

Robin Gibb of the Bee Gees dies

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Robin Gibb: He 'Started a Joke,' and Left Us in Tears

By Chris Willman | Stop The Presses! â€” 4 hours ago

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(photo: Frank Hoensch / Getty Images)Did a singer's name ever seem so prophetic and appropriate as in the case of Robin, one of the great male songbirds of rock's golden age? Bee Gee Robin Gibb succumbed to a longtime struggle with liver cancer Sunday, a spokesperson confirmed. The Rock & Roll Hall of Famer was 62.

His death dashed the hopes of Bee Gees fans who'd hoped that a miracle was in store after the singer emerged from a coma late last month. Prior to his regaining consciousness, his family had revealed that Gibb had been given only a 10 percent chance of surviving and seemed to be preparing the public for his imminent death. Despite the shock fans are now experiencing, family members surely feel grateful for the month they had with Gibb after his unexpected awakening.

Disco fans are feeling their mortality this weekend, as the death of one of the principal voices of the 15-times-platinum Saturday Night Fever soundtrack follows the passing of Donna Summer by a mere three days.

A statement read: "The family of Robin Gibb, of the Bee Gees, announce with great sadness that Robin passed away today following his long battle with cancer and intestinal surgery. The family have asked that their privacy is respected at this very difficult time."

[Robin Gibb & the Bee Gees' chart legacy]

Robin follows Maurice (a fellow Bee Gee) and Andy (a solo artist) in death, leaving eldest brother Barry as the sole survivor among the legendary Brothers Gibb. The Bee Gees had officially retired as a group in 2003, following Maurice's passing, although Barry announced in 2009 that there were tentative plans to revive the act as a duo -- a potential reunion that never came to be after Robin fell seriously ill in 2010.

Some of Robin's health problems seemed to echo the maladies suffered earlier by Maurice -- who was his twin. The cause of Maurice's death nine years ago was attributed to a twisted intestine. Robin first underwent emergency gastro-intestinal surgery in August 2010. In January of this year, he revealed that he'd been diagnosed with colon cancer, which had spread to the liver -- noting that "the strange thing is, I've never felt seriously ill." But he had further intestinal surgery in late March. And the combination of chemotherapy and repeated operations had contributed to all-around depletion, his doctors acknowledged.

Back in early February, Robin was still giving interviews and describing reports of his dire health as exaggerated. "I was diagnosed with a growth in my colon," he told the BBC then. "It was removed. And I've been treated for that by a brilliant doctor, and in their words 'the results have been spectacular.'" The growth, he explained, "is almost gone and I feel fantastic. Really from now on, it's just

what they could describe as a 'mopping-up' operation. I am very active and my sense of well-being is good."

[VIDEO: Robin Gibb, 1949-2012]

Sadly, that appears to have been the last time Gibb spoke with the press. Fans first realized the severity of the situation when he was unable to attend the premiere of his first classical work, Titanic Requiem, in London on April 10. A few days after that work's bittersweet debut, family members revealed that he had contracted pneumonia and was "fighting for his life."

Then, his rallying over the last few weeks was reported as nothing short of a miracle. "Robin has confounded his doctors by waking up from the coma he had slipped into after contracting pneumonia," a statement on his website read. "He remains in intensive care but is now fully conscious, able to speak to his loved ones and breathing on his own with an oxygen mask."

Gibbs' wife, Dwina, told an Irish newspaper that the family had been playing music to help rouse her husband -- and that the newly conscious singer had cried upon hearing Roy Orbison's "Crying." His doctor, Andrew Thillainayagam, told the press, "It is testament to Robin's extraordinary courage, iron will and deep reserves of physical strength that he has overcome quite incredible odds to get where he is now" -- while cautiously adding that "the road ahead remains uncertain."

That road ended Sunday, leaving Titanic Requiem to serve as his own unwitting requiem. He'd written the classical piece in conjunction with his son, Robin-John, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic, joining together original vocal and orchestral themes with excerpts from the Latin Mass for the Dead. Gibb had been intending to sing one vocal number at the premiere, but instead, "Don't Cry Alone" was offered via a recording, according to a four-star review in the London Telegraph.

It was only fitting, if you believe in symmetry, that "Don't Cry Alone" should be the last vocal number unveiled during his lifetime, since, for many, his notoriety began with the tearfulness of "I Started a Joke."

Although falsetto-wielding Barry was the most prominent and most-parodied Bee Gee in later years (see Justin Timberlake's comic impersonation on SNL), Robin was often considered the unofficial lead singer in the trio's late-'60s early days, and it was his tender vibrato that early fans first associated with the Brothers Gibb, via not just "I Started a Joke" but other hits like "I've Gotta Get a Message to You" and "New York Mining Disaster 1941."

It was Robin singing on the group's first No. 1 British hit, "Massachusetts," which also topped the charts in most of the territories of the world (except the U.S., where it made it to No. 11). He was a lad of 17 at the time, and, of course, had never even been to the title state.

[Flashback Rolling Stone interview]

Competition with Barry led Robin to quit the group and go solo in 1969, though he returned in 1971, in time to participate in "How Can You Mend a Broken Heart," their first No. 1 single in America. Their real renaissance, however, kicked off in 1975 when, in the earliest days of disco, they had a second No. 1 with "Jive Talkin'," followed by the similarly rhythmic "Nights on Broadway" and "You Should Be Dancing," which became the template for a block of Saturday Night Fever songs in 1978.

Fever revived "Jive" and "Dancing" along with introducing the instant dance-floor standards "Stayin' Alive," "Night Fever," "If I Can't

Have You," and "More Than a Woman," plus a ballad in the more traditional Bee Gees vein, "How Deep is Your Love." It was by far their greatest commercial triumph, and also, in a way, their unmaking, since only pockets of critics and fans were inclined to recall the pop chops and cred of their early albums after they couldn't shake their association with the waning disco tide.

The '80s and '90s were less kind to the brothers as hitmakers, although they continued to sell well overseas and never stopped being a concert draw. Befitting such a quintessential part of 20th century pop, they gave their last real concert on the last night of the millennium.

Critics and fans who would want to defend the Bee Gees' pre-Travolta reputation point to landmark albums like 1969's double-album *Odessa* -- which, of course, produced no major singles. But the more R&B-oriented smashes that came later provide their own defense, even if there was an inevitable longing among hardcore followers for the days when there was no beat to speak of except for the one inherent in the throb of Robin's vibrato. As the principal songwriter, it may have been brother Barry's job to start the jokes, and sobs, but in that early peak period, at least, it was Robin who finished them.

[Submitted by warchilin66]