

# History of african american music

[History](#), [African American](#)



The history of African American music has been characterized by a mixture among various forms of music. Country blues, urban blues, New Orleans Jazz, Bebop, big-band jazz, and rhythm and blues, have all influenced each other profoundly. These influences flowed back and forth among the various forms. But, black gospel music had only a very limited effect on popular styles, until a few church-trained artists, such as Sam Cooke and Ray Charles, began to incorporate gospel styling into their popular work.

The result is usually described as "soul music," a mix of blues, rhythm and blues, and gospel voices. But, if Ray Charles was one of the "originators" of soul music, "Aretha Franklin reshaped it," by bringing even more of her gospel background to bear on secular love songs (Wade and Picardie 27). By combining popular elements with her stunning voice, her great musicianship, and the feeling for a song that she learned in church, Aretha became one of the greatest soul singers to ever live. Aretha Franklin is a well-known pop, R&B, and gospel singer.

She has been nicknamed "The Queen of Soul" and is an internationally known artist and a symbol of pride in the African American community. Her popularity soared in 1967 when she released an album containing songs "I Never Loved a Man", "Respect", and "Baby I Love You." Throughout her career she has achieved fifteen Grammy Awards, Lifetime Achievement Award, National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences Legend Awards, and many Grammy Hall of Fame Awards. In 1987 she became the first woman inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Time magazine chose her as one of the most influential artists and entertainers of the 20th century. She sang at Dr. Martin Luther King's funeral

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and at former President Bill Clinton's inaugural party. Although she has all these accomplishments and awards there are other reasons that have driven Franklin to fame and landed her on the front cover of Time magazine on June 28, 1968. The reasons I believe allowed Aretha Franklin to become so successful are the following: Her family's involvement with religion, the inspiring people that surrounded her, and the pain she suffered.

It is clear that because her family's involvement with religion would be one reason why Aretha Franklin became as famous as a Gospel singer. Some people would say that her love for religion is unbelievable, but after researching her childhood it is very believable. Her father, Reverend Clarence LaVaugh Franklin lived in Shelby Mississippi and preached while living the life of a sharecropper. As soon as he had enough money, he would move to Memphis, Tennessee to become a pastor of two churches. After a couple of years he attended LeMoyne College, and he studied Education and English Literature.

With his education he was able to bring a more liberal view to his preaching's. Then he moved the family to Buffalo, New York. When he had the resources, he moved the family again to Detroit, Michigan where he settled and became a pastor of a church called New Bethel Baptist Church. He quickly became one of the most famous pastors in the city of Detroit. Aretha was two years old when they made their final move, she would grow up here and grab the emotion of Church and incorporate it into her music. Aretha Franklin's mom, Barbara V. Skaggers, served as choir director and pianist.

Aretha describes her mom as “ a Superb singer, her voice was clear and distinctive”. (Franklin and Ritz, 6) Her parents taught her how to sing with great pride. This was a big issue because the late ‘ 50s, early ‘ 60s was a time of turmoil for African Americans. Her father especially tried to instill pride into her. He was a Civil Rights activist and he was a close colleague with Dr. Martin Luther King. With her parents keeping her involved in Church she was bound to become one of the world’s greatest singers. At around age 12, the father recognized Aretha’s talent as a singer.

So he took her on the road with his traveling gospel show. This was important because it shows the kind of support Aretha received from her family. It was said, “ She was a spellbinding performer at the age of fourteen. ” (Franklin, 3) So her family really supported and inspired her to become a gospel singer. What also made her a great artist was that she had inspiring people all around her. Aretha grew up in Detroit which at the time was a rousing city or a city of hope for the African Americans running away from the brutality of the South.

Though Detroit still had its problems such as race riots, many famous musicians grew up there. Also since New Bethel Baptist Church was so prominent, many musicians and political leaders used Reverend Franklin’s pulpit as a platform to sing or speak to the Black’s of Detroit. Aretha was introduced to classical music by Smokey Robinson’s sister Sylvia Burston. She listened to well known local DJ’s like Ruth Brown and Senator Brystal Brown. When Aretha was younger, she would ride her bike to the local park, and on her way home she would stop by a night club where you could here B.

B. King perform. She says, “ You could hear the soft sound of his guitar all the way to the sidewalk (Franklin and Ritz, 22). National and local political leaders would give there speeches. Speakers such as Dr. Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. , Dr. Martin Luther King, and Reverend Jesse Jackson would speak powerfully to the church. Aretha was directly influenced by Miriam Anderson, Sammy Davis, and Roy Wilkins. Detroit was overflowing with talent and speakers which I believe also contributed to Aretha’s success.

Pain was probably what really drove Aretha Franklin’s success. As stated before, Franklin’s family was highly religious and was continually involved in the Church. But that doesn’t mean that she hadn’t been through a tremendous amount of pain. Early in life her mother and father got adivorce. The father was better suitable to raise Aretha and her four Siblings. The mother moved to Buffalo, New York and tried to make regular visits to see her children. She was supported her children in the best way she could, but when Aretha needed her, she still was not reachable.

Matters became worst a few years later when Aretha’s mom dies of a stroke. Aretha described her mom by saying “ she was the absolute lady” (Smith, 3). At age 15 she had her first child and two years later another would come. But Aretha still wanted to go out and be with friends, so her grandmother usually babysat for her periodically. In a time when Black Activism, Feminism, and Sexual Liberation were high, she needed to provide for herself. So when Aretha was old enough and was ready to start performing, she hired a man named Ted White to be her manager.

He later became her husband. In the future she would divorce him for a famous actor which would end in divorce, too. Even though in 1968 to 1969,

Franklin's career was rising rapidly. She was still described by her Producer Jerry Wexler as " a person whose depressions runs deeper than the sea" (Ritchie Unterberger, 3). Then one of Franklin's highest admirers, gospel giant Mahalia Jackson died. Right after her death a extremely emotional gospel album was released by Aretha " Amazing Grace" This record was considered to be one of the most emotional records of its time.

Much of the pain that Aretha suffered was not really publicized, but still it had to be one of the reasons for her to have such a powerful voice. Aretha Franklin was a successful artist and still inspires musicians today. Her voice is still described as incredible. She has all the awards that she needs to show her talent. Works cited Franklin, Aretha, and David Ritz. *Aretha: From These Roots*. New York: Villard, 1999. Print. Carroll, Jillian. *Aretha Franklin*. Chicago: Raintree, 2004. Print