

Gospel Artist Walter Hawkins Dies at 61

Grammy-winning gospel artist Walter Hawkins died Sunday afternoon at his Ripon, Calif., home after a two-year battle with pancreatic cancer. He was 61.

"Only blessed thoughts and prayers go out to the Hawkins family and everyone who loved Bishop Walter Hawkins," read a message on gospel artist Shirley Caesar's Facebook page Sunday. "May he rest in peace."

A noted singer and pianist, Hawkins pioneered a new wave in gospel music in the 1970s with his Love Alive series, which included such classic songs as "Going Up Yonder," "Changed" and "Be Grateful."

Born in Oakland, Calif., on May 18, 1949, Hawkins was reared in the Church of God in Christ and was part of his brother Edwin's group, the Edwin Hawkins Singers, which produced the international hit "Oh Happy Day" in the late 1960s.

While pursuing a master's of divinity degree from the University of California at Berkeley, Hawkins recorded his first album *Do Your Best* in 1972 and the following year founded the Love Center Church in Oakland, Calif.

With the Love Center Choir, he recorded a series of Love Alive albums. The first, *Love Alive*, debuted in 1975 and featured his then-wife, Tramaine Hawkins, leading the gospel hits "Goin' Up Yonder" and "Changed." The subsequent Love Alive projects included classic songs such as "I Love the Lord," "I'm Going Away," "Thank You, Lord" and "Until I Found the Lord."

Hawkins received nine Grammy Award nominations and won a Grammy in 1980 for his "The Lord's Prayer."