

# 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 A court battle with The Starlets who originally made the song caused them to have their name changed again to Patti LaBelle and The Blue Belles.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

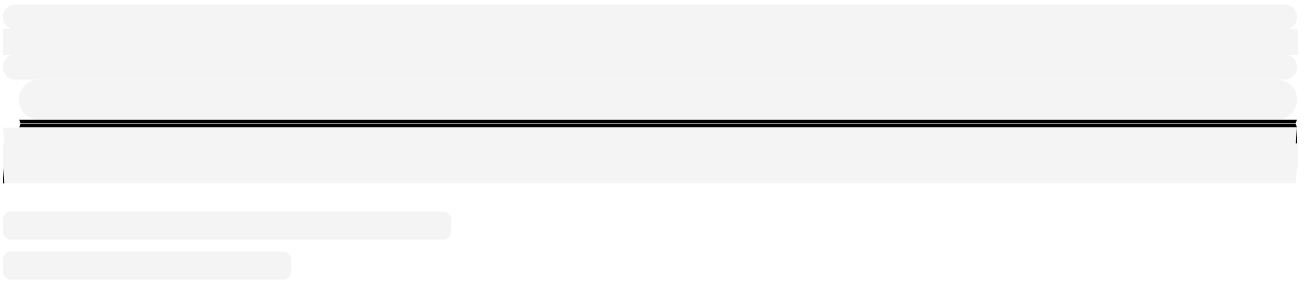
Dash toured with Keith Richards in the late '80s and appeared on two of his albums and The Rolling Stones' *Steel Wheels* in 1989. She reunited with Patti LaBelle and Nona Hendryx to sing "Turn It Out" for the *Too Wong Foo, Thanks For Everything, Julie Newmar!* soundtrack in 1995. They would have a 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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A post shared by Sarah Dash? (@sarahasindash)

# Throwback: Labelle-What Can I Do For You



Patricia Louise Holte from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania sang in a quartet she formed in 1959 called The Ordettes. Two of the singers left the group and Patricia and the other remaining member Sandra Tucker recruited New Jersey transplants Wynona "Nona" Hendryx and Sarah Dash who sang in a group named The Del Capris. Sandra would also leave The Ordettes and she was replaced by Cindy Birdsong. The Ordettes auditioned for Newtown Records and almost did not get a contract because Patricia was deemed "too plain too dark and unattractive" until the head of the company heard her sing. A contract was granted in 1961 and the boss suggested Patti Labelle for Holte's stage name and Bluebelles for the group which was the name of a Newtown subsidiary. Over the next two years the group's name was changed again to Patti Labelle And Her Bluebelles and then Patti Labelle And The Bluebelles. ["I Sold My Heart To The Junkman"](#) was their first single also recorded by a girl group called The Starlets at the same time. Contractual problems had The Starlets release the song under the name Bluebelles and Labelle states in her autobiography that her group eventually recorded their own version. "Junkman" became a Top 20 pop and R&B hit that got them a spot on American Bandstand. A live album *Sweethearts Of The Apollo* recorded at the famous Apollo Theater in New York became their only full-length recording for the label. When success eluded them Newtown Records became passe and they signed a new deal with Cameo-Parkway in 1963 who released their cover of "Down The Aisle (The Wedding Song)" which did pretty well on the pop and R&B charts. "You'll Never Walk Alone" and "Danny Boy" also

fared the same commercially and they recorded their second live album before leaving to join Atlantic Records' roster in 1965. In 1966 Atlantic released *Over The Rainbow* and in 1967 it was *Dreamer* both of which did not do as good as Atlantic had hoped. Cindy Birdsong left the group that year and joined The Supremes as the replacement for Florence Ballard. Birdsong's departure and the loss of their contract with Atlantic that year was tempered with the positive reception they received in England and the opportunity to work with Wilson Pickett. Their fans abroad induced an overseas tour for them and they sang backup on Pickett's popular "634 5789." England was the also the place where Vicki Wickham a British TV producer was based and Elton John's home. The Bluebelles backed John on some tour dates and Sarah Dash had reached out to Wickham for help on retooling their image.

Wickham dressed them in space age gear and suggested they change their name to Labelle before returned home to the United States in 1971 they scored a new contract with Warner Brothers Records. The first album for Warners was self-titled and had the standout rock tune "Morning Much Better" and versions of songs by Laura Nyro and The Rolling Stones. Gamble and Huff produced Nyro's *Gonna Take A Miracle* album and Labelle sang backup. It was at this time when Gamble and Huff approached Labelle about recording the song "If You Don't Know Me By Now" but they were unable to take it to the studio because of scheduling conflicts. The song would eventually be recorded by Harold Melvin and The Blue Notes. *Moon Shadow* in 1972 would be their second and last recording for Warners and Nona Hendryx's writing skills were becoming more noticeable because of her ability to write socially conscious songs and material that focused on sensual situations as well. RCA Records would be their next stop in 1973 resulting in the project *Pressure Cookin'* that had all Nona Hendryx songs except Gil Scott Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" and Stevie Wonder's "Open Your Heart." They toured as the opening act for The Who that year and made another

label change in 1974 by signing with CBS/Epic to release the *Nightbirds* which became their first gold album and number one hit "Lady Marmalade" and the club favorite "What Can I Do For You." The success of this album led to them becoming the first African-American pop group to perform at The Metropolitan Opera House and the earliest Black vocal ensemble to get the cover of Rolling Stone magazine. *Phoenix* in 1975 was moderately successful and expressed more funk rock elements outside of the conventional template most labels thrust upon R&B groups. *Chameleon* came out in 1976 and was noted for "Get You Somebody New" a paean to female autonomy. *Shaman* was their last attempt at a studio album as a group but the differences in vision made them decide to break up in 1977. Patti and Nona both released their first solo albums in 1977 and had success on different levels. Nona became known for her challenging stance to run of the mill Black popular music that resulted in groundbreaking albums and collaborations with numerous artists including Bill Laswell, Prince, Peter Gabriel and The Talking Heads among others. Patti Labelle had many hits and became a pop culture fixation at one point having her own TV show. Sarah Dash released her own critically acclaimed album in 1978 which included the disco hit "Sinner Man." She would go on to record more dance tunes in the '80s working with people like Sylvester and doing session work for The O'Jays and Chic. Labelle would reunite for brief stints in the '90s to record the songs "Release Yourself" and "Turn It Out." In 1999 Labelle received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the R&B Foundation and Cindy Birdsong rejoined them for the event. There were other get togethers such as BET's 2001 tribute to Patti and a song for a soundtrack to a movie that Patti co-starred in. The official reunion of Labelle happened in 2008 when they signed with Verve and released the album *Back To Now*. Gamble and Huff handled some of the production and new work relationships were established with Wyclef Jean and Lenny Kravitz. Labelle's constant experimentations with funk, rock, gospel pop and soul is a precursor for the likes of Kelis, Erykah Badu, Janelle

Monae, Meshell Ndegeocello, Res and Santigold who have all confidently approached self-invention by questioning the traditional model of the female R&B singer.

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## **Labelle Reunion At The Apollo**

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**Labelle On The Today Show  
10/22/08**