

APOLLO

EDUCATION



**APOLLO THEATER
WALK OF FAME
LEGEND**

ARETHA FRANKLIN

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Put aside her 75 million records sold; 18 GRAMMY awards won; being the first woman inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; and distinguished as the “greatest singer of all time” by Rolling Stone Magazine. For **Soul music** legend Aretha Franklin, there is something more valuable than praise and popularity, something she has earned throughout her extraordinary life and career: “R-E-S-P-E-C-T.”

Aretha Louise Franklin was born on March 25, 1942 in Memphis, Tennessee. At the age of four she moved with her family to Detroit, Michigan, where her father became pastor at New Bethel Baptist Church.

Following Sunday church services, the Franklin family home became a popular gathering place for notable figures in the African American community, including some of the most famous musicians of the day. From Gospel stars like Mahalia Jackson and Clara Ward singing hymns through her hallways, to Jazz giants like Art Tatum and Oscar Peterson jamming on her living room piano, visitors exposed Aretha to both **sacred and secular music** growing up.

Inspired by her father’s musical style of preaching, she learned to play piano and joined the New Bethel youth choir at an early age. Developing her musical talents in church and on the road with her father’s “Gospel Caravan” tours, she moved to New York City at the age of 18 to pursue a recording career.

Starting out at Columbia Records, she recorded nine albums on the label, though none produced any major hits. It wasn’t until she signed with Atlantic Records in 1967 that her artistry was fully recognized.

The popularity of her Atlantic recordings not only made “Aretha” a household name, they impacted important social change. Her cover of Otis Redding’s “Respect” for example, became an anthem of the Civil

“SHE’S HOME”

June 1971: The Apollo was buzzing with excitement as fans lined up to see the “Queen of Soul” perform. The glow from the Apollo’s marquee lit up 125th Street reading: “She’s Home: Aretha Franklin.” Backed by saxophonist King Curtis and The Kingpins, Aretha’s soul-infused performances drove fans to near hysteria. Although she has performed on the Apollo stage many times over the course of her career, her 1971 performances made music history and a homecoming like none other.



Rights movement, and has since empowered countless women in their own efforts to gain equal rights. Aretha's live performances influenced further change, including her emotional rendition of "[Precious Lord](#)" at the memorial service for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

With her career skyrocketing, she ventured into the movie industry in the 1970s and 80s. Recording the soundtrack to the movie *Sparkle* in 1976, she went on to make her acting debut in the 1980 musical comedy, *The Blues Brothers*. Performing her smash hit "[Think](#)", her *Blues Brothers* appearance delighted audiences and introduced new generations to her artistry.

Half a century after being crowned the "Queen of Soul," Aretha Franklin continues to perform to this day. A living legend of Soul music and American culture, her legacy will live on to impact the future of music for generations to come. She was inducted into the Apollo Theater Walk of Fame in 2010.

WORDS TO KNOW

Soul music

A blend of Gospel music and Rhythm and Blues made popular by Soul music pioneers including the "Genius of Soul": Ray Charles; the "King of Soul": Sam Cooke, and the "Godfather of Soul": James Brown.

Gospel music

A style of Christian music that became popular in African American religious communities starting in the 1940s.

Sacred music

Music written for and performed in religious settings.

Secular music

Music written for and performed in non-religious settings.

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DID YOU KNOW?

Ooo, Baby, Baby

Aretha grew up just blocks from fellow Apollo Theater Walk of Fame Legend, Smokey Robinson, who first heard Aretha perform when she was four years old. Check out [this performance](#) of the childhood friends singing Smokey's 1965 hit single "Ooo, Baby, Baby" and discussing growing up in Detroit together.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Few artists become so famous that they're recognized around the world as a household name, let alone on a first name basis. "Aretha" is one of them. Who are some other artists that are recognized by only their first name?

Can you match the iconic first names of the following artists to their actual last names? Draw a line to match the names.

a. Kesha	1. Presley
b. Usher	2. Nelson
c. Beyoncé	3. Adkins
d. Adele	4. Fenty
e. Elvis	5. Knowles
f. Prince	6. Sebert
g. Rihanna	7. Raymond

TRY THIS

Pretend you're appearing on a music television program with one of your friends, just as Aretha and Smokey did on Soul Train in 1979. Stage an interview, sing a song, play an instrument, or form a Soul Train Line of your own!

Answers: a. 6, b. 7, c. 5, d. 3, e. 1, f. 2, g. 4

CREDITS

Written by
Tim Sullivan

Apollo Theater Education Staff
Shirley C. Taylor
Director of Education
Debbie Ardemento
Associate Director of Education
Jason Steer
ATA Education Manager
Princess Belton
Education Coordinator
Chinai Hardy
Education Associate
Yanira Gonzalez
ATA Education Coordinator

Photo Credits

Aretha Franklin poses for a portrait circa 1968.
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Aretha with Motown Choreographer Cholly Atkins.
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