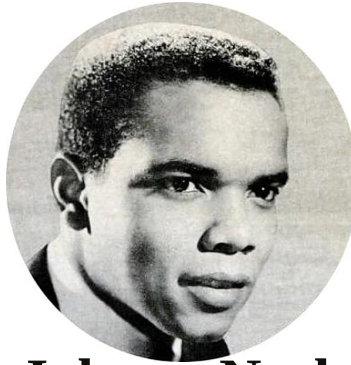




Johnny Nash

August 19, 1940 - October 6, 2020

Houston, Texas

Johnny Nash, the Houston singer who carried reggae onto American pop radio before most Americans knew the word, died at his home in Houston on October 6, 2020, surrounded by family. He was eighty.

John Lester Nash Jr. was born in Houston on August 19, 1940, and sang in the choir at Progressive New Hope Baptist Church as a boy. By thirteen he was covering rhythm and blues hits on a local KPRC television variety show called Matinee, and from 1956 he spent seven years on Arthur Godfrey's radio and television programs, a smooth young tenor the record companies tried to market as the next Johnny Mathis.

He was also a capable actor. In 1959 he played the lead in the film version of Louis Peterson's *Take a Giant Step*, an early Hollywood picture centered on a Black family, and won a prize for it at the Locarno film festival in Switzerland.

The turn that defined him came in Jamaica in the mid-1960s. At a Rastafarian gathering in Kingston he heard Bob Marley and the Wailers, and he soon signed Marley, Bunny Wailer, Peter Tosh and Rita Marley to a publishing deal through a company he ran with his partner Danny Sims. Nash cut records in Kingston, scored with the rocksteady single *Hold Me Tight* in 1968, and helped put Marley's songs, including *Stir It Up*, in front of listeners who had never heard of him.

In November 1972 his own *I Can See Clearly Now* reached number one on the Billboard Hot 100 and stayed four weeks, a sunny song that has been used ever since for every forecast, eye clinic and clean-windshield commercial imaginable. *Tears on My Pillow* topped the British chart in 1975. Children of the 1960s also knew his voice from the theme of the *Mighty Hercules* cartoon.

He stepped away from the spotlight for long stretches. Younger audiences found him again when I Can See Clearly Now turned up in film soundtracks decades later.

Services

Died of natural causes at his home in Houston, Texas, October 6, 2020, aged 80, surrounded by family. Singer, songwriter, actor and producer. Portrait: Joda Records promotional photograph (public domain), hosted by Notice Nearby.

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