

'Queen of Soul' Legendary Gospel Singer Aretha Franklin Dies

Legendary gospel artist Aretha Franklin died on Thursday, according to a publicist. She was 76.

Showbiz 411's Roger Friedman said the 18-time Grammy winner's loved ones are "asking for prayers and privacy" at this time.

Reports surfaced Aug. 13 that Franklin was "gravely ill" and under hospice care in her home.

"Aretha has been sick for a long time but didn't want to share her pain with the world," a source told ET. "She has always been a very private person and the last thing she wanted was to reveal this difficult time in her life with her fans. She's loved her life and in the last year talked so much about her incredible memories. She has earned the title as the Queen of Soul and that is how she wants to be remembered."

Franklin may very well have been the most iconic performer of the 20th-21st centuries.

"She is an American performer at its very best," Boston City Councilor Lydia Edwards says. "She brought soul music to life. She brought a lot of the church music from the African-American experience to life. I can't think of a more American singer than Aretha Franklin."

Rolling Stone called her the greatest singer of all time.

"You know a force from heaven. You know something that God made. And Aretha is a gift from God. When it comes to expressing yourself through song, there is no one who can touch her. She is the reason why women want to sing," according to the mag.

The pastor's daughter first discovered her powerful, soulful voice at New Bethel Baptist Church in Detroit.

"Without Aretha, the church wouldn't still be here," Pastor Robert Smith Jr. says.

"Singing all of her life. She's always been on stage, she's always singing the gospel of truth to the people of God," the pastor says.

Franklin was born in 1942 and performed in her father's traveling revival. While on tour, Franklin befriended gospel greats such as Mahalia Jackson, Sam Cooke and Clara Ward.

In 1956, at age 14, she released her first album, "Songs of Faith," and gave birth to her first child.

By 1960, she signed with Columbia Records and released her self-titled album. Throughout the decade, Franklin released iconic hits including "Respect," "Baby I Love You," "Think," "Chain of Fools," "I Say a Little Prayer," "(Sweet Sweet Baby) Since You've Been Gone" and "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman."

In 1972, she returned to her gospel roots with the album "Amazing Grace," which sold more than 2 million copies and went on to become the best-selling gospel album at the time.

In 1987, singer Aretha Franklin became the first woman to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, according to PBS. This was a testament to her impact on the music world over the course of her long and exciting career. From her teenage days singing gospel in her father's church to her ascendancy to rock and roll royalty, "The Queen of Soul" has expressed a passion and intensity that has never failed to move her listeners.

Her 1988 album, *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism*, deeply affected *Rolling Stone's* David Fricke:

Thirty-one years later, she returns a successful yet scarred woman, the veteran of an extraordinary but frustratingly uneven career as well as a turbulent personal life. Still, she remains undefeated in her faith. *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism* is Aretha Franklin's second vinyl trip to the altar since she ascended to the throne as Queen of Soul, and like the first, 1972's aptly titled *Amazing Grace*, it is a striking musical documentary of uninhibited rapture and sobering confessional intensity—the sound of a woman at once reveling in the glory of her God-given talent and reflecting on a history of pain and uncertainty that earthly success couldn't salve. Ostensibly a record of celebration, *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism* is weighed down by some very heavy crosses.

You can feel every one of them bearing down in her breathtaking reading of "The Lord's Prayer." The opening lines are like a song in themselves, a mini-aria in which Franklin pauses for extended melodic meditations, savoring those moments with slowly arcing wails and a breathy tremolo. She forsakes the fireworks for a heartier, more sage quality in her singing, sounding less like a radiant R&B angel than like a weary suppliant, thankful for all the good she's got and grateful for surviving the bad. Then, as the band and choir swell up behind her, she erupts into a soaring crescendo before suddenly dropping into a low, smoky alto for the amen. It is the album's most stirring moment and one of Aretha's best recorded performances in recent years. It is also a true prayer, with all of the hope it promises and the humbleness it requires.

Her musical legacy can still be heard in the music of today's hottest stars, like Mary J. Blige, Beyonce and more.