

R.I.P. Irene Cara

Singer and actress Irene Cara has died at age 63. Cara became famous in the '80s for her role as Coco on the show *Fame* and for singing the theme song "What A Feeling" from the *Flashdance* soundtrack. Cara was a New York City native who started her career as a child by competing in the Little Miss America pageant. As a seven-year-old, she sang in a mambo band where her father Gaspar Escalera was a saxophone player. She started her acting career with television appearances on *The Electric Company* with co-stars Morgan Freeman, Bill Cosby and Rita Moreno and *Johnny Carson's The Tonight Show* during the '70s. Her acting chops were also formed by her work on Broadway and off-Broadway plays like *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *The Me Nobody Knows*. She and Stephanie Mills worked together on the Broadway play *Maggie Flynn as children*. In 1976, she starred in the Black cult classic *Sparkle* which was scored by Curtis Mayfield. Phillip Michael Thomas, Lonette McKee and Dorian Harewood were her co-stars and the 2012 remake would feature Whitney Houston's last acting role. By the late '70s, Cara's name was growing internationally and she was recognized for her work on *Roots: The Next Generations* and *Guyana Tragedy: The Story Of Jim Jones*.

Her 1980 role as Coco in the movie *Fame* is what made her famous. She sang the title track "Fame" and the film's other song "Out Here On My Own." Both songs had Academy Award nominations and "Fame" was the winner. In 1982 she would win another Academy Award, a Grammy, an American Music Award and a Golden Globe for co-writing "What A Feeling" for *Flashdance* which was one of the biggest movies of the decade. Her time in the limelight ended after a 1985 lawsuit against music executive Al Coury for royalties which was resolved with her winning \$1.5 million in 1993. She had a role in the 1983 film *D.C. Cab* but she never gained the same previous momentum. Her recording career produced four studio albums including one

with her all-woman band Hot Caramel. She sang the title song for the American television drama *Downtown: A Street Tale* in 2004. At the time of her passing, there were plans for new projects that her publicist said would still be done.

Unfortunately, yes. Her business manager and I were notified a few hours ago. I'm her publicist. Believe me, I wish it weren't true. We were working on amazing projects that would have made her and her fans incredibly happy. Her manager and I will finish them. She'd want that.

– Irene Cara (@Irene_Cara) [November 26, 2022](#)