

R.I.P. Sarah Dash

Sarah Dash, a co-founder of Patti LaBelle and the Bluebelles, died at age 76 today of unknown causes. A native of Trenton, New Jersey, Dash started her singing career in the '60s when she formed the girl duo The Del Capris with fellow Trenton resident Nona Hendryx. She later moved to Philadelphia where she, Hendryx and Cindy Birdsong would join The Ordettes a singing group founded by Patricia Holte. Their name was changed to the Blue Belles by the record label owner who recorded their first single "I Sold My Heart To The Junkman." A court battle with The Starlets who originally made the song caused them to have their name changed again to Patti LaBelle and The Blue Belles. He changed Holte's last name to LaBelle and by 1963 the group had its first hit with "Down The Aisle." They had a few more charted singless with the Cameo-Parkway label including "Danny Boy," and "You'll Never Walk Alone" before the label went defunct in 1965. A move to New York City and a new deal with Atlantic Records took them to the next stage of their careers and a smash cover of "Over The Rainbow." Their contract with Atlantic ended by 1970 when they were released from their deal and Cindy Birdsong left the group in 1970 to join The Supremes.Â

Vicki Wickham, who managed the UK music show *Ready, Steady, Go*, became their new manager and reinvented their look and sound. She also urged them to simply use the name LaBelle. The women were now dressed in space suits and bright makeup and signed to Warner Brothers. The new rock-influenced sound failed to create any hits and by 1974 they were signed to Epic Records. It was the 1975 album *Nightbirds* that contained their signature hit "Lady Marmalade" known for its reference to New Orleans sex workers in the French chorus "Voulez-vous coucher avec moi?." LaBelle had a number one hit and became world-famous reaching Gold Record status and becoming the first rock-oriented act to play The Metropolitan Opera House. They

would release two more albums before the group dissolved in 1976.Â

Sarah Dash started her solo career in 1978 with a self-titled album that had the Top Ten disco hit "Sinner Man." Her 1980 dance single "Ooh La La, Too Soon," was famously used in a commercial for the popular Sassoon jeans. She also did session work during the decade with Nile Rodgers, The O'Jays, The Marshall Tucker Band and David Johansen.Â A new deal with Manhattan Records in 1988 produced the solo album *You're All I Need*. Dash worked with Patti LaBelle again on the duet "Don't Make Me Wait" which was included on the album. She recorded more dance music with Jellybean Benitez in 1990 with the song "When You Talk To Me/Manhandled" and in 2012 the Jason King-produced "Hold On (He'll Be Right There)."Â

Dash toured with Keith Richards in the late '80s and appeared on two of his albums and The Rolling Stones' *Steel Wheels* in 1989. She reunited with Patti LaBelle and Nona Hendryx to sing "Turn It Out" for the *Too Wong Foo, Thanks For Everything, Julie Newmar!* soundtrack in 1995. They would have a proper reunion in 2008 and recorded the album *Back To Now* which was critically acclaimed. The release was followed by performances at the Apollo Theater.Â

Sarah Dash never left her Trenton hometown and she was revered there for always contributing to the community. She supported local arts communities and had recently encouraged people to get the COVID-19 vaccine. In 2017, she was named the city's musical ambassador.Â Her charitable works in New York City raising money for single homeless mothers was recognized in the '90s by the deputy mayor of New York City. In 2016, she received a Lifetime Achievement Award from The National R&B Music Society. LaBelle's "Lady Marmalade" was inducted into the National Recording Registry of the Library of Congress in March 2021.Â

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