

GLADYS KNIGHT

Gladys Knight, a woman in possession of one of the most instantly recognizable and loved voices in popular music, was born to Merald Woodlow Knight and Sarah Elizabeth Woods. In 1952, at the age of 7 Gladys won the finals on the very popular *Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour* TV show contest, the world's introduction to her powerful singing voice. The following year, she, her brother Merald, sister Brenda, and cousins William and Eleanor Guest formed a musical group called The Pips. By the end of the decade, the act had begun to tour, and had replaced Brenda Knight and Eleanor Guest with cousins Edward Patten and Langston George.

Bobby Robinson of Vee-Jay Records produced the single "Every Beat of My Heart" for the group, which became a #1 R&B and #6 pop hit when released in 1962. Soon after this, Langston George left the group, which was renamed Gladys Knight & the Pips and continued as a quartet. Again in 1962, after scoring a second hit, "Letter Full of Tears", Gladys and her very talented saxophone player husband (Jimmy Newman) were blessed with a son, Jimmy, Jr, and a beautiful daughter, Kenya, two years later in 1964.

In 1966, Gladys Knight & the Pips joined Motown had several hit singles, including "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" (1967), "The Nitty Gritty" (1969), "Friendship Train" (1969), "If I Were Your Woman" (1970), "I Don't Want To Do Wrong" (1971), the Grammy winner "Neither One of Us (Wants to Be the First to Say Goodbye)" (1972), and "Daddy Could Swear (I Declare)" (1973). In search of a better deal, the group left Motown and contracted with Buddah Records in 1973, where they finally achieved the success they wanted with hits such as the Grammy-winning "Midnight Train to Georgia", "I've Got to Use My Imagination", and "Best Thing That Ever Happened to Me".

After divorcing Jimmy Newman, Gladys married record and theater producer Barry Hankerson (uncle of R&B singer Aaliyah) in 1976. Gladys and Barry remained married for three years, during which time they had a son, Shanga Ali. After Shanga's birth, Gladys broadened her horizons by making her motion picture acting debut in the film *Pipe Dreams*, a romantic drama set in Alaska (produced and co-directed by Barry Hankerson). The film failed at the box-office, but Gladys received a Golden Globe Best New Actress nomination.

In 1970, after many hits, Gladys and the Pips were forced to record separately due to legal issues. Gladys recorded her first solo LP-*Miss Gladys Knight* (1978) on Buddah and *Gladys Knight* (1979) on Columbia. In the early 80s Gladys recorded two duets with her friend Johnny Mathis, "When A Child Is Born" and "The Lord's Prayer" which have become Christmas chestnuts. They returned to the charts in the 1980s with the #1 R&B hits "Save the Overtime (For Me)" (1983) and another Grammy winner--"Love Overboard" (1987).

After a successful 1988 tour, the Pips retired and Gladys Knight began a career as a solo artist. Gladys joined with Dionne Warwick, Stevie Wonder, and Elton John on the 1986 AIDS benefit single, "That's What Friends Are For" which won a Grammy for Best Pop Performance By A Duo Or Group With Vocal. In 1989, Gladys recorded the title track for the James Bond movie *Licence to Kill*, a top 10 hit both in the UK and Germany.

Furthering her popularity, Gladys made guest-starring television appearances throughout the eighties and nineties with roles on *Benson*, *The Jeffersons*, *A Different World*, *Living Single*, *The Jamie Foxx Show* and *New York Undercover*. In 1985, she co-starred on the CBS sitcom *Charlie and Co.* with comedian Flip Wilson.

Gladys Knight's third solo LP, *Good Woman*, was released in 1991. It rose to #1 on the R&B album chart and featured the #2 R&B hit "Men". Her fourth solo LP, *Just for You*, went gold and was nominated for the 1995 Grammy Award for Best R&B Album. Gladys' most recent albums are *At Last* and *Before Me*. Her most recent achievements include a Grammy for a duet with Ray Charles ("Heaven Help us All") from his final album *Ray Charles*, and another Grammy for her album with the All Saints Choir. Gladys Knight & the Pips were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1996.