

Remembering Legends: Late Great 90s R&B Artists

90s R&B music brought out many incredibly talented musicians, some which lost steam after one album, while others continued on to grace listeners with album after album. Unfortunately, many artists careers ended short not because of industry conflicts or financial difficulties, but because death took these talented men and women before their time had come. This article serves as a testimony to all the great 90s R&B artists whose memory will not be forgotten. Please take a moment and remember these late great musicians.

Ephraim Lewis (1968 - 1994)

Ephraim Lewis was set to be a star. While his debut album *Skin*, released in 1992, failed to generate massive commercial success, it highlighted the immense talent of this British singer and led many to compare his pure ability to that of Michael Jackson. It was believed that the only reason the album had failed to sell tremendously well was due to poor writing and so, Elektra Records sought to resolve this issue, sending Ephraim to California to work with some of the best in the business. Unfortunately, Ephraim was never to finish the second album that would promote him to the spotlight as, on March 18, 1994, Ephraim Lewis fell from a balcony in Los Angeles and smashed his head against the pavement, going brain-dead.

Debra Jean "Deah Dame" Hurd of Damian Dame (1958 - 1994)

Born in 1958, Deah Dame was part of the first act signed to the legendary LaFace records. When Damian Dame released their debut album in 1991, they scored a #1 hit with the single "Exclusivity." Unfortunately, before the duo could release their second album, Deah Dame died in a tragic automobile accident on June 27, 1994 at the age of 35.

Phyllis Hyman (1949 - 1995)

Starting in 1971, Phyllis Hyman toured nationally, working with various groups like New Direction and All The People. Hyman began performing as a solo artist in 1977, with her self-titled debut album. Hyman continued to release albums and scored her first top ten hit in 1981 with the single "Can't We Fall In Love Again." Hyman also received acknowledgements for her acting ability, receiving a Tony Award nomination for Best Supporting Actress in the musical, *Sophisticated Ladies*. In 1985, Hyman really started coming into her own, as she released the album *Living All Alone* and scored several hits. The success continued as her 1991 album, *Prime of My Life*, scored a #1 hit with "Don't Wanna Change The World." Despite Hyman's growing success, things began to turn for the worse in her life. In the course of one month, Phyllis Hyman's mother, grandmother and best friend all died. At the same time, Hyman battled bipolar disorder, depression and alcoholism, all while putting constant efforts into supporting AIDS benefit concerts. The burden of all the stress was too much for the talented musician and in June of 1995, Hyman committed suicide.

Bruce Edward "Damian" Broadus of Damian Dame (1966 - 1996)

The other half of the musical act Damian Dame, Damian handled much of the production work for the group. After Dame's death in 1994, Damian released a solo album titled *Damian 199sex*. The day after Damian released his album, on the two year anniversary of Deah's death, Damian himself died of colon cancer at the age of 29.

Aaliyah Dana Haughton (1979 - 2001)

Born in New York and raised in Detroit, Aaliyah had a very rich musical background growing up. She developed her knowledge of stage after performing (and losing) on *Star Search*, and from performing in Las Vegas with her aunt (by marriage), Gladys Knight. In 1993, at the young age of 14, Aaliyah released her debut album, *Age Ain't Nothin But A Number*, with heavy production from R Kelly. The album went platinum and scored several big hits with "Back And Forth" topping the R&B charts, and "At Your Best" reaching #2. The album only started the steam roller that was Aaliyah's career as her second album, *One In A Million* had three #1 R&B tracks and sold 8 million copies world wide. In the years that followed, Aaliyah would be the youngest female artist to perform at the Academy Awards and the only singer to have a single ("Try Again") reach #1 on the Hot 100 purely by radio airplay. Aaliyah's career was only beginning to blossom as she was coming to age but unfortunately, where it would have gone is anyone's guess. In 2001, when returning home from a music video shoot, the plane Aaliyah was on took a sudden nosedive and crashed, killing her.

Kenny Greene of Intro (1969 - 2001)

Kenny Greene was a man of many talents, as he helped form the backbone of the early 1990s group, Intro. Greene wrote and produced most, if not all, of the group's tracks and did lead vocals. His style grew with age as the group's second album shows his developing understanding of music. Greene's legacy lives on, not only in the music of Intro, but in the many songs he helped write for other artists, such as Mary J. Blige's "Reminisce"

and "Love No Limit." In 2001, it became known that Kenny Greene was bisexual and that he was suffering from AIDS. On October 1, 2001, Greene passed away due to complications caused by AIDS.

Lisa Nicole "Left Eye" Lopes of TLC (1971 - 2002)

Left Eye was a member of the popular group TLC, which dominated the charts during the 1990s and was one of the biggest female groups of all time. The group's debut album, Ooooooohhh... On the TLC Tip sold 4 million copies, and was followed by CrazySexyCool which sold over 11 million. Lopes was often considered the creative talent behind the group TLC and was featured in raps on many of the group's tracks, including "Waterfalls" and "No Scrubs." In addition to her work with the group TLC, Lopes worked on a solo album, Supernova, which only saw release outside the United States. Unfortunately, Lopes never was able to finish her second solo album, or the fourth TLC album, 3D, before she was killed in a car accident in Honduras on April 25, 2002.

Keven "Dino" Conner of H-Town (1975 - 2003)

For a long time, Keven and his group mates in H-Town struggled to break into the music industry. When fortunes finally turned and the group was signed by Luther Campbell, they hit the ground running, releasing Fever For Da Flavor in 1993. The album scored huge success with the single "Knockin The Boots" which reached #3 on the Hot 100. The group's second and third albums never managed to match the success of their first but they still remained in the public's eye with singles like "Emotions" and "Thin Line Between Love And Hate." The group mates experienced tension and went their separate ways until 2003 when they began recording for a comeback album. Unfortunately, one night after recording, Dino Conner and Teshya Rae Weisent were driving home when a sports utility car struck their vehicle and killed them both.

Luther Vandross (1951 - 2005)

Vandross early success in the music industry was as the creator of jingles. His jingles were used in ad campaigns by KFC, NBC, and the US Army. However, after signing with Epic Records, Vandross really began to take charge in the music industry. Beginning in the early 1980s, Vandross was very active, writing and producing much of his own music. His debut album, Never Too Much, went double platinum and scored a #1 R&B hit with the title track. Over the course of his career, Vandross never seemed to tire, putting out over 10 albums in 22 years. Throughout these albums, Vandross had over 6 #1 R&B hits and sold over 40 million albums worldwide. Yet Vandross career was not only about the number of albums sold, but about his determination to stay true to his sound, despite the constantly changing R&B scene. In addition, Vandross helped spur the success of other artists, contributing to tracks done by Barbara Streisand, Cat Stevens, Chaka Khan, Aretha Franklin, Diana Ross, Dionne Warwick and so many others. It is unfortunate that as time went on, Vandross was diagnosed with diabetes and was constantly battling with his weight and health. In 2003, Vandross suffered a stroke that devastated him. Nevertheless, Vandross appeared to be improving and looked to be gearing up to return to the music industry that missed him so, until in 2005, Luther Vandross passed away.

Gerald LeVert (1966 - 2006)

Gerald LeVert came out of Cleveland, Ohio with a rich background in music because of his father's role as lead singer of the O'Jays. Gerald's first highly successful act was LeVert, an act comprised of him, his brother Sean and their friend Marc Gordon. Together, the group scored five #1 hits and seven top 10 hits on the R&B charts, in addition to "Casanova," which took #1 on the Hot 100. With Gerald's 1991 debut solo album, Private Line, he scored four top ten tracks on the R&B charts, two of which reached #1. Beyond his debut album, LeVert had many successful tracks including "I'd Give Anything," "Already Missing You," and "Taking Everything." In 2006, he died in his sleep of a heart attack after a 10 day trip in South Africa.

Tony Thompson of Hi-Five (1975 - 2007)

Tony Thompson was born in Waco, Texas in 1975 and grew up singing in the church choir in Oklahoma City. He eventually caught the attention of a producer, and made a demo with four acquaintances from Waco. The five teenagers came together as the group Hi-Five and were signed to Jive Records in 1990. The group scored a hit with the single "I Like The Way" which went gold, as did their self-titled debut album. The group's success continued with their second and third albums, released in 1

About the Author

Martin Fister is the administrator and chief content provider for the [R&B](#) site, R&B Haven, a site which features over 150 artist bios. These bios include [Boyz 2 Men](#) and [Aaliyah](#).

