

DUSTY SPRINGFIELD

b. April 16, 1939

d. March 2, 1999

SINGER

“My sexuality has never been a problem to me, but I think it has been for other people.”

Dusty Springfield was an English singer and record producer best known for her sultry, soulful sound. Born Mary Isobel Bernadette O’Brien in London (she got the nickname Dusty for playing football with the boys), Springfield was one of the most successful British female performers in history, with six top 20 singles in the United States and 16 in Europe. She was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the U.K. Music Hall of Fame.

In 1958 Springfield joined her first singing group, The Lana Sisters, later forming The Springfields with her brother. She first received attention for her hit “I Only Want to Be With You,” and later with a string of solo songs like “Wishin’ and Hopin’” and “Son of a Preacher Man.”

Springfield received acclaim in 1969 when she released “Dusty in Memphis,” an album that was awarded a prestigious spot in the Grammy Hall of Fame. She also became known for her blonde bouffant, heavy makeup and colorful evening gowns—a style emblematic of the Swinging Sixties.

Springfield spent many years out of the public eye, reappearing in 1987 to collaborate with the Pet Shop Boys on “What Have I Done to Deserve This,” which topped both the U.S. and U.K. music charts. By the 1990s, Springfield’s music was experiencing a renaissance, appearing on several film soundtracks, including “Pulp Fiction.”

During the late 1960s and early ’70s, Springfield was romantically linked to Norma Tanega, a California-born singer-songwriter who wrote a few of Springfield’s songs such as “Go My Love.” During an interview in 1970, Springfield said, “People say that I’m gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay, gay. I’m not anything.”

She was linked to many women during her life, including photojournalist Faye Harris and singer Carole Pope. In 1982 she married actress Teda Bracci, whom she met at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Though the wedding wasn’t legally recognized, they lived together for two years.

Later in life, Springfield became a camp icon, attracting gay fans and drag impersonators. In 1994 a breast cancer diagnosis took a toll on her career.

Springfield’s inclusion in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame came just two weeks after her death. At the induction, her friend Elton John said, “I just think she was the greatest white singer there has ever been ... Every song she sang, she claimed as her own.”

She was one of the most successful British female performers in history.

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