

Brother Marquis, Member of Rap Group 2 Live Crew, Dies

Born Mark Ross, he was a well-known member of the group, which fueled a debate about artistic freedom.



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Brother Marquis, a member of the Miami hip-hop group 2 Live Crew, whose sexually explicit lyrics prompted a debate about race and artistic freedom in the 1980s and '90s, has died.

His death was announced on 2 Live Crew's social media accounts on Monday night. The posts did not provide a cause or location of death. Sources differ on whether he was 57 or 58.

2 Live Crew was founded in 1984, and Brother Marquis, born Mark Ross in Rochester, N.Y., joined after the group moved from California to Miami to replace another member who left. He became part of its most well-known lineup alongside Christopher Wong Won (Fresh Kid Ice); the group's leader, Luther Campbell (Luke Skywalker); and David Hobbs (Mr. Mixx).

He was the M.C. on the group's first album, "The 2 Live Crew Is What We Are," and in a 2022 interview he said that he wrote or co-wrote some of the group's most well-known songs.

"I really wasn't comfortable with all the profanity that we were putting into the music," Mr. Ross recalled in that interview, with Vlad TV, "but when you see the reaction in the community and everyone's loving it, you know, you kind of go with it."

In 1990, a Florida court deemed the group's third album, "As Nasty as They Wanna Be," legally obscene — and therefore illegal to sell. It was the first album in U.S. history to have that distinction.

That year, Mr. Ross, Mr. Wong Won and Mr. Campbell were charged with misdemeanor obscenity charges over their performance of songs on the album at a nightclub after an

undercover police officer made a recording of their show. They faced the prospect of a year in prison and fines of up to \$1,000.

During their obscenity trial, prosecutors argued that their song lyrics included graphic descriptions of sexual intercourse and simulations of “deviant sexual acts.” But 2 Live Crew’s lawyers said that the group’s performance had to be understood in the context of hip-hop, and that the lyrics “can have artistic value when you have an understanding, when you have them, in effect, decoded.”

A jury ultimately found the three men not guilty, and in 1992 the obscenity ruling on their album was overturned by an appeals court.

The group faced another court case over their 1989 track “Pretty Woman,” a rap version of Roy Orbison’s song “Oh, Pretty Woman.” Acuff-Rose Music, which held the copyright to Mr. Orbison’s song, sued 2 Live Crew for copyright infringement. After a yearslong legal battle, the U.S. Supreme Court ultimately ruled in 2 Live Crew’s favor, setting a legal precedent by carving out a safety zone for parody within federal copyright law.

Reflecting on 2 Live Crew’s legacy in a 2021 interview with *The Heat Seekers* magazine, Mr. Ross said, “I can take that to my grave, that we made a difference.”

Yan Zhuang is a Times reporter in Seoul who covers breaking news. More about Yan Zhuang