with the singles "Jumpin' Jack Flash," "Freeway Of Love" and "Jimmy Lee." George Michael and the Eurythmics joined Franklin for "I Knew You Were Waiting For Me" and "Sisters Are Doing For Themselves" both were successful commercially and had videos that helped Franklin smoothly transition into the

age of video. She also made a famous appearance in *The Blues Brothers* singing "Think" in the role of a waitress and wife. The younger generation became more familiar with her after she sang the theme song to the popular TV show *A Different World*.Â

She released two albums in the '90s with *A Rose Is Still A Rose* becoming one of her most sold. Lauryn Hill, Sean Combs, Mary J. Blige, Jermaine Dupri, Kelly Price and Babyface worked on *A Rose Is Still A Rose*. The singer seemed to accomplish the impossible in 1998 when she replaced Luciano Pavarotti at the Grammys and sang "Nessun Dorma" at the last minute and received international acclaim.Â

Franklin continued to record in the 2000s and give memorable performances. She famously covered Adele's "Rolling In The Deep" for her *Aretha Franklin Sings The Diva Classics* album. Her performance at the Kennedy Center Honors in 2015 of "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" honoring songwriter Carole King was another noteworthy moment. In these later years, she received honorary doctorates from Harvard, Princeton, Yale andÂ the University of Pennsylvania. Her health issues caused her to cancel shows in recent times but she managed to give a free outdoor concert in Detroit last year. Franklin's last studio album, *A Brand New Me*, which features archival vocals matched with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra was released in November 2017. An all-star tribute concert for Franklin is scheduled for November 14, 2018, in New York City.Â

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