

R&B Icon Behind 'Killing Me Softly' Passes at 88

Description

Roberta Flack, the esteemed and Grammy-acclaimed singer known for her monumental contributions to the music landscape of the 1970s, passed away on Monday, February 24, at the age of 88. At the time of this announcement, her representative disclosed that she departed this life peacefully, although the specific cause of death has yet to be clarified.

"Our hearts are heavy with grief at the news of the incomparable Roberta Flack's passing this morning," the statement articulated. "Surrounded by her beloved family, she left us peacefully. Roberta transcended boundaries and shattered records, all while proudly imparting knowledge as an educator."

From a tender age, Flack exhibited prodigious talent as a classically trained pianist, receiving a music scholarship at the age of 15 to attend Howard University. Her remarkable journey began when jazz luminary Les McCann discovered her at Washington, D.C.'s Mr. Henry's nightclub, leading to her signing with Atlantic Records. Her career-defining moment came in 1971 when Clint Eastwood featured her rendition of the poignant ballad "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" in his directorial debut, *Play Misty for Me*.

A maestro of the "quiet storm" genre, Flack's mellifluous and soothing vocal artistry became emblematic of the R&B and pop radio realms, culminating in a remarkable two-decade streak of chart-topping success.

Born Roberta Cleopatra Flack in Black Mountain, North Carolina, on February 10, 1937, and raised in Arlington, Virginia, her formative years were steeped in musical influence, shaped by her mother's organ playing at the Lomax African Methodist Episcopal Church. Under her father's encouragement—a jazz pianist who restored an old piano for her—she honed her skills on an instrument rife with character, practicing classical masterpieces alongside sacred repertoire.

Following her notable debut as a pianist at her church, Flack pursued formal music education at Howard before transitioning to a role as a music educator, influenced by the prevailing racial barriers confronting Black classical musicians. After her father's death in 1959, she returned to North Carolina to teach music in public schools, later relocating back to D.C., where she shaped the musical journeys of countless students for a decade.

Flack's discography began with the release of her debut LP, *First Take*, in 1969. Esteemed jazz artist Les McCann, upon witnessing her captivating performance, memorialized his experience in a heartfelt introduction to the album, remarking, "What I heard touched me on a level that I have never heard since."

First Take featured her initial No. 1 single on the Billboard Hot 100, "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face," propelling the album to the pinnacle of the Billboard 200 chart. This exquisite ballad garnered the Grammy for Record of the Year in 1972. Flack achieved No. 1 status again in 1973 with "Killing Me Softly With His Song," from the album *Killing Me Softly*, which similarly earned the Grammy for Record of the Year in 1974. The song would later be famously reinterpreted by the Fugees in 1996.

Flack's remarkable consecutive Grammy victories for Record of the Year remained unmatched until U2 replicated the feat in the early 2000s. Over her illustrious career, she recorded several notable duets with



fellow soul icon Donny Hathaway, attaining chart success with tracks such as “Where Is the Love” and “The Closer I Get to You.”

Flack's musical prowess knew no bounds, effortlessly traversing genres from classical to soul, jazz to pop. She amassed a stunning total of 18 Hot 100 hits and four albums graced the Billboard 200 top 10, alongside a wealth of charted singles on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart. Among her seminal works are 1970's *Chapter Two*, 1971's *Quiet Fire*, 1972's *Roberta Flack & Donny Hathaway*, and 1978's *Blue Lights in the Basement*.

While her commercial prominence began waning in the mid-1980s, Flack persevered, releasing her most recent album, a tribute to The Beatles entitled *Let It Be Roberta*, in 2012. She resumed live performances in 2008, until a stroke in early 2016 tragically curtailed her performing career. Six years later, it was publicly disclosed that she had been diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).

Nonetheless, the legacy of Flack continued to flourish, marked by the 50th anniversary editions of her initial albums and her authorship of the 2023 children's book, *The Green Piano: How Little Me Found Music*. This inspired narrative pays homage to the very piano her father restored for her. In the past year, accolades surged, including the release of a poetry and song album overseen by engineer Ebonie Smith, featuring Flack's soulful contributions alongside Maya Angelou's poignant words.

Throughout her career, Flack received 14 Grammy nominations and triumphed in three categories. Her artistry garnered her a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Jazz Foundation of America in 2018, followed by the Recording Academy's equivalent honor in 2020. Reflecting on her inspiring connections with fellow artists, Flack poignantly remarked, “When I met artists and so many others in person and heard from them that they were inspired by my music, I felt understood.”

An enduring philanthropist and activist, Flack remained a dedicated educator at heart, founding the Roberta Flack Foundation in 2010 to empower young individuals through education and mentorship.

Explore below a curated selection of Flack's most cherished musical endeavors.

Vocabulary List:

1. **Esteemed** /ɪˈstiːmd/ (adjective): Regarded with respect and admiration.
2. **Prodigious** /prəˈdɪdʒ.əs/ (adjective): Remarkably or impressively great in extent size or degree.
3. **Luminary** /ˈluː.mɪ.nə.ri/ (noun): A person who inspires or influences others especially in a particular field.
4. **Mellifluous** /məˈlɪf.lu.əs/ (adjective): Sweet or musical; pleasant to hear.
5. **Accolades** /ˈæk.ə.leɪdz/ (noun): Awards or privileges granted as a special honor.
6. **Philanthropist** /fɪˈlæn.θrə.pɪst/ (noun): A person who seeks to promote the welfare of others especially by donating money to good causes.



Vocabulary quizzes

Multiple Choice (Select the Correct answer for each question.)

1. What term describes a person who seeks to promote the welfare of others?
Option: Esteemed
Option: Philanthropist
Option: Paternal
Option: Enigmatic
2. Which word refers to expressions of praise or admiration?
Option: Luminary
Option: Mellifluous
Option: Accolades
Option: Isolation
3. What term describes something that has subtle distinctions or variations?
Option: Authenticity
Option: Nuanced
Option: Venerable
Option: Endeavor
4. Which word signifies magnificent and impressive beauty or grandeur?
Option: Captivating
Option: Endeavor
Option: Splendor
Option: Dramatic
5. What term describes the most effective or favorable?
Option: Amalgamation
Option: Articulates
Option: Optimal
Option: Illuminated
6. Which term is used to describe something remarkably or impressively great in extent size or degree?
Option: Paternal
Option: Affinity
Option: Illuminated
Option: Prodigious
7. What adverb describes expressing oneself clearly and effectively?



- Option: Enigmatic
- Option: Articulately
- Option: Consequential
- Option: Expansive

8. What term means to make something clear or explain?

- Option: Empowering
- Option: Amalgamation
- Option: Elucidated
- Option: Scrutiny

9. Which word describes something with a sudden and striking effect?

- Option: Installment
- Option: Consequential
- Option: Dramatic
- Option: Enigmatic

10. What term refers to the recognition and enjoyment of the good qualities of someone or something?

- Option: Venerable
- Option: Appreciation
- Option: Anticipated
- Option: Enigmatic

Gap-Fill (Fill in the blanks with the correct word from the vocabulary list.)

- 11. Embarking on a new _____ the entrepreneur hoped for success.
- 12. The decision had _____ effects on the company's future.
- 13. They felt an instant _____ for each other when they first met.
- 14. The bright lights _____ the stage for the performance.
- 15. The project underwent intense _____ to ensure its quality.
- 16. The _____ scholar was revered for his contributions to the field.
- 17. The workshop aimed at _____ individuals to take control of their lives.
- 18. The dish was a unique _____ of flavors from different cultures.



19. The long-_____ results of the experiment were finally revealed.
20. The speaker delivered a _____ presentation that held the audience's attention.

Matching Sentences (Match each definition to the correct word from the vocabulary list.)

21. The conference featured a renowned industry as the keynote speaker.
22. The film received numerous awards and for its outstanding performances.
23. Her voice was a delight to listen to soothing all who heard it.
24. His instincts kicked in when he saw the child wandering alone.
25. The artist was known for creating paintings that invited interpretation.
26. The painting was verified for its and provenance by experts.
27. Starting a new required careful planning and dedication.
28. The lanterns the path through the dark forest.
29. The hermit chose a life of in the remote mountains.
30. The fusion restaurant offered an of flavors from different regions.

Answer

Multiple Choice: 1. Philanthropist 2. Accolades 3. Nuanced 4. Splendor 5. Optimal 6. Prodigious 7. Articulate 8. Elucidated 9. Dramatic 10. Appreciation

Gap-Fill: 11. Endeavor 12. Consequential 13. Affinity 14. Illuminated 15. Scrutiny 16. Venerable 17. Empowering 18. Amalgamation 19. Anticipated 20. Captivating

Matching sentence: 1. Luminary 2. Accolades 3. Mellifluous 4. Paternal 5. Enigmatic 6. Authenticity 7. Endeavor 8. Illuminated 9. Isolation 10. Amalgamation

CATEGORY

1. Entertainment - LEVEL6

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