

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Queen of Disco Ruled the Dance Floors

Donna Summer gave voice to a cultural revolution

(AP)—Like the King of Pop or the Queen of Soul, Donna Summer was bestowed a title fitting of musical royalty — the Queen of Disco.

Yet unlike Michael Jackson or Aretha Franklin, it was a designation she wasn't comfortable embracing.

"I grew up on rock 'n' roll," Summer once said when explaining her reluctance to claim the title.

Indeed, as disco boomed then crashed in a single decade in the 1970s, Summer, the beautiful voice and face of the genre with pulsating hits like "I Feel Love," "Love to Love You Baby" and "Last Dance," would continue to make hits incorporating the rock roots she so loved. One of her biggest hits, "She Works Hard for the Money," came in the early 1980s and relied on a smoldering guitar solo as well as Summer's booming voice.

Yet it was with her disco anthems that she would have the most impact in music, and it's how she was remembered after her death at age 63.

Summer died of cancer Thursday morning in Naples, Fla. Her family released a statement saying they "are at peace celebrating her extraordinary life and her continued legacy."

Luminaries from Aretha Franklin to Dolly Parton and Barbra Streisand mourned the loss, as did President Barack Obama, who said he and Michelle were saddened to hear of the passing of the five-time Grammy winner. "Her voice was unforgettable, and the music industry has lost a legend far too soon," he said. "Our thoughts and prayers go out to Donna's family and her dedicated fans."



Donna Summer performs at the Nobel Peace concert in Oslo, Norway in 2009. The Queen of Disco ruled the dance floors with anthems like "Last Dance," "Love to Love You Baby" and "Bad Girl." (AP photo)



Donna Summer in 1979.



Donna Summer performs onstage in 1978. The singer won five Grammy Awards and six American Music Awards during her career.

It had been decades since that brief, flashy moment when Summer was every inch the Disco Queen.

Her glittery gowns and long eyelashes. Her luxurious hair and glossy, open lips. Her sultry vocals, her

bedroom moans and sighs. She was as much a part of the culture as disco balls, polyester, platform shoes and the music's pulsing, pounding rhythms.

Summer's music gave voice to

not only a musical revolution, but a cultural one—a time when sex, race, fashion and drugs were being explored and exploited with freedom like never before in the United States.

Her rise was inseparable from

disco's itself, even though she remained popular for years after the genre she helped invent had died. She won a Grammy for best rock vocal performance for "Hot Stuff," a fiery guitar-based song that represented her shift from disco to more rock-based sounds, and created another kind of anthem with "She Works Hard for the Money," this time for women's rights.

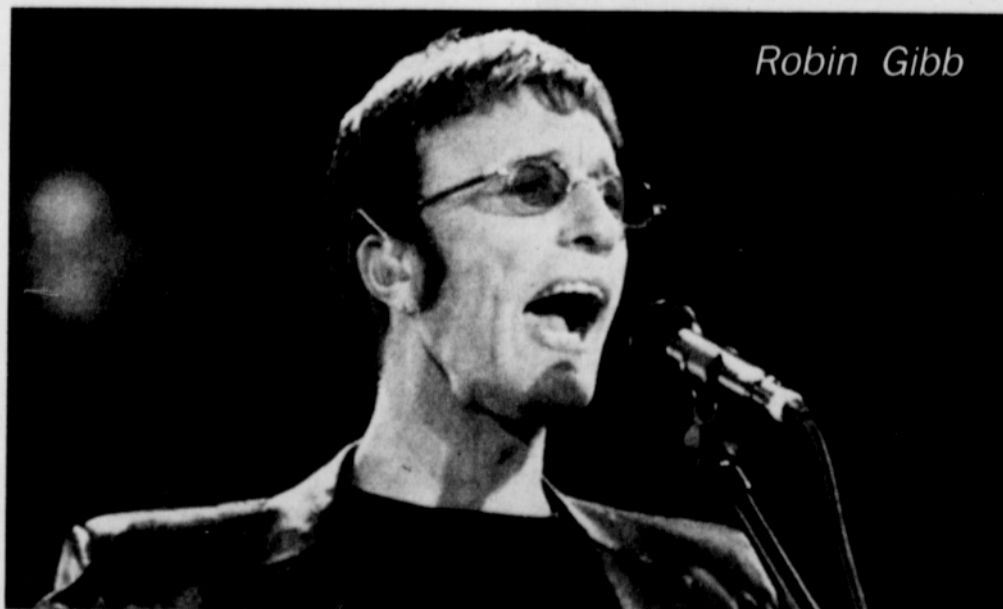
Elton John said in a statement that Summer was more than the Queen of Disco.

"Her records sound as good today as they ever did. That she has never been inducted into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame is a total disgrace especially when I see the second-rate talent that has been inducted," he said. "She is a great friend to me and to the Elton John AIDS Foundation and I will miss her greatly."

Summer may not have liked the title and later became a born-again Christian, but many remembered her best for her early years, starting with the sinful "Love to Love You Baby."

Released in 1975, a breakthrough hit for Summer and for disco, it was a legend of studio ecstasy and the genre's ultimate sexual anthem. Summer came up with the idea of the song and first recorded it as a demo in 1975, on the condition that another singer perform it commercially. But Casablanca Records president Neil Bogart liked the track so much that he suggested to producer Giorgio Moroder they re-record it, and make it longer — what would come to be known as a "disco disc."

What started as a scandal became a classic. The song was later sampled by LL Cool J, Timbaland and Beyonce, who interpolated the hit for her jam "Naughty Girl." It was also Summer's U.S. chart debut and the first of 19 No. 1 dance hits between 1975 and 2008—second only to Madonna.



Robin Gibb

Disco Era's Robin Gibb Dies

Robin Gibb, one of the founding member of the Bee Gees, along with his brothers Barry and Maurice, has died of at age 62.

Gibb fell into a coma last month as he battled colon cancer.

The Bee Gees -- British-born, Australia-raised brothers Robin, Barry and Maurice Gibb -- had a string of disco-era hits including "How Deep is Your Love" and "Stayin' Alive." Their soundtrack to the movie "Saturday Night Fever" was one of

the best-selling albums of the 1970s

The Bee Gees became members of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and won seven Grammy Awards.

Maurice Gibb, Robin's twin brother, died in 2003 at the age of 53 due to complications from a twisted intestine.

The Bee Gees' younger brother, Andy, who had a successful solo career, died in 1988 at age 30 of a heart ailment.