

R.I.P. Betty Davis

Betty Davis, the funk pioneer who was once married to Miles Davis, died age 77 on February 9th of cancer. Davis rattled the music industry establishment in the '60s and '70s when she debuted her raunchy stage show and raw funk. The former Betty Mabry had worked as a model in New York City during the '60s and became acquainted with musicians like Hugh Masekela, Jimi Hendrix and Sly Stone. She recorded her first singles on small labels during this time including "Get Ready For Betty" and "I'll Be There." Her songwriting was recognized when she wrote "Uptown (to Harlem)" for The Chambers Brother's 1967 self-titled hit album. Miles Davis was inspired by Mabry and put her on the cover of his *Filles de Killamajaro* album. Davis tried to secure Mabry a record deal with demo recordings they made but record companies were not interested. It is Davis's association and subsequent marriage to Mabry that is credited for introducing Davis to Hendrix and Stone which led to the creation of his jazz fusion era and his *Bitches Brew* album.

Betty Davis moved to England after their marriage ended and returned to the United States a year later. She worked with members of Sly and the Family Stone, The Pointer Sisters and Sylvester on her three groundbreaking albums. She wrote all of her music and had total control over the way she presented herself. "If I'm In Luck I Might Get Picked Up" and "Shut Off The Lights" were her only two singles to enter the Billboard R&B chart in minor positions. Davis's unapologetic sexuality conveyed in her lyrics, avant-garde raspy vocals and skimpy costumes upset radio stations, the NAACP and religious groups. Many of her shows were boycotted and her music was banned from radio. She recorded one more album for Island Records which was shelved and then she was dropped from the label. Davis became a recluse after 1980 when her father died.

In 2007 and 2009 her first three albums were reissued by Light

In The Attic Records. The label also released her fourth album that was never released and titled it *Is It Love Or Desire?* In 2017, the Phillip Cox documentary *Betty Davis: They Say I'm Different* was released and for the first time she told her story with the promise that she not be filmed.

Betty Davis was never recognized at large during her lifetime but she opened the door for so many women artists to be independent and comfortable in their own self expression. Davis and Millie Jackson were contemporaries but Jackson didn't start her explicit lyric style until 1974 after Davis. Before Mary J. Blige became known and accepted for her thigh-high boots Davis made them her one of main looks and took the criticism for it. Miles Davis acknowledged Betty's blueprint for artists like Madonna in his autobiography. Singers Joi, Janelle Monae and Erykah Badu have all recognized their debt to Davis. Every woman artist after Davis especially other maverick Black women creatives have all walked a path she made easier to follow.

R.I.P. Greg Tate

Journalist, author, musician, band leader and co-founder of the Black Rock Coalition Greg Tate has died at age 64. Tate is recognized as the godfather of hip-hop journalism for his writing in the pages of the *Village Voice* that started in 1981. His articles were some of the earliest serious writings about the genre that was considered a fad during its commercial beginnings. Tate's prose was intellectually sophisticated and poetic but grounded by his insight into the

people's cultural expression and political needs. He famously stated that "There is no such thing as alternative hip-hop because the only alternative to hip-hop is is dead silence and we all know such silence signifies a lack of breath."Â When the music industry establishment propped Eminem up as the savior of rap, something the Detroit rapper never said or believed himself, Tate chided the notion by explaining how silly it was because "The poor beleaguered masses needed to hear it from Malcolm X, not Howdy Doody." He could be comical in his criticism but the observations were dead-on and serious. He always eloquently summarized the pleasure and the problems of marketing Black music through the lense of an industry riddled with America's lasting racial, economic and social problems.Â

In 1985 he responded to the issue of African-Americans being musically pigeonholed by the industry and formed the Black Rock Coalition with Vernon Reid and Konda Mason. Their goal was to create community for Black artists who wanted to create and support rock music. The coalition became a place for artists to share ideas and express themselves outside of the rigidity of mainstream music that had little room for Black rockers. Reid's Living Colour would have success in the '80s with their hit "Cult Of Personality." The BRC was and still is a nurturing ground for many artists and they celebrated their 35th anniversary in 2020 with a four-day celebration of concerts, panels and discussions.Â Tate's first book of essays *Flyboy In The Buttermilk: Essays On Contemporary America* came out in 1992 and is a classic work on African-American politics and art. He authored two more books including one on whites' debt to Black creativity and a verbally dense tome about Jimi Hendrix. When he wasn't scribing for the *Village Voice* he shared his thoughts on a wide range of Black art for publications like *Vibe* and *The New York Times*.Â

The self-proclaimed 'Mayor of Bohemia' started his own band

Burnt Sugar in 1999. The group of ragtag artists and musicians formed a funky noise machine inspired by Miles Davis, Butch Morris, Sun Ra, A Band Of Gypsies and Bad Brains. Tate was also a guitarist and he was a member of the band and he directed them using Morris's conduction to give the band its cues. Their more than one dozen albums of eclectic post soul power comes with electrifying live shows that would sometimes be performed by Burnt Sugar's caramelized nucleus Rebellum. Their [Angels Over Oakanda](#) was released this past fall. Burnt Sugar presented their version of Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song soundtrack in Brooklyn and the film's legendary director Melvin Van Peebles, who also passed this year, was in attendance. Greg Tate most recently appeared in Questlove's award-winning documentary *Summer Of Soul* released this past summer. He also gave possibly his last interview to [NPR](#) about defunct jazz label Strata-East.

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Chaka Khan & Stephanie Mills Set For Verzuz

Chaka Khan and Stephanie Mills are scheduled to be the next artists to do a Verzuz battle. The face off between the two esteemed songtresses will happen November 18th at The Theatre At Ace Hotel in Los Angeles at 8PM ET. Tickets to be there in person can be purchased on the [Verzuztv.com](#) site. Fans can

always stream the event via Instagram and the Triller websites. There were rumors about the two of them doing a Verzuz but it is now confirmed.Â

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*A night for the QUEENS!! Chaka Khan vs Stephanie Mills ? LIVE from LA! 11/18 5PM PT
? <https://t.co/hViUguBvSL>*

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– VERZUZ TV (@verzuzonline) [November 14, 2021](#)

Onyx Collective Share Tango

New York City's Onyx Collective has collaborated with Canadian funk partners Chromeo on their current single "Tango." It is their third collaboration together and all of the songs are part of a larger project they are completing in the future. "Tango" is about fleeting relationships and sounds a bit like Steely Dan and '80s funk. Saxophonist Isaiah says of "Tango":Â

"A classic from the Onyx vaults. A love song that reflects the vibe of being young in New York and having relationships that don't last forever but seem like they will in the moment."

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Last year the band released *Onyx Plays Rodgers & Hart/ Rodgers & Hammerstein* which was a collection of cover songs by legendary songwriting duos Richard Rodgers & Oscar Hammerstein II and Rodgers & Lorenz Hart.

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