

GEORGE MICHAEL

POP SUPERSTAR

b. June 25, 1963

d. December 25, 2016

He was a multi-award-winning British popstar and philanthropist.

“You’ll never find peace of mind until you listen to your heart.”

George Michael was a multi-award-winning British singer, songwriter, and philanthropist. One of the world’s best-selling artists, he rose to international fame in the 1980s with his pop duo Wham! followed by decades of solo superstardom.

The child of Greek-Cypriot and English parents, Michael (née Georgios Kyriacos Panayiotou) was born in North London. In high school, he moved with his family to Radlett, where he befriended Andrew Ridgeley. The pair landed a recording contract as Wham! in 1981.

In 1984 Wham! scored their first U.S. No. 1 single and worldwide hit, “Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go.” Appearing on their second album, it accompanied other top hits, such as the bluesy “Careless Whisperer.”

The duo’s charisma and good looks quickly made them teen idols. In 1985 they became the first Western artists to perform in China. Wham! disbanded amicably in 1986.

Michael launched his solo career with the Grammy-winning single “I Knew You Were Waiting (For Me).” It was the first duet between Aretha Franklin and a white male artist. Michael’s debut solo album, “Faith,” captured the 1988 Grammy for Album of the Year. Along with the title track, it featured five other No. 1 hits, including “Father Figure,” “I Want Your Sex,” and “One More Try.”

In the early ’90s, Michael met his first love, Anselmo Feleppa, while performing in Brazil. Feleppa tested HIV-positive and died 1993. Devastated, Michael wrote the melancholic hit “Jesus to a Child” (1994) as a tribute to him.

In 1998, while in a relationship with Kenny Goss, Michael was arrested by an undercover officer in Beverly Hills, Calif., for “lewd conduct” in a public restroom. He came out publicly during the ensuing media frenzy. His career survived, and he and Goss remained together for a decade. Mutual substance abuse contributed to their split.

Michael toured globally and produced hits throughout his career. He won dozens of awards in the U.S. and internationally, including Grammys, American Music Awards, MTV Awards, and two British Ivor Novello Awards for songwriting. He released 16 Top 10 hits, sold 120 million albums (seven multi-platinum), and often leveraged his music, mostly without fanfare, for philanthropic causes. He contributed to the 1984 Band Aid single for Ethiopian famine relief, “Do They Know It's Christmas?” and donated the proceeds from his own holiday release, “Last Christmas,” to the same cause. He supported AIDS prevention and LGBTQ rights, among many other issues.

Michael’s heart and liver gradually deteriorated. In 2016 he died alone in his bed on Christmas Day. He was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2023.



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