

R.I.P. Cissy Houston



Cissy Houston, gospel singer and mother of Whitney Houston, passed away on Monday at age 91. Houston, who was born Emily Drinkard, started her music career in 1938 when she and her sister Anne and brothers Larry and Nicky formed The Drinkard Four gospel group. Their sister Marie joined the group and the name was changed to The Drinkard Singers. Houston's sister Lee managed the group and later became the mother of Dee Dee and Dionne Warwick. The group performed regularly around Newark,

New Jersey, and after an appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival, they signed a deal with MCA Records and became the first gospel group to release an album on a major label. The group would experience some more changes in the lineup and become The Sweet Inspirations. They had a Top 40 hit in 1968 with "Sweet Inspiration" and became an in-demand backup group. Van Morrison used them on his iconic hit, "Brown Eyed Girl," and Jimi Hendrix, Elvis Presley, Dusty Springfield, George Benson, Wilson Pickett, Aretha Franklin, and Carmen McCrae were some of the artists that used The Sweet Inspirations in their recordings.

Houston started recording solo records in 1963 with the single "This Is My Vow." Her solo album, *Presenting Cissy Houston*, was released in 1970. Houston recorded four solo albums in the '70s and had a disco hit with "Think It Over." She was the first to record "Midnight Train To Georgia" in 1972, one year before Gladys Knight & The Pips made it a hit. Houston was in demand as a session singer and recorded with Paul Simon, Better Midler, Burt Bacharach, and Linda Rondstadt. She performed live with her band around New York City and Whitney would frequently join her on stage. In the 90s, she won Grammy awards for her gospel albums, *Face To Face* and *He Leadeth Me*. She recorded the duet "I Know Him So Well" with Whitney in 1987 and it appeared on Whitney's second album. In 2006, she recorded "Family First" with Dionne Warwick and Whitney for the *Daddy's Little Girls* soundtrack. BET did a tribute to Whitney Houston in 2012 after passing and Cissy performed "Bridge Over Troubled Water." The average pop culture historian has relegated Cissy Houston to being the mother of Whitney but she was a vocalist in her own right that made music listeners understand that a backup singer was just as important as the lead vocalist. Her work on Aretha Franklin's "Ain't No Way" elevated the song into an otherworldly listening experience and this is why Franklin made sure to have Houston on stage with her during their last television appearance together in 2014 on *The Late Show with David*

Letterman. Houston paved the way for her daughter Whitney and numerous singers, especially those who showed their star power in a supporting role.