



"Cross Connection"

Radio Ministry of Hope Wesleyan Church and Wells of Salvation Ministries
Ultimate Oldies Radio – FM 97.7 and 101.1, Huber Heights, Ohio



Series: Christian Messages In Secular Music

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Programs 65 and 66

"American Pie"

© Don McLean

It's remarkable how many famous musicians and singers have lost their lives in airplane crashes. In these two programs, we want to focus on those talented lives that were cut short by such tragedies, and remind all who study this information that we are never guaranteed a tomorrow. For this reason, the Bible emphasizes...

"Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" -- 2 Corinthians 6:2

The Song ¹

- Folk-rock song released on Don McLean's *American Pie* album in 1971
- Single was #1 U.S. hit for four weeks in 1972
- Abstract story of McLean's life starting with the tragic deaths of Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and J. P. Richardson (The Big Bopper) in a 1959 plane crash
 - Deemed "*the day the music died.*"
 - Named #5 song of 20th Century by Songs of the Century education project
 - Longest #1 Billboard Hot 100 hit of all time at 8 ½ + minutes
 - Inducted into Grammy Hall of Fame in 2002
- Lyrics subject of much curiosity and speculative interpretation
- Covered by The Brady Bunch, Tori Amos, Madonna and Garth Brooks
- Spawned numerous parody versions, such as:
 - "American Diet" ("I'm too heavy for my Chevy; I belong in a sty...")
 - "Parable Guy", about Jesus' ministries through the use of storytelling, by the Christian parody band ApologetiX in 1998
 - "Weird Al" Yankovic did Star Wars adaptation "The Saga Begins" in 1999
- Putative references: Buddy Holly, Don McLean, The Monotones, Don Cornell, Marty Robbins, The Big Bopper, Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones, James Dean, Elvis Presley, John Lennon, The Beatles, The Byrds, Karl Marx, Ritchie Valens, Hell's Angels, Janis Joplin, Waylon Jennings, Vladimir Lenin, and Mick Jagger

The Composer / Artist – Don McLean (1945-) ²

- American singer-songwriter. He is most famous for today's featured song
- Father from the Scottish Hebrides; mother from southern Italy
- Drew inspiration from folk music, particularly the group called the Weavers
- Recorded 1st studio sessions while still in prep school.
- Briefly attended Villanova University, where he became friend with Jim Croce
- Sang in cafes in LA, Washington D.C., New York City, and at Newport Folk Festival

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Pie

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don_McLean

- Recorded 1st album (*Tapestry*) in '69 at Berkeley, CA; rejected by 34 labels, then picked up by Mediarts, which was subsequently acquired by major label United Artists
 - Included the hit "Castles In The Air"
- 2nd album, *American Pie*, yielded hits "American Pie" and "Vincent"
- Other hits include "And I Love You So", Roy Orbison's "Crying", "Dreidel", "Since I Don't Have You" and "Wonderful Baby"
- Roberta Flack's "Killing Me Softly With His Song" was written about him after singer/songwriter Lori Lieberman saw him singing his composition "Empty Chairs" in concert
- Inaugurated into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2004

A long long time ago
 I can still remember how
 that music used to make me smile
 And I knew if I had my chance
 That I could make those people dance
 And maybe they'd be happy for a while
 But February made me shiver
 With every paper I'd deliver
 Bad news on the doorstep
 I couldn't take one more step
 I can't remember if I cried
 When I read about his widowed bride
 But something touched me deep inside
 The day the music died

{Refrain}

So, bye-bye, Miss American Pie
 Drove my chevy to the levee
 But the levee was dry
 And them good old boys were drinkin' whiskey and rye
 Singin' this'll be the day that I die
 This'll be the day that I die

Did you write the Book of Love
 And do you have faith in God above
 If the Bible tells you so
 Do you believe in rock n' roll
 Can music save your mortal soul
 And can you teach me how to dance real slow
 Well, I know that you're in love with him
 'Cause I saw you dancin' in the gym
 You both kicked off your shoes
 Man, I dig those rhythm & blues
 I was a lonely, teenage broncin' buck
 With a pink carnation and a pickup truck
 But I knew I was out of luck
 The day the music died
 I started singin'

{Refrain}

With this song, Don McLean immortalized "The day the music died" as 3 February 1959, when a chartered plane carrying Buddy Holly, The Big Bopper (J.P. Richardson) and Ritchie Valens crashed near Clear Lake Iowa, killing all aboard.

In a competition for available seats, Valens "won" his through a coin flip.

Waylon Jennings gave his seat up to Richardson, who was running a fever and had trouble fitting his stocky frame comfortably into the bus seats. When Holly learned that Jennings wasn't going to fly, he said, "Well, I hope your old bus freezes up." Jennings responded, "Well, I hope your plane crashes." This friendly banter of friends would haunt Jennings for years.³

Scriptures on the brevity of life:

- Job 14:1 - Few days, like a flower
- II Samuel 14:14 - Like water spilt on the ground
- Psalm 103:15-16 - Like grass, leaving no memory
- I Chronicles 29:15 - Like a shadow, it will not stay
- James 4:14 - Like a mist or the vapor from a pot
- Job 7:6-7 - Like a weaver's shuttle, or the wind
- Psalm 78:39 - Like a wind
- Psalm 90:9 - Like a sigh
- Job 9:25-26 - Like a swift messenger, a swift ship, or a swooping eagle

³ <http://www.fiftiesweb.com/crash.htm>

Now for ten years we've been on our own
And moss grows fat on a rollin' stone
But that's not how it used to be
When the Jester sang for the King and Queen
In a coat he borrowed from James Dean
In a voice that came from you and me
Oh, and while the King was looking down
The Jester stole his thorny crown
The courtroom was adjourned
No verdict was returned
And while Lenin read a book on Marx
The quartet practiced in the park
And we sang dirges in the dark
The day the music died
We were singin'

{Refrain}

Helter Skelter in a summer swelter
The birds flew off with a fallout shelter
Eight miles high and falling fast
It landed foul on the grass
The players tried for a forward pass
With the Jester on the sidelines in a cast
Now the half-time air was sweet perfume
While the Sergeants played a marching tune
We all got up to dance
Oh but we never got the chance
'Cause the players tried to take the field
The marching band refused to yield
Do you recall what was revealed
The day the music died
We started singing

{Refrain}

Oh, and there we were, all in one place
A generation lost in space
With no time left to start again
So come on, Jack, be nimble, Jack be quick
Jack Flash sat on a candlestick
'Cause fire is the devils only friend
Oh, and as I watched him on the stage
My hands were clenched in fists of rage
No angel born in Hell
Could break that Satan's spell
And as flames climbed high into the night
To light the sacrificial rite
I saw Satan laughing with delight
The day the music died
He was singing

{Refrain}

I met a girl who sang the blues

James 4:13-15 -- *"Now listen, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money. Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."*

Many have spent untold hours trying to figure out what these lyrics mean – the symbolism, references, people and events. Don McLean has never offered an explanation.

Plane crashes have claimed the lives of:

- The Bar-Kays
- The Big Bopper (J.P. Richardson)
- David Box
- Patsy Cline
- Cowboy Copas
- Jim Croce
- Keith Green
- John Denver
- Buddy Holly
- Lynyrd Skynyrd, Ronnie Van Zant
- Dino Martin
- Glenn Miller
- Rick Nelson
- Joe Dan Petty
- Otis Redding
- Jim Reeves
- Randy Rhoads
- Ritchie Valens
- Stevie Ray Vaughan
- Aaliyah
- Bill Graham

And I asked her for some happy news
But she just smiled and turned away
I went down to the sacred store
Where I'd heard the music years before
But the man there said the music wouldn't play

And in the streets the children screamed
The lovers cried, and the poets dreamed
But not a word was spoken
The church bells all were broken
And the three men I admire most
The Father, Son and the Holy Ghost
They caught the last train for the coast
The day the music died
And they were singin'

{Refrain}

Bye-bye, Miss American Pie
Drove my chevy to the levy
But the levy was dry
And them good old boys
 were drinking whiskey and rye
Singing this'll be the day that I die
They were singin'
Bye-bye, Miss American Pie
Drove my chevy to the levy
But the levy was dry
And them good old boys
 were drinking whiskey and rye
Singing this'll be the day that I die

Note for group discussion leader –

- Attached are 6 pages of information about other famous singers and musicians who have died as a result of airplane crashes.
- We recommend that you would review the accounts and circumstances described, play a song, or listen to an excerpt of a song by each of these artists.
- We suggest that, throughout this study, students would read and discuss the scriptures referenced on page 2 of these notes.

Final Thoughts:

Like characters in the Bible, sometimes we may tend to think that famous musicians are larger than life. But no one is above mortality. Death is no respecter of person... reaching to the young, rich and famous as readily as the old, poor and obscure.

Don't be obsessed by death. Be prepared to meet your Creator, and live each day in the light He graciously gives you. Tell those who are dear to you that you love them, and go forward to live the abundant life that Jesus wants for each of His followers!

* * * * *

Attachment: Accounts of musical artists who have passed away as a result of airplane crashes.

Some famous singers and musicians who have died in plane crashes:

(Source: <http://elvispelvis.com/airplanecrash.htm>)

The Bar-Kays':

Jimmy King (b. 1949; guitar), Ronnie Caldwell (b. 1948; organ), Phalin Jones (b. 1949; saxophone), and Carl Cunningham (b. 1949; drums). **The Bar-Kays were employed as Otis Redding's backing group on tour, and the tragic plane crash in 1967, which took his life, also claimed King, Caldwell, Jones and Cunningham.** James Alexander, who fortuitously missed the flight, put a new line-up together with Ben Cauley, the sole survivor of the accident. The Bar-Kays' are known for their instrumental hit, "Soul Finger"

Big Bopper: Age 29

(b. Jape Perry Richardson, 24 October 1930, Sabine Pass, Texas, USA, d. 3 February 1959). After working as a disc jockey in Beaumont, Richardson won a recording contract with Mercury, releasing two unsuccessful singles in 1957. The following year, under his radio monicker The Big Bopper, he recorded the ebullient Chantilly Lace, a rock 'n' roll classic, complete with blaring saxophone and an insistent guitar run. Backed with the satiric The Purple People Eater Meets The Witch Doctor, the disc was a transatlantic hit. The follow up, Big Bopper's Wedding underlined the singer's love of novelty and proved popular enough to win him a place on a tour with Buddy Holly and Ritchie Valens. **On 3 February 1959, a plane carrying the three stars crashed, leaving no survivors.**

David Box: Age 22

(b. Harold David Box, Sulphur Springs on 11 August 1943; d. 23 October 1964) After the death of Buddy Holly, the Crickets used various lead singers on their records. One was David Box who sang lead on the Crickets' recording of "Peggy Sue Got Married"...The song was among the last Cricket singles to be issued on Coral - and one of the very best released after Buddy died...David also worked with local band Buddy and the Kings. **Buddy Groves** vocal/guitar, **Carl Banks** bass and **Bill Daniels** presumably on drums. Daniels was a qualified pilot and the quartet hired a Cessna Skyhawk 172 to take them to a gig in Harris County on . **The plane crashed nose first and overturned on the return flight.** There were no survivors.

Patsy Cline: Age 30

(b. Virginia Patterson Hensley, 8 September 1932, Gore, near Winchester, Virginia, d. 5 March 1963). Patsy's manager, Randy Hughes, was the son-in-law of Cowboy Copas. In 1963 Randy flew Patsy to Kansas City for a benefit for the widow of a country disc jockey who had died in a car crash. The return journey was hampered by storms and poor visibility. **On 5 March 1963 Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas, Hawkshaw Hawkins and Randy Hughes were killed when their plane crashed in swamped woodlands in Camden, Tennessee, 85 miles from Nashville.** Identification was difficult as only Patsy's shoulders, the back of her head and right arm were in one recognizable piece. Another country star, Jack Anglin, of the duo Johnny And Jack, was killed on the way to her funeral. Patsy's single at the time of her death was, ironically, Leavin' On Your Mind.

Cowboy Copas: Age 49

(b. Lloyd Estel Copas, 15 July 1913, near Muskogee, Oklahoma, USA, d. 5 March 1963). Copas was raised on a small ranch and taught himself the fiddle and guitar before he was 10 years old. **His son-in-law, Randy Hughes, also managed Patsy Cline and all three were killed, along with Hawkshaw Hawkins, in a plane crash on 5 March 1963.** A few weeks later, Copas had a posthumous country hit with a record ironically entitled Goodbye Kisses.

Jim Croce: Age 30

(b. 10 January 1943, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, d. 20 September 1973).

Originally a university disc jockey, Croce played in various rock bands before moving to New York in 1967 where he performed in folk clubs. By 1969, he and his wife, Ingrid, were signed to Capitol Records for APPROACHING DAY. The album's failure led to Croce returning to Pennsylvania and taking on work as a truck driver and telephone engineer. Meanwhile, he continued with songwriting and, after sending demo tapes to former college friend and New York record producer, Tommy West, Croce secured a new deal with the ABC label. Croce's second album, YOU DON'T MESS AROUND WITH JIM, provided him with a US Top 10 hit in the title track and, along with Operator (That's Not The Way It Feels) helped establish Croce as a songwriter of distinction. In July 1973, he topped the US charts with the narrative Bad Bad Leroy Brown. Exactly two months later, **he died in a plane crash at Natchitoches, Louisiana. when the chartered Beechcraft D-18 snagged the top of a pecan tree during take-off.**

Keith Green: Age 28 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Green

Died on July 28, 1982, when the Cessna 414 leased by Last Days Ministries crashed after takeoff from the private airstrip located on the LDM property. The small two-engine plane was carrying eleven passengers and the pilot, Don Burmeister, for an aerial tour of the LDM property and the surrounding area. Green and two of his children, three year old Josiah, and two year old Bethany, were on board the plane, along with visiting missionaries John and Dede Smalley and their six children. All aboard the seven-seat aircraft were killed.

Among several causes, the NTSB determined that the crash was largely due to aircraft gross weight overload. The pilot, who was an experienced U.S. Marine Corps pilot, should have refused to take five more passengers than there were seats on the plane, but since military requirements put weight and balance responsibilities on the loadmaster of the flight and not the pilot, Burmeister may have neglected this responsibility by habit. With eleven passengers on board, the aircraft was considerably overloaded by nearly 450 pounds (202 kg) and laden center of gravity was located 4.5 inches (110 mm) past the maximum aft limit. Also considered is the fact that operator and pilot did not satisfy insurance requirements for aircraft familiarization for operation, and pilot's failure of several checkrides, leading to the revocation of his certificate shortly before the accident.

(from another source: <http://www.squidoo.com/keithgreen>) **Keith Gordon Green** (October 21, 1953 – July 28, 1982) was an American gospel singer, songwriter, musician, and Contemporary Christian Music artist originally from Sheepshead Bay, New York. Green is best known for his strong devotion to evangelical Christianity and his unwavering efforts to stir others to the same. Notable songs written by Green and/or his wife, Melody Green, include "Your Love Broke Through," "You Put This Love In My Heart," and "Asleep In The Light," as well as the popular modern hymns "O Lord, You're Beautiful" and "There Is A Redeemer."

John Denver: Age 53

(b. Henry John Deutschendorf Jr., 31 December 1943, Roswell, NM, d.12 October 1997, CA). One of America's most popular performers during the '70s, Denver's rise to fame began when he was 'discovered' in a Los Angeles night club. He initially joined the Back Porch Majority, a nursery group for the renowned New Christy Minstrels but, tiring of his role there, left for the Chad Mitchell Trio where he forged a reputation as a talented songwriter. One of his compositions, Leaving On A Jet Plane, provided an international hit for Peter, Paul And Mary, and this evocative song was the

highlight of Denver's debut album, RHYMES AND REASONS. He continued to enjoy a high profile throughout the rest of the decade and forged a concurrent acting career with his role in the film comedy OH, GOD with George Burns. However, although Denver became an unofficial musical ambassador with tours to Russia and China, his recording became less prolific as increasingly he devoted time to charitable work and ecological interests. A San Francisco television station reported that Denver may have crashed while trying to switch from one fuel tank to another. Both tanks were empty, KRON reported. **Denver was killed instantly in the crash of the Long-EZ experimental airplane he was piloting on October 12 , in Monterey Bay shortly after take off.** Denver, an experienced pilot, had taken delivery of the Y-shaped, futuristic looking plane just a day before the crash.

Buddy Holly: Age 22

(Charles Hardin Holley, 7 September 1936, Lubbock, Texas, d. 3 February 1959). Holly was one of the first major rock 'n' roll groundbreakers, and one of its most influential artists. Holly was an initial inductee into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986. On the afternoon of 1 February his tour played in Green Bay, Wisconsin but an evening show was cancelled owing to bad weather. The 2 February date at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa went ahead. It was following this show that Holly, Valens and the Big Bopper chartered a small plane to take them to the next date in Moorhead, Minnesota, rather than travel on the tour bus, which had a defective heater and had previously broken down several times. **Owing to the snowy weather the plane crashed minutes after takeoff, killing all three stars and the pilot.** (The tour actually continued after their deaths, with Bobby Vee, Jimmy Clanton and Frankie Avalon filling in).

Lynyrd Skynyrd / Ronnie Van Zant:

(d. 20 October 1977) With their tally of gold discs increasing each year and a series of sell-out tours, the band suffered an irrevocable setback in late 1977. **On 20 October, Van Zant, Steve Gaines, his sister and backup singer, Cassie and manager Dean Kilpatrick were killed in a plane crash en route from Greenville, South Carolina to Baton Rouge, Louisiana.** (The twin-engine Convair 240 plane short of fuel crashed into a swamp in Gillsburg, MS). Gary Rossington, Allen Collins, Billy Powell and Leon Wilkenson were all seriously injured but eventually recovered. That same month, Lynyrd Skynyrd's new album STREET SURVIVORS was withdrawn as the sleeve featured a macabre design of the band surrounded by flames.

*Ooh, ooh that smell
Can't you smell that smell?
Ooh, ooh that smell
The smell of death surrounds you.*

-- from "That Smell", released in 1977 on the album *Street Survivors*.

Dino Martin: Age 35

(Born: July 20, 1953 in Encino, CA ,Died: March 21, 1987 in Mount San Gorgonio, CA) Entertainer Dean Martin's son Dino Martin, who as member of '60s pop group Dino, Desi and Billy had a hit called "I'm a Fool," **killed in the crash [while flying] an Air National Guard [Phantom Fighter] jet in California's San Bernardino Mountains.**

Glenn Miller: Age 40

(Born: Mar 1, 1904 in Clarinda, IA, Died: Dec 15, 1944 in English Channel) Only Glenn Miller's decision to enlist in the Army stopped his orchestra's success. He did the near-impossible and organized the finest military jazz band ever heard, his Army Air Force

Band. By 1944, when it had relocated to London, it featured clarinetist Peanuts Hucko, pianist Mel Powell, drummer/singer Ray McKinley, trumpeter Bobby Nichols and sometimes a string section and a vocal group. Their version of "St. Louis Blues March" became famous and this group's broadcasts and radio transcriptions are well worth searching for. Glenn Miller flew across the English Channel in December 1944 with plans of setting up engagements on the Continent. **His plane was shot down (quite possibly in error by the Allies) and lost.** ~AMG or December 15, 1944 a cold, wet and foggy afternoon, Glenn Miller departed an RAF-Base, in England in a Norseman C-64 aircraft. The flight was to take Glenn Miller and other passengers to Paris. However, the flight never made it. **It is believed the aircraft encountered icing conditions over the English Channel and crashed.** Glenn Miller and his band had been performing for Allied Troops prior to the crash and was planning on putting on a show in Paris, France.

Rick Nelson: Age 45

(b. Eric Hilliard Nelson, 8 May 1940, Teaneck, New Jersey, d. 31 December 1985, De Kalb, Texas). One of his greatest moments as a pop singer occurred in the spring of 1961 when he issued the million-selling Travelin Man' backed with the exuberant Gene Pitney composition Hello Mary Lou. Shortly after the single topped the US charts, Nelson celebrated his 21st birthday and announced that he was changing his performing name from Ricky to Rick. A performance at Madison Square Garden in late 1971 underlined Nelson's difficulties at the time. Although he had recently issued the accomplished RICK SINGS NELSON, on which he wrote every track, the audience were clearly more interested in hearing his early '60s hits. Nelson responded by composing the sarcastic Garden Party, which reaffirmed his determination to go his own way. The single, ironically, went on to sell a million and was his last hit record. **On 31 December 1985, a chartered plane carrying him to a concert date in Dallas caught fire and crashed near De Kalb, Texas.**

Joe Dan Petty: Age 52

Grinderswitch (Died 8 January 2000, Macon, GA)

Longtime Allman Brothers Band guitar tech and former Grinderswitch bassist Joe Dan Petty was killed in a plane crash **Saturday (1/8/00) near the Herbert Smart Airport in Macon, Georgia... The accident occurred about 2:45 in the afternoon after the pilot reported fuel line problems and was attempting to land the aircraft in an opening.** Also aboard the plane was an unidentified second person, thought to be a friend of Joe Dan's and fellow pilot. It's not clear who was piloting the plane at the time of the accident. Joe Dan received his pilot's license about a year ago and had owned the plane for two years... Grinderswitch: Working in the commercial shadow of better-known acts, they counted as fans members of the Marshall Tucker Band and a lot of other musicians who felt they deserved a break. The group failed to emerge as much more than a top regional act and an opener for the Allmans and Charlie Daniels, among others, despite recording seven album between 1972 and 1982, first for Capricorn and later for Atlantic.

Otis Redding: Age 26

(September 1941, Dawson, Georgia, USA, d. 10 December 1967).

The son of a Baptist minister, Redding assimilated gospel music during his childhood and soon became interested in jump blues and R&B. He remained something of a cult figure until 1965 and the release of the magnificent OTIS BLUE in which original material nestled beside the Rolling Stones' Satisfaction and two songs by a further mentor, Sam Cooke. Redding's version of the Temptations' My Girl then became a UK hit, while the singer's popularity was further enhanced by the visit of the Hit The Road Stax revue in 1967. A triumphant appearance at the Monterey Pop Festival suggested that Redding was about to attract an even wider following but tragedy struck on 10 December 1967. **The light aircraft in which he was travelling plunged into Lake Monona, Madison, Wisconsin, killing the**

singer, his valet, the pilot and four members of the Bar-Kays. The wistful (Sittin' On) The Dock Of The Bay, a song Redding recorded just three days earlier, became his only million-seller and US pop number 1.

Jim Reeves: Age 40

(James Travis Reeves, b. 20 August 1923, Galloway, Texas, USA, d. 31 July 1964). His first singing work was with Moon Mullican's band in Beaumont, Texas and he worked as an announcer and singing disc jockey at KGRI in Henderson for several years. (Reeves bought the station in 1959). In November 1952 Reeves moved to KWKH in Shreveport, where his duties included hosting the "Louisiana Hayride." A land deal took him via private plane (he was a skilled amateur pilot) to Batesville, Arkansas, on July 30, 1964, with pianist Dean Manuel. **On July 30, while approaching Nashville on his return, the plane ran into a rainstorm and disappeared from radar.** Outside his Brentwood home, Marty Robbins heard something crash. It took two days to find the wreckage and the bodies.

Randy Rhoads: Age 25

(b. Randall William Rhoads, 6 Dec 1936, Santa Monica, CA, d. 19 March 1982). Possibly one of the greatest hard rock guitarists America ever produced, Randy Rhoads would, had his life not been so tragically curtailed in a freak airplane accident, be talked about in the same breath as Eddie Van Halen or even Jimmy Page. Randy Rhoads was the talented heavy metal guitarist who helped put Ozzy Osbourne back on the charts in the early 1980's. Whilst en route to Florida for further live shows the tour bus made an unscheduled stop where the driver's friend had a small aeroplane. **After taking up a couple of band members for a joy ride, Rhoads and a make-up girl were persuaded to enlist. The pilot, high on cocaine, seemingly aimed the aircraft at the empty tour bus and all passengers were killed.**

Ritchie Valens: Age 17

(b. Richard Steve Valenzuela, 13 May 1941, Los Angeles, California, USA, d. 3 February 1959, Iowa). Valens was the first major Hispanic-American rock star, the artist who popularized the classic '50s hit La Bamba. Valens also performed solo and was heard by Bob Keane of Del-Fi Records, who took him into Gold Star Studios to record several songs. (Keane also shortened the singer's name from Valenzuela to Valens and added the 't' to Richie). In October 1958 the single Donna/'La Bamba' was issued. It was actually the ballad Donna, written by Valens about his high school friend Donna Ludwig, that was, contrary to popular belief, the side of the record which was the bigger hit, reaching number 2. La Bamba, the b-side, only reached number 22 in the USA but is the more fondly-remembered song. **It was on 3 February 1959 when he, Buddy Holly and the Big Bopper were killed in an airplane crash following a concert in Clear Lake, Iowa.**

Stevie Ray Vaughan: Age 35

Born: Oct 3, 1954 in Dallas, TX; Died: Aug 27, 1990 in East Troy, WI
Sure, Robert Cray had the nascent groundswell's first Top 40 hit with March 1987's "Smoking Gun" (off of Strong Persuader), but it was Vaughan who sold millions of records and had the ability to galvanize arena-sized audiences with his incendiary performances. And in the final hours of his life, it was Vaughan who--by Eric Clapton's admission--emerged the victor in a good-ol'-fashioned cutting contest on a Wisconsin amphitheater stage, leaving the other world-class participants--Clapton, Cray, Buddy Guy, and Vaughan's brother Jimmie--all wondering to what heights he would eventually take his virtuosity. The question was answered when **the helicopter carrying Vaughan to Chicago after the concert slammed into a fog-shrouded hill near the amphitheater in the wee hours of August 27, 1990. He was dead--instantly--at 35.**

Aaliyah: Age 22

(born: Aaliyah Haughton, New York 16 January 1979; died Marsh Harbour, the Bahamas 25 August 2001), Aaliyah was at the forefront of the Nineties' mainstream acceptance of R&B which now sees acts like Destiny's Child and 3LW go straight into the US and UK pop charts. A teen idol who scored her first transatlantic hit with "Back and Forth" in 1994 at the age of 15 and remained a chart presence for the next seven years, she went on to model for the fashion designer Tommy Hilfiger and made her acting debut last year opposite the Chinese martial arts legend Jet Li in the film *Romeo Must Die...* The rhythm 'n' blues singer **was killed in a plane crash after a video shoot in the Bahamas.** She was 22.

NASSAU, Bahamas (CNN) -- The small aircraft that crashed...on the island of Abaco, killing singer Aaliyah and eight others, was overloaded by hundreds of pounds, officials said Thursday. The extra weight -- and the way in which it was distributed -- most likely contributed to the plane's crash shortly after takeoff, said John Frank, executive director of the Cessna Pilots' Association...Immediately after the crash Saturday at Marsh Harbour airport, airport employees told CNN that baggage handlers and the pilot of the Cessna 402 had complained before takeoff that the aircraft was overloaded with luggage, but the passengers insisted on taking everything with them.

Bill Graham: Age 60

Promoter

Bill Graham was the P.T. Barnum of rock and roll, an unparalleled showman who forever revolutionized the symbiotic relationship between artists and audiences. A catalyst behind the rise of the San Francisco psychedelic scene of the late 1960s, he almost single-handedly pioneered the business of concert promotion, his fusion of theatricality and professionalism introducing new standards in sound, lighting and stage design. Famed for mixing acts of various musical and racial backgrounds on his bills, Graham nurtured the careers of superstars and cult favorites alike, his influence extending from small club dates to stadium tours and festivals; despite no musical talent of his own, he remains one of the truly seminal figures of the rock era...**On the night of October 25, 1991, he and Bill Graham Presents staffers Steve Kahn and Melissa Gold were killed in a helicopter accident;** a free concert dubbed "Laughter, Love and Music" soon followed in their honor, headlined by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Santana, Aaron Neville and comedian Robin Williams. At the time of his death, Graham was 60 years old.