

The Guardian



Juliette Gréco, face of chic postwar Paris, dies aged 93

French actor and singer's career spanned more than half a century

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The legendary French actor and singer Juliette Gréco, whose career spanned more than half a century, has died aged 93, her family has said.

"Juliette Gréco died this Wednesday surrounded by her family in the house she loved so much. Her life was one like no other," her family said in a statement sent to AFP.

"She was still making French songs shine at the age of 89" when her career was ended by a stroke, it added. She also lost her only daughter, Laurence-Marie, in 2016, the same year.

"I miss it terribly. My reason for living is to sing! To sing is everything, there is the body, the instinct, the head," she told *Télérama* magazine in an interview in July.

She was the face and voice of radical chic postwar Paris, a friend of Left Bank intellectual giants such as Jean-Paul Sartre, and the lover of both the Hollywood studio boss Darryl F Zanuck and the jazz legend Miles Davis.

She was arrested by the Gestapo when she was just 16 after her older sister and her mother - a member of the French Resistance - were sent to a concentration camp.

With fashionable Saint-Germain-des-Prés fizzing with creative energy, her look was immortalised by photographers like Willy Ronis, Robert Doisneau and Henri Cartier-Bresson, who shot her in the street or in smoky clubs like Le Boeuf sur le Toit (The ox on the roof).

Gréco's early success as a cabaret artist led to a series of performances in Paris's Olympia concert hall - then the temple of French popular music - in 1954. Six years earlier she had begun what was to become a long film career, taking her across the Atlantic and into the arms of the powerful Hollywood producer Zanuck.

Although she never became a big film star, Gréco became a household name across western Europe in 1965 thanks to the success of the French TV series Belphegor, a detective drama about a ghost haunting the Louvre museum.

Gréco was born on 7 February 1927 in the southern town of Montpellier, but was mostly brought up by her grandparents near Bordeaux after her parents separated.

During the second world war both her parents were active in the resistance, and she was only spared deportation to Germany because of her age. Her wartime experiences sealed her lifelong alliance to the political left.

In 1981 she was practically expelled from Chile, then under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, for singing songs censored by the military regime.

She married three times: briefly in 1953 to actor Philippe Lemaire, with whom she had a daughter; then to the actor-director Michel Piccoli between 1966 and 1977 and finally to Gérard Jouannest, who co-wrote some of Jacques Brel's greatest songs including "Ne Me Quitte Pas" (Don't Leave Me).

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