

BREAKING: Country Singer Naomi Judd Dies at 76

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Naomi Judd, the Kentucky-born singer of the Grammy-winning duo The Judds and mother of Wynonna and Ashley Judd, has died. She was 76.

The daughters announced her death on Saturday in a statement provided to The Associated Press.

"Today we sisters experienced a tragedy. We lost our beautiful mother to the disease of mental illness," the statement said. "We are shattered. We are navigating profound grief and know that as we loved her, she was loved by her public. We are in unknown territory."

Naomi Judd died near Nashville, Tennessee, said a statement on behalf of her husband and fellow singer, Larry Strickland. It said no further details about her death would be released and asked for privacy as the family grieves.

The Judds were to be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame on Sunday and they had just announced an arena tour to begin in the fall, their first tour together in over a decade. They also made a return to awards shows when they performed at the CMT Music Awards earlier this month.

"Honored to have witnessed "Love Can Build a Bridge" just a few short weeks ago," singer Maren Morris posted on Twitter on Saturday.

"This is heartbreaking news! Naomi Judd was one of the sweetest people I've ever known," singer Travis Tritt posted on Twitter, noting that he had worked with Judd several times

on screen and during performances.

The mother-daughter performers scored 14 No. 1 songs in a career that spanned nearly three decades. After rising to the top of country music, they called it quits in 1991 after doctors diagnosed Naomi Judd with hepatitis. Wynonna continued her solo career.

During Naomi's four-year retirement from show business after her hepatitis diagnosis, she struggled with depression and later wrote an autobiography, *Love Can Build a Bridge*, also made into a miniseries, which focused on faith, hope and healing. In an interview with , she told of a prayer she used during the worst of her bout with hepatitis C:

"Father by whom all things are made, without whom nothing ever was, is right now or ever shall be, I know—I have a legal, binding contract with you, that was sealed with the blood of my Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus on His cruel cross at Calvary so that I can, freely, at any time, enter into the throne room, and on bended knee seek mercy, guidance and inner peace.

"And then I would acknowledge what I was mindful of, what I was grateful for," Judd said. She later wrote another autobiography, *River of Time*, which placed special emphasis on her struggle with depression. After its 2016 release, she told CBN News about a suicide attempt interrupted by her husband.

"Larry's a very spiritual man and he's a pastor's kid," Naomi said. "And that's when he grabbed me and started talking to me. And he said the real identity is not being Wynonna or Ashley's mom or being *the* Naomi Judd. Your real identity is your spiritual being. And every problem, if you're a spiritual being, every problem has a spiritual solution. And we need to find that for you. ... "I have faith, I believe in God and I've gotten through all this stuff because of those three things: my faith, my hope and my belief in an eternal God."

The Judds' hits included "Love Can Build a Bridge" in

1990, "Mama He's Crazy" in 1984, "Why Not Me" in 1984, "Turn It Loose" in 1988, "Girls Night Out" in 1985, "Rockin' With the Rhythm of the Rain" in 1986 and "Grandpa" in 1986.

Born Diana Ellen Judd in Ashland, Kentucky, Naomi was working as a nurse in Nashville, when she and Wynonna started singing together professionally. Their unique harmonies, together with elements of acoustic music, bluegrass and blues, made them stand out in the genre at the time.

"We had such a stamp of originality on what we were trying to do," Naomi Judd told The AP after it was announced that they would be joining the Country Music Hall of Fame.

The Judds released six studio albums and an EP between 1984 and 1991 and won nine Country Music Association Awards and seven from the Academy of Country Music. They earned a total of five Grammy Awards together on hits like "Why Not Me" and "Give A Little Love."

The Judds sang about family, the belief in marriage and the virtue of fidelity. Because Naomi was so young looking, the two were mistaken for sisters early in their career.

They first got attention singing on Ralph Emery's morning show in early 1980, where the host named them the "Soap Sisters" because Naomi said she used to make her own soap.

After the success of "Mama He's Crazy," they won the Horizon Award at the 1984 CMA Awards. Naomi started her speech by saying "Slap the dog and spit in the fire!"

Daughter Ashley Judd is an actor known for her roles in such movies as *Kiss the Girls*, *Double Jeopardy* and *Heat*.

Strickland, who was a backup singer for Elvis Presley, was married to Naomi Judd for 32 years. {eoa}

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