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Remembering Aretha Franklin

When Aretha Franklin died on 16 August 2018, the response within popular music writing was a story unto itself: dozens of critics, academics, biographers, or some combination working to explain her immense impact.

Although *Journal of Popular Music Studies* could not hope to compete with *Billboard*, NPR, or the *New Yorker*, we did want to note Franklin's passing in our journal. So we asked readers to contribute comments, some of which are reprinted here. We also offer a long but still partial list of the work published in the immediate aftermath of Franklin's death. Too often, given the transition from hard copy publication to virtual web postings, writing of this kind can get lost to history. These markers are not an archive, but at least a guide for those in the future looking to assemble one.

Among the first to write about Franklin's historic importance in the late 1960s was Phyl Garland, music columnist for *Ebony* and author of the pioneering collection *The Sound of Soul* (1969). Garland would write for *Ebony* through 1978, then *Stereo Review* through 1992, also authoring text for a 1984 Michael Jackson photo book; she was also instrumental in establishing a cultural reporting program at Columbia University. "Aretha Franklin: Sister Soul," a chapter in *Sound of Soul*, chronicled the Eddie Heywood records she played on piano growing up, the influence in chords and "earthiness" of gospel's James Cleveland, a family friend, her preacher father's "timing," and the professional encouragement of Teddy Wilson's bassist, Major "Mule" Holly, then Philadelphia DJ Jimmy Bishop and his wife Louise connecting Franklin to Atlantic's Jerry Wexler. Aretha had been crowned queen, but in the lineage she and Garland knew to respect, "The queen of the blues was and still is Dinah Washington." Unfortunately, though Garland's papers are kept at Indiana University, she lacks a literary executor or family representative to authorize a needed full compilation of her writing. We hope that somebody reading this might be inspired to take on that worthy project.

– Eric Weisbard

She Sent Me First, a brief piano intro—Aretha, over drumstick ticks, spare, like a warm-up that could be heading anywhere, until, like a call to order, a few hard chords get down

Journal of Popular Music Studies, Volume 31, Number 1, pp. 3–14. Electronic ISSN: 1533-1598 © 2019 by the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, U.S. Branch (IASPM-US). All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <http://jpms.ucpress.edu/content/permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/jpms.2019.311002>

to business. And out slides sideways “You Send Me,” closing side one of *Aretha Now*, raising the Queen of Soul’s teen crush Sam Cooke from the dead. In 1968 and for years if not decades after, knocked out by the sheer presence of this woman, how exuberant and tough she could be, how loud, and especially how irresistible her dance grooves were, I barely noticed if I ever even heard what has become my favorite Aretha track, and one of my favorite pieces of recorded music, period. It was some time in the late 90s. My husband was binge-listening to an Aretha retrospective, and I probably was thinking about “Think” when this surprise slid in and stole the show.

I tend to picture Aretha Franklin center stage, but starting from that sideways entrance, she’s somewhere else here, almost under the groove, which is more lounge R&B than gospel or pop and so owned by Jerry Jemmott’s suave bass line that it’s sometimes more top than Aretha’s voice which, while never what you’d call modest, is understated for her, at least at first, as much bemused as amazed. You can really hear that wryness that’s always somewhere in the mix even as she’s taking over the world. And when the narrative reaches the place where she starts to realize she wants to marry us and take us home, you could get the idea that, unlike that tingly moment when Cooke realizes the same thing, nuptials are an actual possibility. Then she breaks loose with burst after burst of sweet inspiration—this is Aretha, after all. She sent me.

– Carola Dibbell, novelist and music critic

Think/my lips from speaking. In 1968, what Aretha said was, “Think.” In all the appreciation that has poured out since her death, not much has been said about Franklin the thinker. She was not a writer, or even much of a talker, famously reticent in interviews, hard to pin down, defensive—until she started up the music. Then you could hear her thinking out loud, thinking at length, thinking with her fingers at the keyboard. When she went into those rooms, those white rooms filled with white men, far below the Mason-Dixon line or in Midtown Manhattan, to record her music, she did not try to lecture or sweet-talk. She simply sat down, started playing, playing something that called everybody present in the room to purpose, and to musical thought. In 1993, exactly halfway through the half-century that separates “Think” from today, another female musician, Julia Wolfe, wrote a work based entirely on Aretha’s opening call to musical attention. (The title, *my lips from speaking*, comes from a rabbinical meditation on the treachery of words.) The piece, scored for six (SIX!) piano players, takes a single axiom of soulful thought and spins it out into a musical argument that lasts fifteen clangorous minutes. Listening to it, as I did this week, I am moved to think that life goes on. My God, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceit. (There ain’t nothing you could ask—I could answer you, but I won’t.) To those who insult me, let my soul be silent; may my soul be like dust to everyone. Think.

– Robert Fink, musicologist

I Get It Now. Because Aretha Franklin was iconic, I ignored her, gravitating instead toward artists drawn more to scale. During the 1970s, as Franklin’s peak years whizzed by and I discovered both soul music and women’s liberation, artists flowed through the door Franklin had opened—with songs that legitimized our autonomy one hit at a time, such

as Ann Peebles’s “I Can’t Stand the Rain” or Candi Staton’s “Young Hearts Run Free.” I wasn’t ready for a song as powerful as “Dr. Feelgood” in 1967, for something that heady and earthy, as male-identified and pro-female, all at once. Her genius was to put talent aside and just be herself. I get it now. In her final album *Aretha Franklin Sings the Divas* in 2014, Aretha acknowledges the divas who have become legend, some before but most after her reign, as if to say, “You be you. This is me.” Still a better belter than most, she’s enjoying herself with material other women made famous, controlling the conversation with the loopy dips and raspy highs of her 74 years. I finally saw Franklin in concert in 2012 when my daughter and I celebrated our birthdays together at her Radio City Music Hall show—a legendary performance, I’ve read recently, but I disagree: Franklin got tired midway through the second half, and we left while we were still having a good time. Legends don’t make themselves; we do that. Listen to everything and discover her the way she would have wanted for yourself.

– Georgia Christgau, journalist

The blues had a banshee. Lightly edited from a Facebook post:

Couple folk have inquired as to why this reporter hadn’t waxed elegiacally re Ms. Aretha taking it to the next phase. Here’s the deal: *Billboard* got in touch before we even knew The Queen was in the hospice, asked for a contribution to a package they were assembling for next week’s print edition. Pubs routinely do that kind of dire forecasting —sister just told me Bb started prepped all the way back in 2000! Damn!) Decided while The Queen was still here to do something modest about Nikki Giovanni’s empathetic masterpiece “Poem For Aretha.” Turned that piece in BEFORE The D’s own Lady Soul split in the flesh. Then came the (heart) breaking news. Being committed to *Billboard* meant any other thoughts would have to await publication there first. Meanwhile of course all our esteemed colleagues—Wesley Morris, dream Hampton, Nelson George, Daphne Brooks—covered so much sacred and political ground as to render us feeling a mite superfluous—but since we Prose R Us a brother couldn’t help prosaically indulging hisself anyway. To The Fullness

To Wit: When The Uncaged Malindy Sings (Ms. Aretha and The New Black Music)

*At the point where what she did we feel
left singing, you were on your own. At
the point where what she was was in
her voice, you listen and make your
own promises.*

*More than I have felt to say, she
says always. More than she has ever
felt is what we mean by fantasy.*

*Emotion, is wherever you are. She
stayed in the street Sometimes you are afraid to listen to this lady.*

– AMIRI BARAKA, “DARK LADY OF THE SONNETS” (LINER NOTES FOR A BILLIE HOLIDAY COMPILATION, 1967)

I was told of a Chuck Rainey/Aretha story from my colleague and friend Al Caldwell . . . my 20 yr. rhythm section buddy with Vanessa Williams . . . Chuck Rainey is his mentor . . . and Chuck said, "When we were on the road with Aretha (Chuck, Purdie, Cornell and many other legends) . . . If it was Sunday, Aretha would find a church to go sing . . . no matter what town they were in . . . and she would bring the rhythm section with her and she gave explicit instructions . . . 'when I start singing . . . don't listen to me' . . . and the guys were like 'don't listen? Wtf?' and they would go to a church, and she would start singing . . . and Aretha turned around to the band . . . and they were all in tears . . . and she shouted at them 'I TOLD Y'ALL NOT TO LISTEN'!!! LMAO . . ."

– JT Lewis

Your Mama's Mama, Grandmother Callie, preferred Sarah Vaughn over Ms. Aretha, okay? Somewhere back in the 70s this was explained to you as a matter of diction and lyrical transparency: "That girl gets to whooping and hollering so much you can't understand a word she's singing. Now, with Sarah, every word is clear." Though she preferred the Methodist "high church" to the church of the Baptists—dap to Fredara Mareva Hadley for teaching us the distinction—we felt but couldn't explain as children—don't get twisted: it wasn't about respectability. Jim Crow Tennessee-born Grandmother Callie worked in men's barbershops for a substantial part of her adult life. In later years her main gig was at Wright Patterson Air Force Base. When asked if she was going to watch the original 70s broadcast of *Roots*, her curt reply was a Beale Street gangsta-classic: "No I can't watch that. I don't want to be reminded of anything that might make my hand slip while I've got my razor at some general's throat."

In retrospect, maybe by the time Ms. Aretha came around, Grandmother Callie had heard enough Negro screaming to last her a lifetime. Didn't need Ms. Aretha raising her hackles or her blood pressure with her mumbo-jumbo. Didn't want those mid-song primal eruptions of hers in the circumference. Provoking recollections of strange fruit swinging from the poplar trees.

Who Ms. Aretha and her ministry was to Mama Tate and her Black Power generation cohort was of course a different story. Secular healing spirit avatar/Womanist Warrior-Queen icon/All the way live Black Madonna of the sorrow songs. There was no greater love. Can we even begin to count the ways? All the lyrical sensibility they needed was in Ms. Aretha's sound—a one-woman hallelujah choir that embodied every erg of emancipatory desire The Movement had exorcised and left writhing on the freedom train's killing floors.

The house of Black music contains many mansions and Ms. Aretha was an energy containment field for multitudes.

A speaker of the unspeakable. A whooping and a hollering screamer of the unscreamable.

In her indelible stage roles as Lady Soul and the Queen of Soul, she was holder of the second most well-earned and accurately hyperbolic honorific in all of R&B after Mr. Dynamite. To which we'd add High Priestess of her own All Souls Church—a globally expansive, many splended sanctuary where Ms. Aretha could stir up her erotic and ecclesiastical witch's brew under cover of Jesus and The Movement in all its pantheistic

Pan-Africanist glory. A stirring concoction of all things Black, pleasurable; and “ancient to the future” per The Art Ensemble of Chicago’s famous millenia-spanning description of that hoodoo You People love to hear done with phonics and song.

Duke Ellington liked to say the only musicians who interested him were those he considered “Beyond Category.” Max Roach, who considered the term jazz tantamount to calling it nigger music, believed that in the same way that folk speak of The Music of Bach, Mozart and Beethoven we need to reject the J word and begin publicly waving banners honoring The Music of Thelonious Monk, The Music of Charlie Parker, The Music of Billie Holiday et al. The Music of Aretha Franklin also belongs to that roll call and litany because she was also a genre unto herself. A Singularity unto Herself in the Nubian constellation of unbridled dark and performative stars.

Brother Max invoked Ms. Aretha when he defined the qualities he felt one needed to be anointed “a Master in Our Music.” In Max’s opinion, only when you can do what Ms. Aretha learned to do in her father’s church—make folk sigh, cry, laugh, shout, and signify with your instrument—only then can you be considered a “master” in the Black tradition. Ms. Aretha was a Queen of Swing, but the swing in her is less akin to Sarah Vaughn’s 1950s perfected conception of an improvising chanteuse and more aligned with that wild whooping and hollering freedom swing cats Ornette, Trane, and Albert Ayler got up to in the 60s. Ms. Aretha, in other words, was free with her harmonic and melodic feelings in ways we typically refer to as avant-garde. The plasticity and ferocity of Ms. Aretha’s vocal conception freaked top 40 radio’s tender nerves like taint nobody’s business if she did. Blasted her ululating voice in drive time to frightening heights while stirring us deep in our marrow. Leaping across octaves from a whisper to a scream with the quickness. Projecting an ancestral recall of both the holiness church in the wild and the devil’s whipping post.

Modern life was becoming full of new reasons to caterwaul out loud when Ayler, Hendrix and Ms. Aretha came along. The sources of the bloody murder were human and technological in origin. NASA’s Saturn rockets shooting for the moon; the bombing of our babies in Birmingham, the agonies which followed in various quarters for the assassinations of Medgar, King, X and The Kennedy boys, the napalm hellfire detonated on young and tender Vietnamese flesh; the existential panic and anxiety that came to Cold War America in the wake of Hiroshima and Nagasaki when it was revealed American cities could be annihilated as push-button remotely as Asian ones. The uptick in sexual release which increased upon access to pharmaceutical contraception provided its own background noise.

All of this is to say Ms. Aretha’s melismatic rollercoaster rides, her sonically promiscuous mingling of the excruciating and the ecstatic, never sounded gratuitous, screamed Zeitgeist with an immediacy that enchantingly suited the murderous routines and instant gratifications of the age. The blues had a banshee and they called it Rock Steady.

In his seminal 1967 essay “The Changing Same (R&B and the New Black Music,” Amiri Baraka states that James Brown’s screams were more radical than Ornette Coleman’s, but Aretha’s sanctifier sister-siren version was more radical than either in the clutch of our souls. Her ministry bonded her flock to her ululations as a means to take us ultimately to a power greater than ourselves. The vagaries and varieties of the human singing

voice make our vocal cords the most mysterious organ in the body. There is as of yet no science that can deconstruct the vocal legerdemain of Aretha Franklin, but there remains the African village kulcha of Detroit.

By all accounts Aretha Franklin was practically born singing, swinging and sermonizing in the manner we all became accustomed to. Berry Gordy and Smokey Robinson still reverently tell of spying her five-year-old self crooning away at the piano and sounding not so different than her adult superstar self.

The best improvisers tell you the most important part of playing is listening. Aretha's ears don't get as much dap as her pipes, but she must have been hearing well beyond her years at five, too. This raises the question of why in heaven's name does a five-year-old need a four-octave range and the perfect pitch of a Pavarotti or a Clifford Brown? The answer may lie in being hell-bent as a wee child on rejecting formal training and conjuring up a self-taught virtuoso out of your own whole cloth. Such a wily and resourceful soul may need to shut down the opposition with her gospel game way before her rap game gets strong.

Now when we talk about the jazz in Aretha Franklin we need to acknowledge that it was as unbridled as Ornette's, Trane's, and Ra's. But Ms. Aretha wasn't just vocally avant-garde as a mutha—she sometimes went Out There pianistically as well. Her slippery, wayward substitutions on the keys while duetting with Smokey Robinson on that *Soul Train* clip are ghostly and illmatic.

What we call grand style in Black music is arguably a matter of Zen. We'd say it comes down to your idiosyncratic way with personal timbre and syncopation, your instinct for ellipsis and erasure, all the notes you don't sing, or scream, and all the chasmic spaces in between the ones you do. Your entrances and exits matter.

How some folk electrify and ignite the oxygen in the room by simply showing up, breaking out. The miracle of the anticipated presence, the horror vacui of the dreaded void.

Wayne Shorter told Branford Marsalis that every saxophonist who fiended to become a true payer had to go up and personally greet every note. Ms. Aretha sounds like she not only greeted them but served 'em all a stacked plate of homecoming on occasion too.

Respect to those who greet All The Note notes and their other malcontents.

Our esteemed golden-era *Village Voice* colleague Gary Giddins recalls being an undergrad at Grinnell College and catching Cecil Taylor going to town on a lunchroom piano, while freestyling on the ivories to an Aretha album on the jukebox. How sad is it we'll never get to hear that colliding nebula of a duet in real time, freely rung out in cosmic Jericho collapsing concert form? Like CT and Trane, Ms. Aretha was That Alpha and That Omega with it: those consecrated field hollas to Infinity make you wanna throw up both your hands and say, "Look at how she did my life. And yours too."

– Greg Tate, critic and musician

State Funeral Officially a state funeral is defined as a public ceremony, observing the strict rules of protocol held to honor people of national significance. In America, most state funerals have been reserved for white men—particularly those with military histories. When I heard about the Queen's passing on August 16, 2018, I decided to travel from

LA to Detroit to attend her public memorial. I knew her city would give her the laying to rest—the state funeral—she deserved.

Making this trip was nothing short of a DJ pilgrimage. I owed her this praise and I wanted to be a witness. My flight landed and I stepped off the plane, light from commitment to minimalist travel. I picked up a rental and headed to my old stomping ground. I had lived in Detroit for a year and a half and managed to survive two winters. Though I moved there for love, I was always drawn to the city's living musical future, not just its history. I drove through familiar neighborhoods taking notice of the neocolonial hipster presence. I also held the complexity of what Detroit activists, scholars and artists were doing that complicated the narrative of gentrification. Detroit vs. Everybody.

It was 6 p.m., and the sun was setting against the backdrop of abandoned homes peopled with the ghosts of family memories. I made it to the Cass Corridor community, a few miles from where the public memorial would be held. I decided to drive by the venue hosting the service, the Charles H. Wright African-American Museum.

In the parking lot in front of the museum were a few parked police cars and about twenty people standing in line. The official start time was 9 a.m. the next day, but they were there twelve hours in advance to ensure a goodbye to the Queen. I parked my car and got out, excited to see the faces of people who grew up singing with Aretha.

To my surprise there were four Black women cops watching over the museum. When I walked up, they greeted me without a trace of aggression or suspicion. We shared a nod that confirmed each other's humanity. Under the circumstances they felt like family, and in my mind, they were state guards protecting royalty. The officers pointed me in the direction of where the people had begun to gather. I walked toward the front of the line and prepared myself to speak to the few people who were camped out with food, water and blankets for their own overnight festivities.

The first person in line was a man in a wheelchair. I told him that I had just flown in from California for the service and then asked him a question, "Papa, you staying out here all night?" His response: "Yeah baby, this is Motown." I returned to my car, checked into my room and retired for the evening feeling full.

The next morning, I woke up ready to send her off. I had made peace with her passing, and I knew that, in the name of Tramaine Hawkins' black funeral greatest hit, Aretha was "Going up Yonder." The fashion decision wasn't an easy one. How does one dress for a woman who carried the voice of Black America in her lungs? Aretha held the Black church blues beneath her floor length furs. Only my Sunday finest would do. I credit her for bringing me, a non-Christian believer, to the gospel. Because of Aretha I learned to think about the American Black church as an informal learning ground for supreme musicianship. Albertina Walker, The Caravans, Sam Cooke, and James Cleveland were just a few of the architects of bible soul that I had gotten to know through Ms. Franklin. And while Jesus remains a distant figure in my personal belief system, nothing can ever turn me away from the sound of Black faith.

I found my way back to the Charles H. Wright museum and immediately felt the pride in the streets. She was their Aunt Ree—mother of Black Excellence and sister of familiar pain.

The T-shirts being sold along the side of the museum were bearing Aretha's face throughout her years. Columbia Aretha, Atlantic Aretha, Gray Hat Obama Inauguration Aretha.

There were Black Muslims from the Nation of Islam (NOI) making use of stand-still traffic by handing out gift copies of their Aretha Franklin exclusive *Final Call* issue; inside was a special message from Farrakhan. This nuanced gesture made sense. The very first NOI mosque Temple #1 was founded by Farad Muhammad in Detroit and led by his appointed Supreme Minister Elijah Muhammad. I looked closely at the newspaper and noticed that the image of Aretha used on this Islamic newspaper was her standing behind the pulpit. The photo was taken from her second gospel album, *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism*, recorded at her father's New Bethel Baptist Church in 1987. This kind of inter-faith love coming from the Nation stood out. The respect for all that Aretha represented was made clear.

I parked the car a few blocks away and walked toward the museum where the Queen's body was being held. The atmosphere was that of an Aretha Franklin market place; buttons, mugs, bootlegged greatest hits CDs, and commemorative programs that highlighted Aretha's achievements. Cash economies and cooperative economies underlined the grieving. I joined the line knowing it would be one of the most memorable parts of my journey and, of course, there was music. The local radio station KISS FM set up a tent and spent the day blasting Aretha's hyper-familiar songs, some of the tunes were remixed and the bulk of selections were from her Atlantic years. The people, her people, sang and danced in line. They were paying tribute with rhythm.

"The last time we saw a crowd this big," one woman said, "was when Rosa Parks had her memorial here." After a harmonizing moan in agreement, another woman remembered, "Yeah, and Aretha sang at Rosa Parks' funeral, too."

Detroiters reminded each other that Rosa Parks and Aretha Franklin had public memorials at the same museum and private funerals at Greater Grace Temple. They were local stateswomen for whom Black imaginary flags were flying at half-mast. Yes, the world watched on, but only we could see them.

An older gentleman weighed in with more details, "You know Aretha will be buried next to her father in the same region of Rosa Parks at Woodlawn. Swanson Funeral did Sister Rosa's body, too." More harmonized moan agreement. Turns out that originally Rosa was set to be buried in a family plot at Woodlawn Cemetery. Instead she was entombed near her family in a mausoleum.

The line formed from Brush Street and circled around to East Warren Ave. As it moved, people continued with their city-specific oral histories. One of the most common topics in line was the question, "Who did the body?" The answer was Swanson Funeral Home.

We moved closer to the entrance of the museum, and by now, the DJs began to play later hits from the Aretha Franklin 80s and 90s catalog. Luther Vandross came to mind. He produced two of Aretha's albums from that period, *Jump to It* (1982) and *Get It Right* (1983). The DJ also played cuts from *Who's Zoomin' Who* (1985). It dawned on me that Aretha was an active artist from 1956 to 2017. During her career, no generation was deprived of a hit.

By afternoon, the line had grown with more folks stopping by during their lunch breaks. I saw Detroit residents from all walks of life, dressed in all kinds of styles. Black trans women, white gay men, Black houseless people, and the elderly, came together to share the spirit of the day, singing their favorite songs verbatim. There were people in hospital scrubs bidding their farewells at the end of their shifts from Detroit Medical Center next door.

We were now close enough to see Aretha's 1956 Cadillac, the actual car from her *Pink Cadillac* video, which sat outside the museum. Next to the Cadillac was a spectacular La Salle Ivory hearse. It was perfectly dramatic. Rosa Parks was escorted to her final resting place in the same model vehicle.

You could hear people's approving proclamations that "she looked good." The Swanson Funeral Home was under pressure to do the Queen justice. Judging by the murmurings of satisfaction in the crowd, expectations were not only met but exceeded. A group of about ten of us were now being ushered into the museum. From the entrance, I saw Aretha's body as she lay there in peace.

Aretha, was dressed in red from head to toe. Her fingernails were painted red, her earrings were red, her lips were red and Aretha wore something akin to Dorothy's (from *The Wiz*) ruby slippers. Her feet were crossed and she appeared to be in her element. Notably, her body lay in an epic 24k gold-plated casket that was lined with white satin and lace. Floral arrangements from local dignitaries circled the casket, and museum staff were there to hand out memorial programs. Protocol.

The first thought that came to me when I walked past her casket was that this was my first and last time seeing Aretha Franklin. I'd never seen her perform in concert, and I would never be given the opportunity to see her sing from her gut and her hips again. This was her final performance. The next day at her second public memorial, Aretha was in a new bronze casket wearing a different color—this time powder blue with silver slippers.

I had no choice but to follow Aretha's migration pattern between Los Angeles and Detroit to make it to her services. Both she and I lived in each city, and both she and I understood the magnitude of her passing and how it would reverberate through her childhood streets. We both knew that dignity, combined with a little showmanship, was the only thing that could match the volume of her life. Through Aretha, I was introduced to post-life costume changes.

Before leaving the memorial, I stood against the wall and watched more people show up with honor. A lady a few feet down from me on the same wall complimented my outfit. "Hey now, looking sharp, I like that hat." I knew how much of a compliment the word sharp meant to older Black Americans. I thanked her and together we watched the faces of people flowing out of the museum. She held on to a menthol cigarette, and I noticed how it danced between her fingers. She broke the silence between us again, this time with a story about Aretha. "You know, me and Aretha shared first boyfriends. His name was Willie Wilkerson." Then she switched subjects and said, "My mama was driven to the cemetery in the same hearse as Aretha."

I looked her in the face and took note of her well-arched eyebrows. "That must mean your mama was fierce, too," I said. Then I complimented her eyebrows. "Thank you baby," she said, "I use a little liquid eyeliner on them, but my kids get mad at me 'cause they say I

still dress like I'm young." We laughed together. She followed up with "Shit, I'm 73 but I ain't no old lady, I like to relax with a glass of White Zinfandel at the casino. I'm going to Vegas next month." Without another word, she lit the cigarette. Aretha's Detroit.

I walked away and headed back to my car and started reflecting on a piece I had read titled "We Must Bury Our Dead Twice," written by lesbian activist and writer Barbara Smith. It was a review of the 1987 funeral of James Baldwin for *Black/Out*, a magazine of the National Coalition for Black Lesbians and Gays. She described a key moment at the funeral, and it stood out to me. She had witnessed how the eulogy delivered by poet and playwright Amiri Baraka, the one where he proclaimed that James Baldwin was "God's black revolutionary mouth," generated spectacular energy throughout the church. She recalled how Baraka's radical recalling of Baldwin's life inspired a roaring applause and standing ovation. Smith couldn't imagine what would happen next. But she captured the moment in her description, "The only voice that could adequately follow Baraka's eulogy was Baldwin's own. A recording of him singing "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" washed over the stilled crowd."

Not until I left the viewing of Aretha did I realize that the songs selected to gather over Aretha's body at the Charles H. Wright Museum were from her Aretha's *Amazing Grace* album and "Precious Lord," another song rooted in the Black church funeral tradition, was on that album. I began to reflect on the number of people Aretha praised with her voice after their passing. She sang at the funerals of Martin Luther King Jr., Albertina Walker, James Cleveland, Mahalia Jackson, Dinah Washington, Clara Ward, Coleman Young, David Ruffin, Luther Vandross, Rosa Parks, and more. She sang for Nelson and Winnie Mandela, The Queen of England and Beatrix of the Netherlands. She sang for Presidents Carter, Clinton, Obama and reluctantly for Reagan and Bush. But perhaps nothing speaks to the royal status of the queen like the fact that singing over the body of Aretha Franklin at Charles H. Wright Museum was none other than Aretha Franklin.

Aretha Franklin sang at her own funeral.

The next day, friends and family gathered from around the nation to officially send Aretha home during a six-hour service that was broadcast all over the world. August 30, 2018, Aretha Franklin was laid to rest in her final costume and casket change. Our last memory of Aretha will be seeing her dressed in a sequined gown in a color that best describes her five-decade career—rose gold. Thank you, Aretha.

– DJ Lynnée Denise, multimedia artist and DJ Scholar

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Primary institutional affiliations are noted where available. It's worth noting that many of the authors cited here—Robert Christgau, Nelson George, and Greg Tate, among others—will forever be associated with the *Village Voice*, which after publishing longtime contributor Carol Cooper's Franklin retrospective announced that it was suspending publication on August 31, 2018. ■

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