

Lifestyle

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In this file photo American soprano Jessye Norman performs at the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris.
— AFP photos

In this file photo US President Barack Obama presents the 2009 National Medal of Arts to opera singer Jessye Norman during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC.

Global opera legend **JESSYE NORMAN** dies at 74

Celebrated opera singer Jessye Norman, an American soprano who showcased her majestic voice in performances around the world, died Monday, her family said. She was 74 years old. The Grammy winner died "surrounded by loved ones" at a New York hospital due to septic shock and multi-organ failure after complications from a 2015 spinal cord injury, a statement said. "We are so proud of Jessye's musical achievements and the inspiration that she provided to audiences around the world that will continue to be a source of joy," said her family.

Praising her "beautiful tone, extraordinary power, and musical sensitivity," New York's Metropolitan Opera—where she sang more than 80 performances—dedicated its Monday show of "Porgy and Bess" to Norman. "Jessye Norman was one of the greatest artists to ever sing on our stage," said general manager Peter Gelb in a statement. "Her legacy shall forever live on." Born September 15, 1945 in Augusta, Georgia, Norman grew up surrounded by music as one of five children in a family of amateur artists.

She made a foray into gospel at age four, and as a young girl began listening to radio broadcasts of perform-

ances at the Metropolitan Opera, where she would eventually become legend. "I don't remember a moment in my life when I wasn't trying to sing," she told NPR in 2014. Growing up in the segregated American South, at five years old she sat in a "whites only" section in a train station, becoming an unknowing young activist. "We come to Earth, I feel, with a completely open heart," she told NPR. "And then we're told that we have to close it off to certain things. And that's a great shame."

A pioneering young black woman in the white world of classical music, Norman quickly became beloved for her seemingly effortless soaring voice and effervescent personality. She studied music on a full-tuition scholarship at the historically black college Howard University in Washington before going on to the Peabody Conservatory and the University of Michigan. She established herself in Europe in the 1970s, making her operatic debut in Berlin in 1969 before dazzling audiences across the continent including Italy. She eventually moved to London and spent years performing recital and solo work.

Perhaps best known for her Wagnerian repertoire, the

regal Norman made her Met debut in 1983 as Cassandra in Hector Berlioz's "Les Troyens" during the house's centennial season. "Her huge voice is a velvet wonder, totally seamless when she so desires," wrote The Washington Post's Octavio Roca in a 1980 review.

Soul-healing voice

News of her death triggered a wave of tributes, including from American-Canadian singer-composer Rufus Wainwright, who said "the world has lost one of the greatest voices that we have ever had and heard." "She poured herself out for us," Wainwright tweeted. "Rest in peace, dearest Jessye Norman." Norman held a slate of honorary doctorates from prestigious schools including Juilliard, Harvard and Yale. She earned a prestigious Kennedy Center Honor at age 52 in 1997, and president Barack Obama bestowed her with a National Medal of Arts.

Her notable performances include two US presidential inaugurations, the 60th birthday celebrations of Britain's Queen Elizabeth, the opening ceremonies of the Atlanta Summer Olympics in 1996, and at the bicentennial of the

French Revolution in Paris in 1989. She was a Commander in France's Order of Arts and Letters, and also had an orchid named after her. She took on much of the cost of opening the Jessye Norman School of the Arts, which provides free after-school arts programming to disadvantaged children in Georgia.

Her personal life remained shrouded in mystery, though her 2014 biography "Stand Up Straight and Sing!" alluded that a French aristocrat once proposed to her. At a 2014 Metropolitan Opera Guild luncheon honoring Norman, the Nobel-prize winning novelist Toni Morrison, who died earlier this year, praised the soprano's voice as a unique wonder. "The beauty and power, the singularity of Jessye Norman's voice. I don't recall anything quite like it," Morrison said. "I have to say that sometimes when I hear your voice, it breaks my heart," she said. "But all of the time, when I hear your voice, it healed my soul."—AFP

Late Mexican superstar's body goes missing

Legendary Mexican singer Jose Jose's legions of fans had not even finished processing the news of his death when a mystery exploded amid the mourning: where is the body of "The Prince of Song"? Jose Romulo Sosa Ortiz, a superstar singer of Latin love songs better known by his stage name, Jose Jose, died Saturday at age 71 outside Miami, according to the Mexican government. Emotional fans were still belting out his classic hits through tears in Claveria, his native Mexico City neighborhood, when the loss took a telenovela-like turn: Jose Jose's two oldest children, Jose Joel and Marysol, accused their younger half-sister and her mother of hiding his body.

When Jose Joel and Marysol, whose mother was the second of Jose Jose's three wives, arrived Sunday at the

funeral home where they thought his wake would be held, they were told their father's body was not there. They said their father's third wife, Sara Salazar, and her daughter Sarita refused to tell them where it is or what the funeral plans are. As comparisons to Elvis Presley began to fly—is he REALLY dead? — Jose Joel and Marysol went to the police station in Cutler Bay, Florida, to file a report on his missing remains.

"If I don't see my dad's body I can't believe anything. Nothing," Marysol told journalists outside the station house. "To be clear: We aren't fighting for his money or his inheritance, we aren't interested in that," said Jose Joel. He called for an autopsy, urged the Mexican government to intervene and suggested that Sarita was acting "as if it were part of a contract" to sell exclusive media rights to their father's funeral.

Telenovela villain

In an exclusive interview with Spanish-language TV network Univision on Sunday, Sarita, 25, made an appeal for family unity and said it was "still very early to decide what will be done" with the remains. She blamed the confusion surrounding her father's body on US regulations on handling remains. "US laws are very strict. Unfortunately, not even his wife has been able to view the body," she wrote in a statement published Monday on the Instagram account of a Univision pro-

gram called "El Gordo y La Flaca."

"People of Mexico: we will bring him to Mexico so you can say goodbye. We promise you will be able to hold a wake for him," she added. Memes comparing Sarita to the most iconic villains of Mexico's melodramatic telenovela soap operas went viral on social networks. In Claveria, the singer's native barrio, fans gathered around a statue of him and chanted: "We want them to give us back Jose Jose!"

"He was a great man, for his voice but above all for his sensitivity... He was a great man of the people," Rogelio Cuevas, an 86-year-old neighbor, told AFP. Mexico City authorities are planning a mass karaoke

tribute to the late crooner Friday outside the Palace of Fine Arts.

Velvety voice

With his velvety voice and songs for jilted lovers, Jose Jose sold more than 120 million albums in a career spanning over five decades. The Latin Recording Academy, which gave him a lifetime achievement award in 2004 and named him its person of the year in 2005, said "his music and voice will forever reign in the history of Ibero-American music." Jose Jose was known for his openness about his personal life, including his romances and struggles with alcoholism.

He quit drinking in 1993, but health issues led him to give up singing in the early 2000s. He married three times and fathered three children. He wed his Cuban third wife, Salazar, in 1995, then moved to Miami with her. He had been hospitalized for pancreatic cancer, though Sarita told Univision he was in remission. Relations had long been strained between her and her half-siblings, who claim she prevented them from seeing their father in later years. Jose Jose had ceded the rights to his songs to Sarita, and Mexican media reported that she also convinced him to sign the rights to his life story over to her.—AFP



Fans pay tribute to the late Mexican singer and actor Jose Jose after knowing of his death, in front of his monument in Mexico City. — AFP