

From Beyond the Grave: How Artists Boom in Popularity After Passing Away

By Michelle Levine



The hip hop world was shaken on the morning of November 2nd to learn that Takeoff, a rapper most notably known for his membership in the musical trio Migos, was fatally shot. Born as Kirshnik Khari Ball, Takeoff was 28 years old when he was shot outside of a private party he was attending in Houston.

At the time of his death, Migos was no longer performing together, but Takeoff had created a dynasty with his uncle Quavo and first cousin once removed Offset in the hip hop industry.



Takeoff performs on SNL with Migos their hit song "Stir Fry" on March 4, 2018. Fans in the comments credit him to being the most authentic in comparison to how he sounds on the recorded album.

In the seven days following Takeoff's death, Migos' song catalog reached 56.6 million U.S. on-demand streams, up 182.2% from the 20.1 million streams the week prior. Streams for Takeoff's solo work increased by 434.9%, reaching nearly 50 million U.S. on-demand streams, according to Billboard. Hit songs like "Bad and Boujee," "Stir Fry," and "Walk It Talk It," saw increases of up to 93% or 3.7 million official streams. When "Bad and Boujee" was released in 2017, it locked in the No. 1 spot for three straight weeks on the Billboard Hot 100 chart.

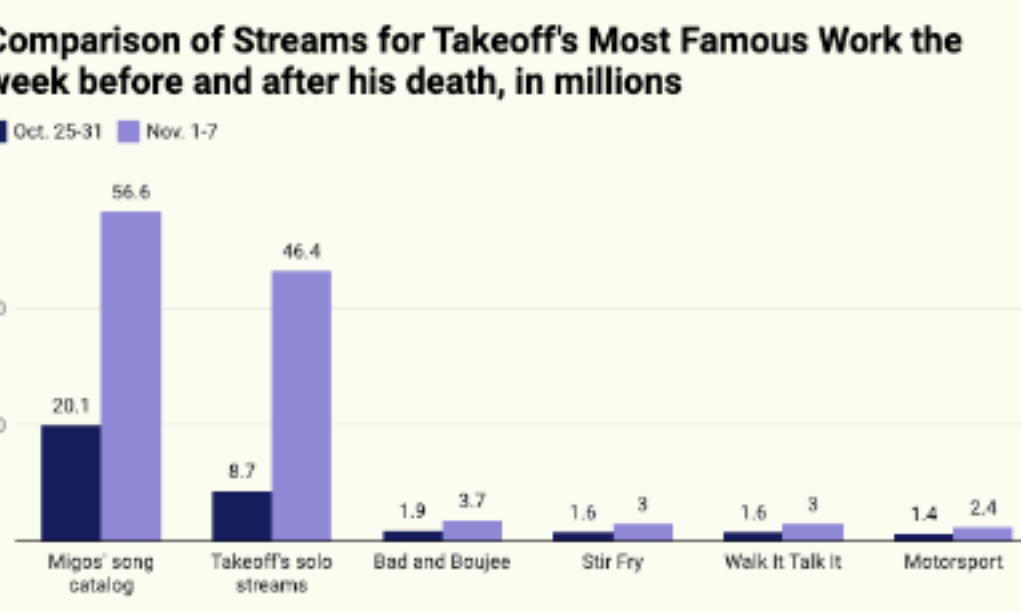
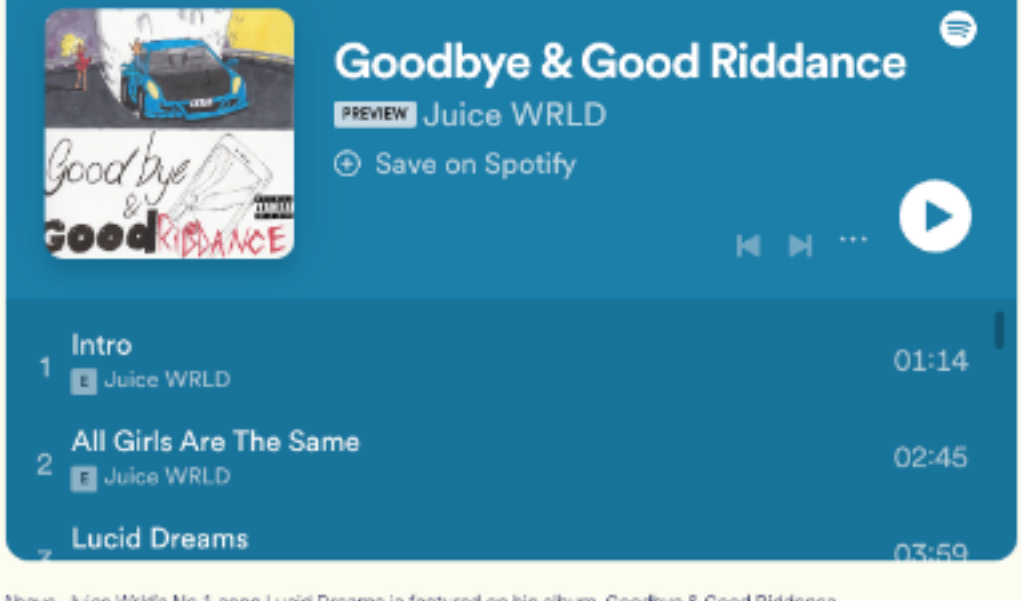


Chart: Michelle Levine • Source: [Billboard](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

This graph shows a drastic increase in streams in the immediate week following Takeoff's death, both for his own music and what he produced with Migos.

This trend has been seen time and time before with other artists who have died. Juice Wrld, another young, popular artist who died unexpectedly dominated Billboard charts immediately following his death. The 21-year-old rapper saw major streaming spikes on Spotify and Apple, with his 2018 hit song "Lucid Dreams" reaching the No. 2 spot on Spotify's Top 200 chart. The day before his death, the song was at No. 118 on the same list. It reached over 5.5 million streams, an increase of over 476%.

On Apple, the same song reached the No. 1 spot for the Apple's Top 100 songs chart, which tracks the daily trends for most-streamed songs in the United States. Other songs of Juice Wrld took spots No.2, No. 5, No. 6, and No. 7.



Above, Juice Wrld's No. 1 song Lucid Dreams is featured on his album, Goodbye & Good Riddance.

For some late artists, their passing leads to **milestones never achieved during their career**. Rock legend David Bowie had been performing for the greater part of the second half of the 20th century, but it wasn't until he died that he had a No. 1 album in the United States, according to CNBC. Days before he died of cancer, Bowie released "Blackstar," the album that took him to the No. 1 spot on Billboard charts the week after.

Regarded as a music icon of the 20th century, Bowie had a well decorated career while he was alive. His song "Fame" hit the No. 1 spot on the Billboard Hot 100 list and stayed there for two weeks. "Let's Dance" got the same recognition eight years later in 1983 and remained in the top spot for one week.



The album cover for "Aladdin Sane" features the iconic photo of David Bowie with his branded lightning bolt running the length of his face.

When DMX died of an overdose in 2021, U.S. streams increased 928% in the two days following his death compared to the two days before. In the days leading up to his passing, streams were already increasing, following the news of his hospitalization one week prior. Before getting hospitalized on April 2, 2021, his songs were streamed about 1 million times per day. Between April 3 and April 8, they rose to between 3 and 4 million per day.

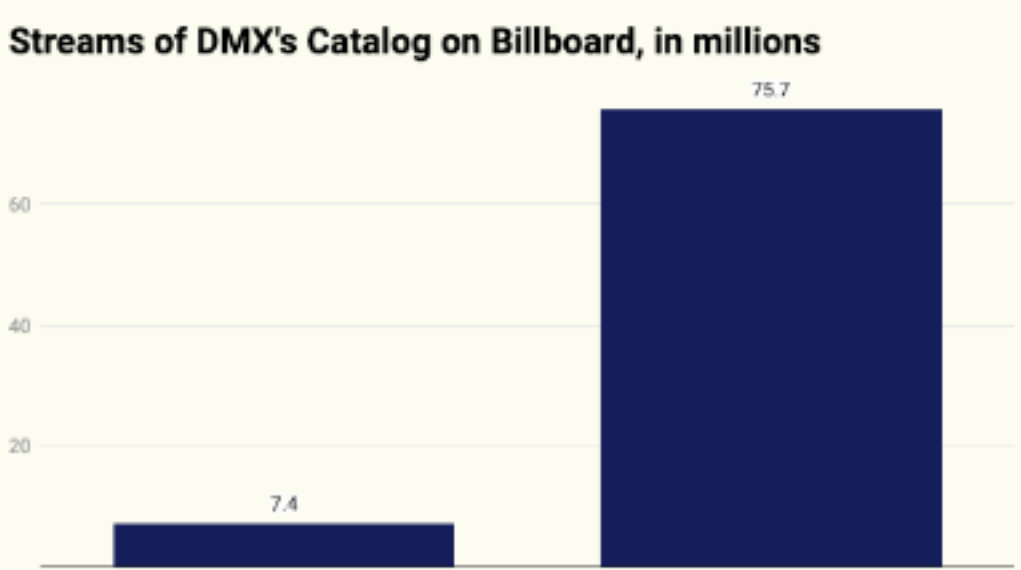


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In the span of four days surrounding DMX's death, there were over 10 times more streams of his music.

The death of Michael Jackson in 2009 led to policy changes for how Billboard categorized their top charts, proving the magnitude of listeners who tune into the voice of those who've passed. Previously, Billboard would remove any album over 2 years old from their top 200 album chart. When Jackson died, however, they were forced to remove this policy following the increase in sales for "Thriller" and "Number Ones," which became the two top-selling albums in the United States. Billboard acknowledged their success, placing them on the chart.



Michael Jackson entrances the crowd at Wembley as he performs "Thriller" on July 16, 1988.

For others, the sudden passing can change the narrative surrounding their sound. John Lennon created hits as a member of the Beatles for over a decade, but his album "Double Fantasy," which was produced with Yoko Ono, received minimal sales and not-so-great reviews. However, when Lennon was murdered three weeks after its release, the album immediately jumped to the No. 1 spot and stayed there for two months.



John Lennon leads the Beatles in the quintessential album cover of "Abbey Road." Following him (in order) is Ringo Starr, Paul McCartney and George Harrison.

Lennon had preached this idea in his 1974 song, "Nobody Loves You (When You're Down and Out)," where he said: "Everybody loves you when you're six foot underground." An eerie prediction of how admiration continues and even increases after death.

This idea has been widely studied by psychologists and discussed throughout society: people become loved after they're dead. Mara Schwartz Kuge, founder and president of Superior Music Copr., told CNBC that the increase in album sales or song streams after an artist dies can be attributed to grief, curiosity or both. The increased exposure of their name in headlines leads a lot of people to look them up again, whether they were fans before hearing the news or not.

For those who were, a lot of it is tuning into the nostalgia associated with that artist. When they die after a long, successful career, listening to their old hits can bring back fond memories for their fans. It's also to their way to mourn them, paying a tribute by pressing play in place of going to the private funeral. In a lot of the cases discussed here, the death's were sudden and tragic. Audiences were typically young and felt a connection to these artists, who no longer have the option to write another song or perform another show.

Ian Drew, consumer editorial director at Billboard, had a similar conversation with USA TODAY, adding that the shock of a sudden death generates curiosity, inspiring an initial search for their name and eventually their music.

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