

# Musicians

# Aretha Franklin

American Singer-Songwriter

“Queen of Soul”



1942 – 2018

**Aretha Franklin**, American singer who defined the golden age of soul music of the 1960s. As a young teen, Franklin performed with her father on his gospel programs in major cities throughout the country and was recognized as a vocal prodigy.

At age 18, Franklin switched from sacred to secular music. She moved to New York City, where Columbia Records arranged her recording contract and supervised sessions highlighting her in a blues-jazz vein. From that first session, “Today I Sing the Blues” (1960) remains a classic. But, as her Detroit friends on the Motown label enjoyed hit after hit, Franklin struggled to achieve crossover success.

Without targeting any particular genre, she sang everything from Broadway ballads to youth-oriented rhythm and blues. Critics recognized her talent, but the public remained lukewarm until 1966, when she switched to Atlantic Records, where producer Jerry Wexler allowed her to sculpt her own musical identity.

At Atlantic, Franklin returned to her gospel-blues roots, and the results were sensational. “I Never Loved a Man (the Way I Love You)” (1967), recorded at Fame Studios in Florence, Alabama, was her first million-seller.

As a civil-rights-minded nation lent greater support to black urban music, Franklin was crowned the “**Queen of Soul.**” “Respect,” her 1967 cover of Otis Redding’s spirited composition, became an anthem operating on

personal, sexual, and racial levels. For the next half-dozen years, she became a hit maker of unprecedented proportions; she was “**Lady Soul.**”



# Bob Marley

Jamaican Singer-Songwriter



1945 - 1981

Bob Marley considered to be one of the pioneers of reggae music. The Jamaican star - who fused elements of the genre with ska and rocksteady - stood out because of his blend of the musical styles and distinctive vocals and lyrics, which brought Jamaican music and culture to the masses.

Starting his professional career in 1963 after forming **Bob Marley and The Wailers**, they went on to release their debut album **The Wailing Wailers in 1965**, which featured the single **One Love/People Get Ready**. Other than being responsible of the enduring hits **No Woman No Cry, Is This Love, Buffalo Soldier, Get Up Stand Up and I Shot the Sheriff**, Marley is also considered as a Rastafari icon and was known for his unapologetic support for the legalisation of marijuana.

In 1977, Marley was diagnosed with cancer and sadly died as a result of it in 1981, aged 36. However, he left a huge legacy behind - influencing a host of artists from across the musical spectrum and becoming one of the most instantly recognisable faces of all time.

# Nina Simone

American Singer-Songwriter



1933 – 2003

She was one of the most extraordinary artists of the twentieth century, an icon of American music. She was the consummate musical storyteller, who used her remarkable talent to create a legacy of liberation, empowerment, passion, and love through a magnificent body of works.

She was known as the 'High Priestess of Soul'. Nina Simone might be one of the hardest artists to pin down with her musical styles ranging from classical to folk, jazz, pop, gospel, jazz, and blues.

By the end of her life, Nina was enjoying an unprecedented degree of recognition. Her music was enjoyed by the masses due to the CD revolution, discovery on the Internet, and exposure through movies and television. Nina had sold over one million CDs in the last decade of her life, making her a global catalogue best-seller.

When Nina Simone died, she left a timeless treasure trove of musical magic spanning over four decades.

She was a hugely prominent figure during the civil rights era, where she spoke as well as performed. Simone's talent was as big as her troubled personal life, but her impact on music and culture has remained.



# Muddy Waters

American Singer and Guitarist



1913 – 1983

Muddy Waters was a crucial figure in the post-war blues scene. He grew up immersed in the Delta blues. He began playing the guitar and Harmonica by the age of 17 and was first recorded in the Library of Congress in 1941. After moving to Chicago to become a full-time musician, he recorded his first records for Columbia and Aristocrat Records in 1946. A record deal followed, and hits like "**I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man**" and "**Rollin' Stone**" made him an iconic Chicago blues man.

Travelling to England in 1958, he laid the foundations for the resurgence of blues in the country and was a crucial influence on many of the legendary British bands we know and love today. **The Rolling Stones** named themselves after his 1950 song **Rolling Stone**, **Led Zeppelin's Whole Lotta Love** is based on the Muddy Waters hit **You Need Love**, **Hoochie Coochie Man** has had too many covers to mention and everyone from **Eric Clapton** to **Jimi Hendrix** cite him as influences.

Since his death, Waters' contribution to the music world has continued to gain recognition. In 1987, Waters was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Five years later, the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences awarded the musician a Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award.

# Prince

American Singer-Songwriter



1958 – 2016

Prince became interested in music at a young age and taught himself how to play the piano, guitar and drums. When **Prince Rogers Nelson** signed his first record contract aged 19, it was clear from the outset that he was a genius.

Prince's music mixed 70s funk and the post-punk sounds of the New Wave, but his love for music was too great to be constrained by genres. If his musical talent wasn't enough to stop you in your tracks, then his image would. Prince didn't just defy genre; he also defies genders. Prince wasn't afraid to sport anything from fishnet stockings to suspenders and heels.

**1999** was his big cross-over hit album - mixing in rock, pop, R&B and blues. MTV, who claimed they were a "rock" station and therefore couldn't play black artists, had to concede when Prince made **Purple Rain** - the album, the movie and the song that was perhaps the biggest power ballad of the decade.

From that point on, Prince released music in a dazzling array of styles, the highpoint of which was the ambitious double album **Sign 'O' The Times** in **1987**. He died in 2016 aged 57 but has left a huge vault unreleased recording that proved the man genuinely loved making music.

# Tupac Shakur

American rapper, songwriter, and actor



1971 - 1996

Tupac Shakur, known by his stage names 2Pac, Pac, and Makaveli, is regarded as one of the most iconic and influential rappers of all time.

What he brought to hip hop was a level of rawness and a poetic drive in the way he delivered his words. He had a level of self-empowerment that made people want to listen to what he had to say. Even today, you could fly anywhere and surely there'd be someone who knows of Tupac.

Tupac started the rapid growth of the rap/hip-hop/pop culture. Through various albums from trust, to racial discrimination, Pac spoke passionately about how the society helped him grow as a man. This was the legacy that made Pac an influential character to the society we live in.

Tupac was an inspiration and influencer to many people because of the honesty and courage he put in his songs and his actions. Which led to him impacting the music culture in today's day and age and who knows what the rap genre would be like without him.

# Stevie Wonder

American singer, songwriter, musician, and record producer



1950 - Present

Stevie Wonder is a one-of-a-kind musician. Despite losing his eyesight at a young age, by 13 he would become the youngest artist to top the Billboard charts, and he's still creating brilliant music.

Wonder was always on the cusp of the latest trends and music technology; performing almost as a one-man band, he was also one of the first musicians to experiment with sampling, synthesizers, and vocoders. He has a talent for blending R&B, electronica, pop, soul, funk and jazz, and he even influenced hip-hop.

Throughout his career he's used his platform to support various important causes: he was one of the leading campaigners to make Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday a national holiday in the US, and in 2020 he released two politically charged singles in support of another wave of Black Lives Matter protests.



# Whitney Houston

American singer and actress



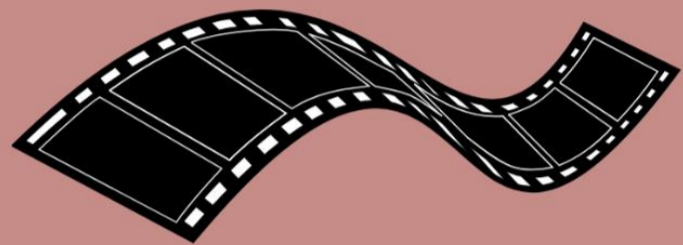
1963 – 2012

Whitney Houston was an American singer and actress whose first four albums, released between 1985 and 1992, amassed global sales in excess of 86 million copies.

Houston almost seemed destined from birth to become a singer. Her mother and cousin were both legendary figures in American gospel, soul and pop music. Cissy Houston was the choir minister at New Hope Baptist Church, and it was there that a young Houston got her start. Even as a child, Houston was able to wow audiences; she later told Diane Sawyer that a rapturous response from the congregation at New Hope had a powerful effect upon her: "I think I knew then that [my singing ability] was an infectious thing that God had given me."

In 1992 Houston married singer Bobby Brown and made her motion-picture debut in *The Bodyguard*; the film featured her rendition of Dolly Parton's "I Will Always Love You," which stayed at number one for 14 weeks. The film's soundtrack dominated the Grammys the following year, with Houston winning the awards for album of the year, record of the year, and best female pop vocal performance. In the mid-1990s she continued acting, in films such as *Waiting to Exhale* (1995) and *The Preacher's Wife* (1996), and the soundtrack of each film generated hit singles for her.

The gift she gave she never gave herself, but her gift was that no matter what if you believe in yourself and you believe in hope you will find your way.



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

# Directors



# Oscar Micheaux

Author, film director and independent producer



**1884 – 1951**

Hailed as the first major Black filmmaker, Oscar Micheaux directed and produced 42 feature films between 1919 and 1948.

He was a writer-turned-filmmaker, using his first novel “The Homesteader” to launch his career in the film industry. During that time, Micheaux’s content was classified as “race film,” a genre of movies made during the Jim Crow era that were created for and by Black people.

Many of his films featured all-Black casts and his characters were not stereotypical, unlike the blackface caricatures seen in more mainstream white films. He tackled subjects such as racial violence, rape, economic oppression, and discrimination within his work.

He died in 1951 but has posthumously been inducted into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame and awarded the Golden Jubilee Special Directorial Award from the Directors Guild of America.

# Gordon Parks

American photographer, musician, writer, and film director



**1912 – 2006**

Gordon Parks started his career as a prolific and famed photographer before branching out into filmmaking. He started as a consultant on various Hollywood productions in the '50s before directing a series of documentaries about Black urban life for National Educational Television.

Parks became Hollywood's first major Black director, bringing the iconic "Shaft" to theatres in 1971. The film spawned several follow-ups and helped spark a subgenre known as blaxploitation. The genre was one in which images of lower-class Blacks being involved with drugs and violence were exploited to make commercially successful films.

While this genre played on Black stereotypes, it also cast Black actors in lead roles, instead of as minor characters or sidekicks.



# Kathleen Collins

African American poet, playwright, writer, filmmaker, director, civil rights activist, and educator



1942 - 1988

A poet, playwright and filmmaker, Kathleen Collins helped break barriers for female directors in Hollywood. She had two major films: “The Cruz Brothers and Miss Malloy” and “Losing Ground,” which were released in the early '80s.

Although “Losing Ground” was denied a large-scale exhibition, it was among the first films created by a Black woman that was feature-length and created for popular consumption. Collins helped pave the way for future Black women filmmakers to have their films get national commercial distribution.

Collins passed away in 1988 from breast cancer. At that time, the bulk of her work was unpublished and left to her daughter. In 2006, Nina Collins began to go through her mother's archive and have it published, restored and reissued.

# Ryan Coogler

American film director, producer, and screenwriter



**1986 - present**

“Black Panther” director Ryan Coogler has become a household name in less than a decade. In 2013, he gained critical acclaim and attention for his debut film “Fruitvale Station,” which led him to direct “Creed,” a spin-off sequel to the Rocky films.

Black Panther is the 18th movie in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, a franchise that has made \$13.5 billion at the global

box office over the past 10 years. (Marvel is owned by Disney.) It may be the first mega budget movie—not just about superheroes, but about anyone—to have an African-American director and a predominantly black cast.

Hollywood has never produced a blockbuster this splendidly black. The movie comes as the entertainment industry is wrestling with its toxic treatment of women and persons of colour.

This rapidly expanding reckoning - one that reflects the importance of representation in our culture - is long overdue. Black Panther is poised to prove to Hollywood that African-American narratives have the power to generate profits from all audiences.

And, more important, that making movies about black lives is part of showing that they matter.



# Ava DuVernay

African-American filmmaker



1972 - present

Ava DuVernay first made a name for herself in Hollywood with her 2012 film “Middle of Nowhere.” The film earned her the directing award in the U.S. dramatic competition at Sundance. She was the first Black woman to win this award.

Two years later, “Selma” helped DuVernay become the first Black woman to be nominated for a Golden Globe for best director and the first Black female director to be nominated for best picture. In 2017, she was nominated for the Oscar for best documentary feature for her film “13th.”

While her 2018 Disney fantasy film “A Wrinkle in Time” ultimately lost money at the box office, it still garnered more than \$100 million domestically. DuVernay was the first Black woman to hit that benchmark.

More recently, DuVernay has had a successful run-in television. Her Netflix limited series “When They See Us” had earned critical acclaim and 16 Emmy nominations. It won the Emmy for outstanding limited series. Last year, DuVernay was elected to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences board of governors as part of the director’s branch. DuVernay also founded a film collective called Array in 2010. The company is dedicated to amplifying people of colour and female directors in the film industry.

# Spike Lee

American film director, producer, screenwriter, actor, and professor



1957 - present

In the mid-80s Spike Lee emerged in the film industry with “She’s Gotta Have It,” a film about the love life of a contemporary Black woman. Over the next 40 years, Lee would become known for his exploration of race relations, colourism in the Black community and urban crime and poverty. He has released a movie almost every year since 1986.

He was one of the few Black filmmakers making movies for a wide audience during that time and, while his films were not breaking box-office records, they were gaining critical attention.

Lee was nominated for best documentary feature in 1998 for “4 Little Girls” and best original screenplay in 1990 for “Do the Right Thing.” He received an honorary Oscar in 2016 for his directorial accomplishments. In 2019, Lee finally claimed his first Oscar for best adapted screenplay for his work on “BlacKkKlansman.”

His most recent feature was “Da 5 Bloods,” which was released on Netflix last year. The film received several key critics’ prizes, including best film from the National Board of Review and one of the top 10 films of the year by the American Film Institute.



# Marlon Riggs

American filmmaker, poet and gay rights activist



1957 - 1994

Marlon Riggs was an American filmmaker, poet and gay rights activist during the '80s and '90s. He produced and directed a number of documentary films including "Tongues Untied," "Ethnic Notions" and "Color Adjustment" prior to his untimely death in 1994 due to complications from AIDS.

Riggs used film to examine past and present representations of race and sexuality in the U.S. One of his most controversial documentaries was "Tongues Untied." It looked at gay Black male culture during the AIDS crisis and featured a kiss between two Black men, something that hadn't been portrayed in mainstream media. It was selected by PBS for its "POV" series.

The documentary was partially funded by taxpayer money through the National Endowment for the Arts, leading some conservatives to use it in long-running attempts to defund PBS and the NEA.

Riggs' work, although controversial, became a lightning rod for the culture war between conservatives and liberals that raged during that time.

# Jordan Peele

American actor, comedian and filmmaker



1979 - Present

For many years, Jordan Peele was identified with the comedy show “Key & Peele,” in which the filmmaker starred alongside fellow comedian Keegan-Michael Key. However, in 2017, Peele delivered an Oscar-winning feature film called “Get Out.”

The film was a horror movie about racism that became a breakout hit and critically acclaimed. It exceeded \$100 million in sales domestically within its first three weeks in theaters, making Peele the first Black writer-director to hit that mark with his debut movie.

“Get Out” was nominated for four Oscars, including best picture, best director, best actor and best screenplay. Peele won the award for best screenplay.

Peele’s second film “Us” also received critical and commercial success. He is currently working on his third feature. In the meantime, he has been an active producer of television shows including “Hunters,” “Lovecraft Country” and “The Twilight Zone” as well as films such as “Candyman” and “BlacKkKlansman.”