

LUTHER VANDROSS

GRAMMY-WINNING
SINGER

b. April 20, 1951

d. July 1, 2005

“Whenever I say goodbye it’s never for long because I believe in the power of love.”

He was one of the most influential R&B singers of all time.

Luther Vandross was an eight-time Grammy Award-winning singer, songwriter, and record producer, rated among the top R&B artists of all time. Known as “The Velvet Voice,” he dominated the charts for more than two decades.

Vandross was born in New York City. His father died when Vandross was a child. Vandross developed an early aptitude for music and took his inspiration from the sounds of Aretha Franklin, Dionne Warwick, and other female singers in the pantheon of Motown superstars.

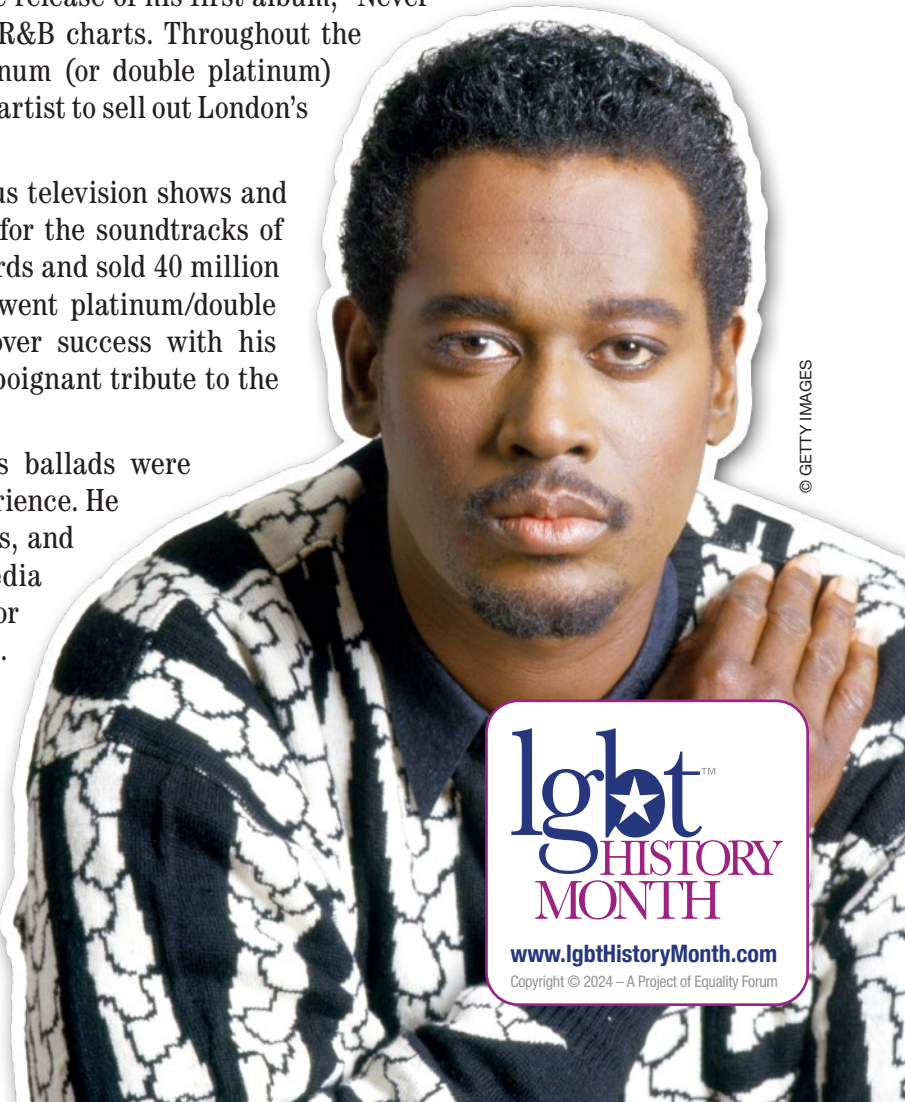
In 1969 Vandross landed a television appearance singing on “Sesame Street,” then a brand-new children’s show. His first big artistic break came in the early 1970s, when he composed songs such as “Everybody Rejoice” for the Broadway musical “The Wiz.” The rocker David Bowie hired him as a backup singer, and Vandross worked on the arrangements for Bowie’s famous 1975 album, “Young Americans.” Bette Midler, Diana Ross, Barbra Streisand and a host of other leading artists also hired Vandross as an arranger, songwriter, and backup singer. Toward the end of the decade, he recorded with a variety of groups, singing on singles such as “Dance, Dance, Dance” by the band Chic.

Vandross launched his solo career in 1981 with the release of his first album, “Never Too Much.” The title track reached No. 1 on the R&B charts. Throughout the 1980s and ’90s, he released 11 consecutive platinum (or double platinum) albums. Also beloved abroad, he was the first male artist to sell out London’s Wembley arena for 10 straight shows.

During his career, Vandross appeared on numerous television shows and performed at prestigious events. He wrote songs for the soundtracks of 16 feature films. Vandross won eight Grammy Awards and sold 40 million records worldwide. Of his 14 studio albums, 13 went platinum/double platinum. In 2003, he achieved ultimate crossover success with his Billboard No. 1 album “Dance With My Father,” a poignant tribute to the parent he lost too soon.

Characterized by their soulful lyrics, Vandross’s ballads were infused with the emotional weight of his own experience. He struggled with his weight and sexuality, loneliness, and the desire for romantic love. Despite ongoing media speculation, he never came out publicly, perhaps for fear of losing his predominantly female audience. In 2017 his close friend, the legendary singer Patti LaBelle, disclosed in a television interview that Vandross had been gay.

Vandross suffered a major stroke in 2003 and died from complications two years later. He was posthumously inducted into the National Rhythm and Blues Hall of Fame. The New York Times published his obituary.



© GETTY IMAGES

lgbt[™]
HISTORY
MONTH

www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com

Copyright © 2024 – A Project of Equality Forum