Whitney Houston, a multiplatinum pop/R&B singer who ruled the charts for decades beginning in the mid-1980s, has died. Houston was 48. Police responded to an emergency call at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Los Angeles at about 3:45 p.m. PT. Her death came on the eve of music's biggest night the Grammy Awards.

Whitney Elizabeth Houston was born in Newark, NJ, on August 9, 1963; her mother was gospel/R&B singer Cissy Houston. Her cousin was Dionne Warwick and Houston grew up around such star vocalists as Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, and Roberta Flack. "When I used to watch my mother sing, which was usually in church, that feeling, that soul, that thing-it's like electricity rolling through you," she recalled to Anthony DeCurtis of Rolling Stone.
By age 11, Houston was performing as a soloist in the junior gospel choir at her Baptist church; as a teenager, she began accompanying her mother in concert and went on to back artists like Lou Rawls and Chaka Khan.

Somewhat bizarrely, Houston's first recording as a featured vocalist was with Bill Laswell's experimental jazz-funk ensemble Material; their 1982 album *One Down* placed Houston alongside such unlikely avant-gardists as Archie Shepp and Fred Frith. The following year, Arista president Clive Davis heard Houston singing at a nightclub and offered her a record contract. Her first single appearance was a duet with Teddy Pendergrass, “Hold Me,” which missed the Top 40 in 1984.

Her self-titled debut album, released in March 1985, began a gradual ascent to the top of the charts. The first single, "You Give Good Love," made its way to the number three position and the second, a cover of the late-'70s hit "Saving All My Love for You," hit number one later that year. Houston received the 1986 Grammy award for best pop vocal performance and came home with five trophies from the US music awards as well. Two more singles also topped the charts: "How Will I Know" and
Houston cemented her superstar status on her next album, *Whitney*; despite the unimaginative title, it became the first album by a female artist to debut at number one, and sold over nine million copies. Its first four singles -- "I Wanna Dance with Somebody (Who Loves Me)" (another Grammy winner), "Didn't We Almost Have It All," "So Emotional," and "Where Do Broken Hearts Go" -- all hit number one, an amazing, record-setting run of seven straight.

It was at the Soul Train Music Awards in 1989 that Houston crossed paths with someone who would have a lasting effect on her life. She made the acquaintance of singer Bobby Brown, a popular "New Jack Swing" performer in his own right.

"After a year or so, I fell in love with Bobby," Houston explained after detailing her rebuff of his first proposal. "And when he asked to marry me the second time, I said yes." The couple was married in July 1992.
Prior to this, Houston recorded and released *I'm Your Baby Tonight*. The album was a slight disappointment; even so, *I'm Your Baby*, which featured the chart-topping single "All the Man That I Need," achieved triple platinum status. After two years, Houston went ahead with plans to star in *The Bodyguard*. Critical response to the film was mixed. Mixed reviews didn't affect *The Bodyguard*'s box-office success. It grossed $390 million worldwide by mid-1993. The soundtrack album, which featured six Houston performances, sold about 24 million copies. The biggest single generated from the soundtrack—and the longest-running number one single ever—was her rendition of Dolly Parton's "I Will Always Love You," which earned Houston two of her three Grammys in 1994. "I Will Always Love You" became the biggest single in pop music history. It set new records for sales and weeks at number one.

In late 1995, Houston starred in *Waiting to Exhale*, an adaptation of a popular novel by Terry McMillan about four black women struggling to find harmony in their lives. The soundtrack featured three songs by Houston. The following year she starred in *The Preacher's Wife*, about a young woman who is having difficulty in her marriage to a minister as they try to build a new church together. Though it was not critically well-received, she earned an NAACP Image Award in 1997 as outstanding lead actress for this role.

In 1998, Houston finally issued a new full-length album, *My Love Is Your Love*, her first in eight years. The album sold even fewer copies than *I'm Your Baby Tonight*, but it received Houston's most enthusiastic reviews in quite some time. Unfortunately, Houston was also back in the tabloids in early 2000; she was arrested in Hawaii when airline authorities reportedly found marijuana in her luggage (the charges were later dismissed). Speculation about Houston's personal life only grew when she was dropped from the Academy Awards telecast that March, officially because of a sore throat, but reputedly due to poor rehearsals and a generally out-of-it air.

Her personal issues became even more public through the reality television series *Being Bobby Brown*, and she eventually divorced her husband and went into intense rehabilitation. Houston separated from Bobby Brown in September 2006, the divorce was finalized on April 24, 2007.

Houston released her new album, *I Look to You*, on August 2009. The album's first two singles are "I Look to You" and "Million Dollar Bill." The album entered the Billboard 200 at No. 1, with Houston's best opening-week sales of 305,000 copies, marking Houston's first number one album since *The Bodyguard*, and Houston's first studio album to reach number one since 1987's *Whitney*. In May 2011, Houston enrolled in rehabilitation center again, as an out-patient, citing drug and alcohol problems. A representative for Houston said that it was a part of Houston's "longstanding recovery process."

At her peak, Whitney Houston was the golden girl of the music industry. From the middle 1980s to the late 1990s, she was one of the world's bestselling artists. She wowed audiences with effortless, powerful and peerless vocals that were rooted in the black church but made palatable to the masses with a pop sheen. "The biggest devil is me. I'm either my best friend or my worst enemy," Houston told ABC's Diane Sawyer in an infamous 2002 interview with then-husband Bobby Brown by her side.