

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

'Ivory Queen of Soul' Dies at 54

Singer was protege of funk master Rick James

(AP) -- Teena Marie, the "Ivory Queen of Soul" who developed a lasting legacy with her silky soul pipes and with hits like "Lovergirl," "Square Biz," and "Fire and Desire" with mentor Rick James, has died. She was 54.

Marie certainly wasn't the first white act to sing soul music, but she was arguably among the most gifted and respected, and was thoroughly embraced by the black audience.

Marie made her debut on the legendary Motown label back in



Teena Marie passed away recently at 54. She had a great influence in the Soul Community.



1979, becoming one of the very few white acts to break the race barrier of the groundbreaking black-owned record label that had been a haven for black artists like Stevie Wonder, the Jackson Five, the Supremes and Marvin Gaye.

Marie was the protege of the masterful funk wizard James, with whom she would have long, turbulent but musically magical relationship.

The cover of her debut album, "Wild and Peaceful," did not feature her image, with Motown apparently fearing black audiences might not buy it if they found out the songstress with the dynamic, gospel-inflected voice was white.

But Marie notched her first hit, "I'm A Sucker for Your Love," and was on her way to becoming one of

R&B's most revered queens. During her tenure with Motown, the singer-songwriter and musician produced passionate love songs and funk jam songs like "Need Your Lovin'," "Behind the Groove" and "Ooh La La La."

Marie's voice was the main draw of her music: Pitch-perfect, piercing in its clarity and wrought with emotion, whether it was drawing from the highs of romance or the mournful moments of a love lost. But her songs, most of which she had a hand in writing, were the other major component of her success.

She continued to record music and perform. In 2004 and 2006 she put out two well-received albums on the traditional rap label Cash Money Records, "La Dona" and "Sapphire."

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