

Born August 9, 1963 in Newark, New Jersey to John and Cissy Houston, Whitney Houston almost seemed destined from birth to become a singer. Her mother Cissy Houston, cousin Dionne Warwick and godmother Aretha Franklin were all legendary figures in American gospel and soul music. Cissy Houston was the choir minister at New Hope Baptist Church, and it was there that a young Whitney got her start. Even as a child, Whitney was able to wow audiences; she later told interviewer Diane Sawyer that a rapturous response from the congregation at New Hope had a powerful effect upon her: "I think I knew then that [my singing ability] was an infectious thing that God had given me."

By the time she turned 15, Whitney was performing often with her mother and around the same time, she was discovered by a photographer who was awed by her natural beauty. She soon became an extremely sought-after teenage model. Whitney became one of the first African American women to appear on the cover of Seventeen magazine but music remained her true love.

When she was 19, Whitney Houston was discovered in a nightclub by the renowned Clive Davis of Arista Records, who signed her immediately and took the helm of her career as she navigated from gospel to pop stardom. In 1983, Houston made her debut on national television, appearing on The Merv Griffin Show to sing "Home" from the musical The Wiz. She and Davis spent the next two years working on her debut album, finding the best producers and songwriters available to showcase her amazing vocal talent.

In 1985, she released her debut album Whitney Houston and almost immediately became a smash pop sensation. Over the next year, her hit singles "Saving All My Love for You" and "How Will I Know" helped the album reach the top of the charts, where it stayed for fourteen non-consecutive weeks. Houston won a Grammy in 1986 for "Saving All My Love for You"; the award was presented to the singer by her cousin Dionne Warwick. Houston followed the monumental success of her first album with a second release, Whitney, in 1987. That record, too, went platinum many times over and won more Grammy Awards, leading to a successful world tour. During this time, the singer also appeared at a concert for Nelson Mandela's birthday and founded the Whitney Houston Foundation for Children, a nonprofit organization that funds projects to help needy children over the world.

By 1992, Whitney Houston was on top of the world. That year she married the R&B singer Bobby Brown, formerly of New Edition. A year later on March 4, 1993, Whitney gave birth to a daughter Bobbi Kristina.

Whitney Houston continued to progress in her career, crossing over successfully into acting in 1992 by starring opposite Kevin Costner in the wildly popular The Bodyguard. With this movie, she set a trend for her films to follow: in each film she also released a hit single, creating sensational record sales for the soundtracks. Her smash single from The Bodyguard, a cover of Dolly Parton's 1974 "I Will Always Love You," proved to be Houston's biggest hit ever, spending

a record-breaking fourteen weeks atop the U.S. charts. The soundtrack album went on to win Houston three Grammys, including Album of the Year and Record of the Year. Later in the 1990s, Houston also starred in *The Preacher's Wife* and *Waiting to Exhale*, both accompanied by hit soundtracks as well.

In 1998, Houston released *My Love Is Your Love*, her first non-soundtrack studio album in many years, and it earned her another Grammy. Her collaboration with Mariah Carey in the animated film *The Prince of Egypt* produced a single, "When You Believe," which won an Academy Award. In 2002, Houston released her fifth album titled, *Just Whitney*. In 2009 Houston released a new album, *I Look To You*, which reached number one on the charts. Since then, she has been honored by BET and the NAACP for her lifetime of achievement.

On February 11, 2012, Whitney Houston departed this life in Beverly Hills, CA. She was preceded in death by her father, John Houston. She leaves behind to cherish memories and celebrate her life, her daughter, Bobbi Kristina and her mother, Cissy Houston. Her iconic voice will live on with her family, friends, and fans forever.

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Whitney
E L I Z A B E T H
Houston

