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PRINCE ROGERS NELSON OBITUARY

1958 - 2016



Prince Rogers Nelson, the musical superstar known better simply as Prince, died April 21. He was 57.

One of the best-selling musicians of all time, a singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist, Prince won seven Grammy awards, a Golden Globe, and an Academy Award. Songs including "When Doves Cry," "Raspberry Beret," and "Kiss" soared to popularity and became pop-culture staples, widely known by fans of all genres of music. His broad appeal was due in part to the eclectic combinations of styles he created as he made his music, melding rock and R&B, jazz and funk, hip-hop and disco in a highly listenable – and danceable – mélange.

[From his amazing outfits to his quirky taste in snacks, see Legacy.com's 5 favorite memories of His Royal Badness](#)

Born June 7, 1958, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Prince was the son of musicians and was writing and performing music from his earliest years. By the time he was in high school, he and friends had formed the band Grand Central. His first recordings were with another band, 94 East, but by 1976, Prince had his own representation and soon was recording as a solo artist.

Prince's rise to stardom began with his debut album, "For You," with the lead single, "Soft and Wet," making a moderately strong debut on R&B radio and cracking the Billboard Hot 100 at No. 92. A second, self-titled album went platinum and yielded two more popular singles, "Why You Wanna Treat Me So Bad?" and "I Wanna Be Your Lover." Prince's crossover potential was rising, as he made it to the top 20 of the Hot 100 and performed on "American Bandstand" in 1980.

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1982 and '83 saw a lead-up to Prince's greatest fame, as he cracked the Top 10 with popular singles from his "1999" double album: The title track, "Delirious," and "Little Red Corvette" were widely played on pop and soul radio, and the video for the latter single was one of the first by an African-American artist to reach heavy rotation on MTV.

If "1999" was popular, its follow-up, "Purple Rain," was explosive. The 1984 album accompanied a movie of the same name, in which Prince starred in his film debut. The dual offering helped Prince virtually dominate the pop culture of the year, with the album sitting at the top of the charts for 24 weeks and yielding hit after hit. The movie won an Academy Award for best original song score and was both successful at the box office and an enduring favorite among fans of rock musicals.

Following the life of a young singer known as "The Kid," the movie "Purple Rain" afforded plenty of space for great musical performances by Prince and others. Many of those songs were hit singles. The title track became one of Prince's signature songs, widely played in concert for much of his career. "When Doves Cry" became Prince's first No. 1 single. "Let's Go Crazy" also soared to the top of the charts, memorable for its preacherlike, spoken-word intro that led into a purely fun dance track. "Take Me With U" and "I Would Die 4 U" were also popular singles from the soundtrack.

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As the wild popularity of "Purple Rain" brought Prince's music into more homes than ever before, it also drew attention to his provocative lyrics. The sexually explicit song "Darling Nikki," though not the first of its kind recorded by Prince, was perhaps his most notorious. Reportedly, it was this song that prompted Tipper Gore to found the Parents' Music Resource Center – the committee that called for "Parental Advisory" stickers to be placed on albums with sexual, violent, or drug-related content – after hearing her preteen daughter listening to the song. "Darling Nikki" came to top the center's "Filthy 15" list of songs they found most offensive, along with radio hits including Madonna's "Dress You Up" and Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It."

The center's condemnation of Prince ultimately had the opposite effect of what its founders intended – rather than hampering his career, it seemed to help shoot it into the stratosphere. He and his backing band, the Revolution, followed "Purple Rain" with "Around the World in a Day," featuring enduring hit "Raspberry Beret," and "Parade," with the No. 1 single "Kiss." In 1986, he starred in a second movie, "Under the Cherry Moon," which he also directed.

As the late 1980s waned and the 1990s began, Prince continued to release popular albums and singles, including "Sign o' the Times" and "Batdance." He also continued developing a persona that would become as well-known as his music. Beginning with his early 1980s recordings, Prince offered a flamboyant yet reserved face to the world. Dressing wildly and spelling song and album titles in his own unique shorthand, he kept fans equally intrigued and confused as he both courted and shunned the spotlight, a superstar who was an extrovert onstage but shy in person.

Prince fanned the flames around his persona when, in 1993, he announced that he would no longer be called Prince, changing his name to an unpronounceable symbol in a reaction to what he called slavelike treatment by his record label, Warner Bros. His statement on the matter included the explanation, "The first step I have taken toward the ultimate goal of emancipation from the chains that bind me to Warner Bros. was to change my name from Prince to the Love Symbol. Prince is the name that my mother gave me at birth. Warner Bros. took the name, trademarked it, and used it as the main marketing tool to promote all of the music that I wrote. The company owns the name Prince and all related music marketed under Prince. I became merely a pawn used to produce more money for Warner Bros."

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When circumstances dictated that people had to call him something they could pronounce, he agreed to be called "The Artist Formerly Known as Prince," but Warner Bros. helped print-media outlets by mailing them floppy disks with a custom font, including the moniker that became known as "Love Symbol No. 2." Prince's popular singles during this in period included "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World" and "I Hate U." He maintained his used of the Love Symbol as his moniker until 2000, when he announced that with the expiration of his contract with Warner Bros., he would readopt the name Prince.

Prince had seen his last No. 1 single in 1989 with "Batdance," but his status as a pop icon only increased despite his waning popularity on the charts, and he continued to record prolifically throughout his life. He leaves behind a legacy including dozens of studio albums as well as live recordings and movies. Also important to his legacy is the work he did to encourage the careers of other artists, particularly the female protégées with whom he was both romantically and musically linked, including Sheila Escovedo, Apollonia Kotero, and **[Denise "Vanity" Matthews](#)**. He also wrote songs made famous by other artists, including the Bangles' "Manic Monday" and Sinéad O'Connor's "Nothing Compares

2 U.”

Prince’s death came as a great shock to fans and colleagues, coming at a relatively young age and with little warning. A week before his death, news broke that a plane on which he was traveling landed briefly in Illinois, where he received medical treatment for the flu at a hospital and was released after a short time. But there was no other indication of a severe illness until news broke Thursday morning of a death at his Paisley Park estate near Minneapolis. Soon after that initial news, it was confirmed that it was Prince himself who died, though the cause of death is not yet clear.

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Prince was immediately and widely mourned on social media, with expressions of disbelief sharing space with memories of his unforgettable music and personality. Lenny Kravitz posted an early photo of Prince on Instagram, commenting, “My musical brother... My friend... The one who showed me the possibilities within myself, changed everything, and kept his integrity until the end, is gone. I am heartbroken.” Spike Lee offered Instagram a photo of himself along with the musician, captioned, “I Miss My Brother. Prince Was A Funny Cat. Great Sense Of Humor.” Justin Timberlake tweeted, “Numb. Stunned. This can’t be real.” Whoopi Goldberg was among several who declared, quoting Prince’s 1984 hit, “This is what it sounds like when doves cry.”

Prince was married twice, with both relationships ending in divorce. His one child, Boy Gregory, was born in 1996 with Pfeiffer syndrome, a rare genetic disorder, and died a week after his birth. Prince is survived by several brothers and sisters.