

R.I.P. Gwen McCrae



Singer Gwen McCrae has died at age 81. McCrae came to be known to the public in the '70s when her single "Rockin' Chair" topped the soul charts. She started her career as a teenager singing in clubs around her native Pensacola, Florida. The singing partnership she formed with her husband George led to local hits, "Like Yesterday Our Love Is Gone" and "No One Left To Come Home," written by Clarence Reid, who later became Blowfly, and Willie Clarke. McCrae recorded a cover of Bobby "Blue" Bland's "Lead Me On," which was picked up by Columbia

and became a Top 40 hit. The success of the Bland cover is when her husband retired from singing to become her manager. Reid and Clarke wrote "Rockin' Chair," which McCrae had recorded for the TK Records subsidiary, Cat. Betty Wright, another Florida R&B legend, had introduced The McCraes to the owner of the record label and helped them get a deal with the company. McCrae had one more national hit with the label, "Damn Right Its Good," before her marriage ended as well as her contract with the label. Her relocation to New Jersey included a new record deal with Atlantic. This second phase of her solo career is when she released the dance music classics "Funky Sensation," "Poyson," "All This Love That I'm Giving," and "Keep The Fire Burning." McCrae injected funk into soulful arrangements meant for dancing. In the 70s, she was the first person to release "You Were Always On My Mind" as a country ballad, but by the '80s, she had become a dance music legend. New fans were born in places like the dancefloor of the Paradise Garage in New York City. Her brand of funk was less polished than the typical disco sound, so some called it post-disco, but it was just another soulful strain of dance music. Decades later, "Funky Sensation" would be sampled by British dance group Disclosure as well as singers Leela James and Rahsaan Patterson.

In the 2000s, McCrae released a gospel album and joined the Soulpower organization that launched comebacks for James Brown associates Bobby Byrd, Marva Whitney, Lyn Collins, and Martha High. She released her last single, "Now I Found Love," in 2010.

Throwback: Gwen McCrae-Funky Sensation



[youtube id="NLTAn6ltUi0"]

Gwen McCrae's 1981 "Funky Sensation" was the result of her brief stay involvement in dance music and a two-album contract with Atlantic Records. Songwriter/producer Kenton Nix was already having success in dance music with Taana Gardner when he wrote "Funky Sensation." McCrae's first time with national success happened in 1975 with the song ["Rockin' Chair"](#) and "Funky Sensation" reinvented her as a dance music artist and gave McCrae trans-generational appeal because of sampling culture. [Masters At Work](#) took the song to another era of dancefloor when they remixed it in 1994. The U.K.'s Northern Soul music scene discovered McCrae's lesser-known catalog and was a catalyst for the two albums she recorded for the Rhythm King label based there in the '80's. McCrae recorded for another European record company in the '90's and released a gospel album in 2005. The singer suffered a stroke while touring the U.K. in 2012 and a fundraiser was set-up to cover her medical expenses and travel back to the United States.