

Richard Smallwood, Gospel Icon and ‘Total Praise’ Composer, Dies at 77

The body of Christ is mourning the passing of Richard Smallwood, a towering figure in gospel music whose ministry spanned decades and whose songs became anthems of hope, worship and faith. Smallwood entered the presence of the Lord on Dec. 30, 2025, at the age of 77, in Sandy Spring, Maryland, following complications from kidney failure.

Born on Nov. 30, 1948, in Atlanta, Georgia, and raised in Washington, D.C., Smallwood discovered his musical gift early. Classically trained on the piano, he cultivated a style that beautifully merged classical sophistication with Spirit-led worship. His music not only resonated in sanctuaries but also crossed over to reach millions around the world.

Smallwood’s ministry took flight with the formation of The Richard Smallwood Singers in 1977, whose self-titled debut album became an instant gospel classic, spending nearly two years on the Billboard gospel charts. Over the years, he expanded his reach with the group Vision, producing albums that inspired churches globally and earned him a host of awards and accolades, including eight Grammy nominations, multiple Stellar and Dove Awards and induction into the Gospel Music Hall of Fame.

Among his many contributions, “Total Praise” stands as a timeless declaration of worship and trust in God, born in a season of personal trials yet radiating hope and faith that

transcends generations. Other beloved songs, such as “I Love the Lord” and “Center of My Joy,” have been embraced worldwide, even recorded by mainstream artists, showcasing how his music touched hearts and transformed lives.

Beyond his musical accomplishments, Smallwood’s life reflected a steadfast devotion to God. Though he faced personal struggles, his faith never wavered, and his music became a testimony of perseverance, trust, and the sustaining power of God’s presence.

He is survived by two brothers and three foster sisters, who carry forward his legacy of faith, ministry and song.

Prepared by Charisma Media Staff.