

# Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul, has died

By [Lisa Respers France](#), [Dan Gilgoff](#) and [Todd Leopold](#), CNN

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**(CNN)** — Aretha Franklin, whose gospel-rooted singing and bluesy yet expansive delivery earned her the title "[the Queen of Soul](#)," has died, a family statement said Thursday. She was 76.

Franklin died at 9:50 a.m. at her home in Detroit, surrounded by family and friends, according to a statement on behalf of Franklin's family from her longtime publicist Gwendolyn Quinn.

The "official cause of death was due to advanced [pancreatic cancer](#) of the neuroendocrine type, which was confirmed by Franklin's oncologist, Dr. Philip Phillips of Karmanos Cancer Institute in Detroit," the family statement said.



[Tributes](#) and [tears](#) flooded in Thursday after news of her death broke.

**Related Article:** [Aretha Franklin is dead](#)

Aretha helped define the American experience. In her voice, we could feel our history, all of it and in every shade—our power and our pain, our darkness and our light, our quest for redemption and our hard-won respect. May the Queen of Soul rest in eternal peace. [pic.twitter.com/bfASqKILc5](https://pic.twitter.com/bfASqKILc5)

— Barack Obama (@BarackObama) [August 16, 2018](#)

"Aretha helped define the American experience," former President Barack Obama [said in a statement](#). "In her voice, we could feel our history, all of it and in every shade -- our power and our pain, our darkness and our light, our quest for redemption and our hard-won respect. May the Queen of Soul rest in eternal peace."

[Tributes pour in for 'Queen of Soul' Aretha Franklin](#)

Live shot from the Hollywood Walk of Fame. RIP Aretha! Thank you for your music! [#queenofsoul](#)  
[pic.twitter.com/ZW8e2S2wvk](https://pic.twitter.com/ZW8e2S2wvk)

— Peggy DeOrio (@psdeorio) [August 16, 2018](#)

Legendary soul singer and Franklin's friend of more than sixty years, Sam Moore, had words of sorrow and comfort to offer.

"I adored her and I know the feelings were mutual. While I'm heartbroken that she's gone I know she's in the Lord's arms and she's not in pain or suffering anymore from the damn cancer that took her away from us," he said in a statement. "I'm going to hope, pray and count on the fact that I will see her again sometime. Rest in the Lord's arms in love, Re."

Franklin's fans paid tribute with flowers and a crown left on her Hollywood Walk of Fame star in Los Angeles.

Her death comes three days after a source close to Franklin told CNN's Don Lemon that the singer was [in hospice care](#).

### [Aretha Franklin in photos](#)

"In one of the darkest moments of our lives, we are not able to find the appropriate words to express the pain in our heart. We have lost the matriarch and rock of our family. The love she had for her children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and cousins knew no bounds," Franklin's family said.

"We have been deeply touched by the incredible outpouring of love and support we have received from close friends, supporters and fans all around the world. Thank you for your compassion and prayers. We have felt your love for Aretha and it brings us comfort to know that her legacy will live on. As we grieve, we ask that you respect our privacy during this difficult time."

Funeral arrangements will be announced in the coming days, the statement said.

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The singer had been reported to be in failing health for years and appeared frail in recent photos, but she kept her struggles private.

In February 2017, Franklin announced she would stop touring, but she continued to book concerts. Earlier this year, she canceled a pair of performances, including at the New Orleans Jazz Fest, on doctor's orders, according to Rolling Stone.

The singer's final public performance was last November, when she sang at an Elton John AIDS Foundation gala in New York.

## Sing it: R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Over the course of a professional career that spanned more than half a century, Franklin's songs not only topped the charts but became part of the vernacular.

She made "[Respect](#)," written by Otis Redding, a call to arms. "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman," a Carole King song, was an earthy expression of sexuality. "Think," which she wrote with her then-husband, Ted White, became a rallying cry for women fed up with loutish men.

The first woman admitted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, she had 88 Billboard chart hits during the rock era, tops among female vocalists. At the peak of her career -- from 1967 to 1975 -- she had more than two dozen Top 40 hits.

"Aretha Franklin is not only the definitive female soul singer of the Sixties," according to her Rolling Stone biography, "she's also one of the most influential and important voices in pop history."

She won 18 Grammy awards, including the honor for best female R&B performance for eight straight years.

There was nothing run-of-the-mill about a Franklin performance. "I Never Loved a Man (the Way I Love You)" is slinky and gritty, Franklin's voice sometimes a whisper over Spooner Oldham's electric piano.



**Photos:** 'The Queen of Soul': Aretha Franklin in photos

"The House That Jack Built" fairly crackles: "I got the house / I got the car / I got the rug / And I got the rack / But I ain't got Jack," Franklin belts.

In Franklin's delivery, "Eleanor Rigby" was a figure of defiance; with Franklin's voice, "Bridge Over Troubled Water" went places not even Art Garfunkel, whose angelic tenor dominated Simon & Garfunkel's original version, could take it.

Her soul was as deep as her voice was strong.

"I think of Aretha as 'Our Lady of Mysterious Sorrows,'" wrote the late Jerry Wexler, Franklin's producer at Atlantic Records. "Her eyes are incredible, luminous eyes covering inexplicable pain. Her depressions could be as deep as the dark sea. I don't pretend to know the sources of her anguish, but anguish surrounds Aretha as surely as the glory of her musical aura."



**Photos:** Aretha Franklin and US presidents

Legendary singer Aretha Franklin and future president, Donald Trump, attend the grand opening of the Trump International Hotel and Tower on May 19, 1997 in New York City.

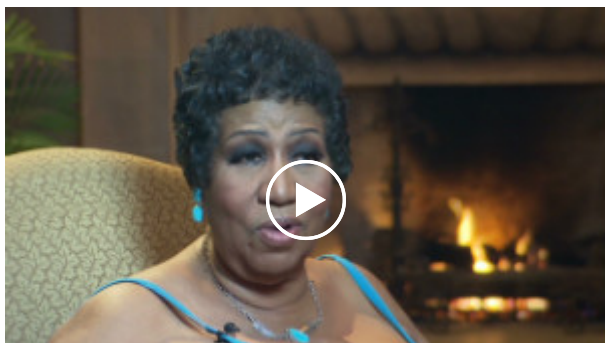
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## A recording career at 14

Perhaps more than any other soul star, Franklin's voice embodied the music's debt to gospel.

She was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1942, but was raised mostly in Detroit, where her father, C.L. Franklin, was a prominent minister and a nationally known gospel singer. Franklin sang in the choir of her father's church and, though she declined her dad's offer of piano lessons and taught herself instead, began recording gospel music at age 14.



**Related Video:** Aretha Franklin on father's influence (2012) 00:35

She toured the gospel circuit with her father, befriending stars such as Mahalia Jackson and Sam Cooke. She later performed at Jackson's funeral.

She was signed to Columbia Records in 1960 by John Hammond, the eagle-eyed talent scout who also discovered Billie Holiday, Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen, but she had only limited success at the label. It wasn't until her arrival at Atlantic Records in the decade's second half that she gave up trying to become a polished all-purpose entertainer for a career as a soul and R&B singer, backed by an earthy rhythm section from Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

"The backup musicians provided a much grittier, soulful and R&B-based accompaniment for Aretha's voice," according to the All Music Guide, "which soared with a passion and intensity suggesting a spirit that had been allowed to fly loose for the first time."

Over a year-and-a-half stretch from 1967 to 1968, Franklin racked up 10 Top Ten hits.

"It had looked for the longest time like I would never have a gold record," she told Time magazine in 1968. "I wanted one so bad."

Songs like "Respect" were not only huge sellers, they were also adopted by African-Americans and feminists as anthems for social change.

Civil rights icon and US Rep. John Lewis recalled Franklin's "unwavering" commitment to the movement.

"What made her talent so great was her capacity to live what she sang," Franklin said in a statement Thursday. "Her music was deepened by her connection to the struggles and the triumphs of the African American experience growing up in her father's church, the community of Detroit, and her awareness of the turmoil of the South."

After Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, Franklin sang at his funeral.



**Related Video:** 7 things you should know about Aretha Franklin 01:54

The hits kept coming throughout the early 1970s, including "Spanish Harlem" and "Bridge Over Troubled Water."

By the late '70s, Franklin's star power began to wane, as the golden age of soul ended and as critics and fans became less enthusiastic about her continuing output. However, she re-emerged in the 1980s, releasing the 1985 album "Who's Zoomin' Who?", which spawned the hit "Freeway of Love."

She also collaborated with the Eurythmics on "Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves" and British pop star George Michael on the smash duet, "I Knew You Were Waiting (for Me)." The latter hit No. 1, her last chart-topper.

"Don't say Aretha is making a comeback," she said at the time. "Who's Zoomin' Who" was released, she said, "because I've never been away."

## Personal pain lent depth to her music

Franklin's reportedly tumultuous personal life, meanwhile -- she was twice divorced and had brushes with the law -- was shrouded in secrecy.

She was the mother of four sons -- she gave birth to the first at 15 and the second at 17, according to a 1995 *Ebony* magazine profile. The article depicted her as a warm, down-to-earth woman with a crackling sense of humor, who answered the door in bare feet and confided her diet secret was a combination of Slim-Fast and younger men. She also was reportedly an accomplished cook, telling *Ebony*, "I can wear some chitlins out."

The *Ebony* profile suggested the source of some of that pain might have been Franklin's growing up largely without a mother -- Barbara Franklin left the family in 1948, when Franklin was 6, and died four years later -- or the anguish of losing her father.

C.L. Franklin was shot in his home by burglars in 1979 and lived for five years in a semi-coma before dying, the magazine said. Asked the toughest decision she ever had to make, Franklin told *Ebony*, "It was when my dad was in the hospital," and began to cry.



But Franklin's lows and the emotion involved fueled her music. She saw a number of resurgences in the past three decades and her image as a pop icon endured, with President Barack Obama featuring her singing "My Country 'Tis of Thee" at his inauguration in 2009. She also performed at President Bill Clinton's inauguration in 1992.

Franklin was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President George W. Bush in 2005. In 1986, her voice was declared a national resource by the Michigan Legislature. She even had an asteroid named for her.

### Related Article: Aretha Franklin Fast Facts

'sitting down at the counter to a scrumptious turkey and dressing plate with mashed potatoes oozing with gravy and loving it.' "

"She looks rested and relaxed, like a housewife headed out to do some shopping at the local K-Mart," *Ebony* reporter Laura Randolph wrote in the 1995 profile. "There, or at the Woolworth's Five and Dime where, she recalls, she's spent many an afternoon 'browsing and buying knick-knacks' then

## Health issues derailed her late career

Franklin battled health issues in recent years, struggling with weight gain and associated ailments.

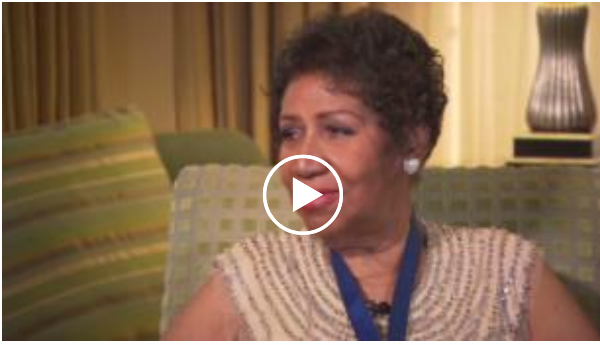
In August 2010, she canceled two free concerts in New York because of "fractured ribs and pain in the abdomen," spokeswoman Gwendolyn Quinn said, adding that Franklin's doctors had told her to come in for tests immediately.

That November, her doctors ordered her to cancel all personal appearances for the next six months, the *Detroit Free Press* reported. In early December, Franklin underwent surgery deemed "highly successful."

She also canceled some appearances in 2013.

However, she recovered enough to return to touring in 2014, including a performance at New York's Radio City Music Hall. She'd also lost almost 100 pounds.

"It's fun buying new clothes!" she told *USA Today*. "I couldn't stay out of the mirror, just turning every way. This is my natural weight."



As for her old wardrobe? The shopper knew exactly what to do with those outfits.

"I'm thinking of giving them to a resale shop," Franklin said.

Her final album, "A Brand New Me," paired Franklin's original recordings of some of her greatest hits with modern musical arrangements from London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

*CNN's Carolyn Sung contributed to this report.*

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