

R&B legend Tyrone Davis succumbs after lengthy illness

By Karen E. Pride

Special to Sentinel-Voice

CHICAGO (NNPA) — Legendary rhythm and blues soul singer Tyrone Davis, who vaulted to fame with hits such as "Can I Change My Mind" and "Turn Back the Hands of Time," died recently at a hospital in west suburban Hinsdale. He was 66.

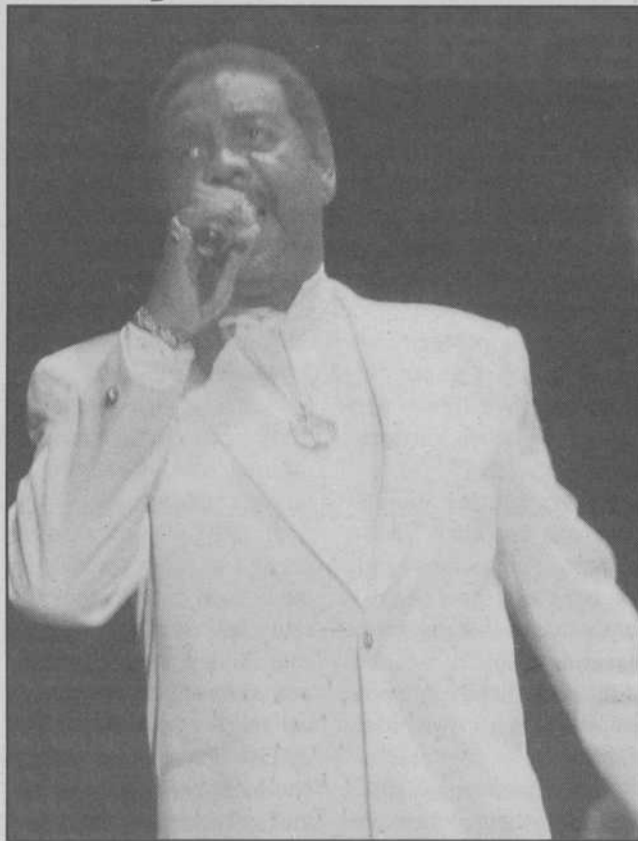
Surrounded by family and friends, Davis' death comes four months after suffering a stroke, which doctors said was made worse by him being a diabetic. He had remained in the hospital since October until his release last week.

"He went so gently and peacefully," his wife, Ann Davis, told the *Chicago Defender*. "I want to thank all his fans who supported us, especially during these last months."

Considered the "king of romantic Chicago Soul" — a survey on Billboard Magazine named him the 30th best R&B singer of all time — Davis' smooth and versatile baritone voice could handle everything from pop to soul to funk and blues.

Otis Clay, a fledgling gospel singer when he met Davis, said the two struck up a friendship that has lasted 44 years.

Clay said, "He was like a brother to me, and I don't mean that in a loose sense."



Tyrone Davis' hits included "Can I Change My Mind."

Clay said that they had made a pact early on that whichever one of them made it big first, he would pull the other one up with him.

"He got his when he recorded 'Can I Change My Mind' in 1968," said Clay. "Mine came about a year earlier with a tune called 'That's How It Is,' but people only remembered the line 'slap some sense in me.'" Davis' 1968 hit showcased his love-lorn pleading to full effect

and the song went all the way to number one on the R&B charts, and reached the pop Top Five as well.

Over his four-decade career, Davis recorded 38 albums. His last, "The Legendary Hall of Fame" — was released in September.

The singer's stylish class made him especially popular with female soul fans during a lengthy hit-making run that lasted throughout the '70s and '80s.

But Davis was a family man.

He married Ann at St. John's Church Community Baptist Church in Chicago 42 years ago, and the union produced five children.

She said that one of the things she really enjoyed with her husband was their trips together. "We went to Bellinzona, Switzerland, in 2002," she said. "We said that if we were 20 years younger, we would move to that place. We had wonderful vacations."

According to a news release, Davis was born May 4, 1938, in Greenville, Miss. He moved to Chicago in 1959,

eventually working "as a valet and chauffeur for blues man Freddie King."

Chicago's soul and blues scene was rich with a plethora of singers, and Davis quickly became friends with the likes of Clay, Little Milton and Bobby "Blue" Bland, performing in clubs on the city's west and south sides.

Davis hit the R&B Top 40 with steady regularity in the 1970s, including the Top Ten's "Could I Forget You," "I Had It All the Time," "Without You in My Life," and "There It Is."

In 1975, he scored his third number one R&B hit with "Turning Point."

After his stroke, longtime friend Alderwoman Dorothy Tillman organized a two-day tribute concert for Davis in November.

"I want to thank all the performers who came out for the concert," she said. "Jerry Butler, Buddy Guy, Denise LaSalle, Koko Taylor, Gene Chandler... all the people who came out to support him."

Ann Davis said that through the years she didn't realize how many people her husband's music touched.

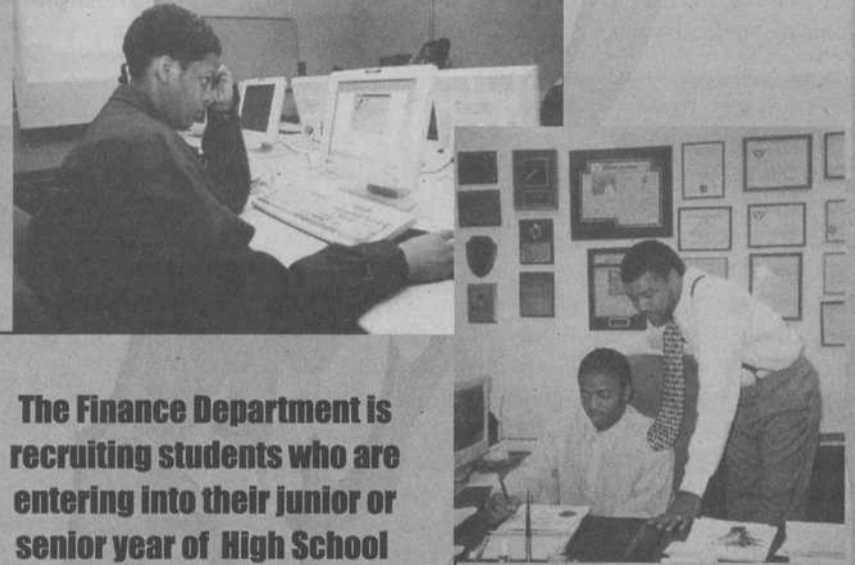
"The fans all over the world have been so grand," she said. "Tyrone was just one of God's gifts."



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Artist

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tirelessly during his illness. The strain and her constant focus on hoping he would get better consumed her she said, erasing segments of life from her memory, wiping out random events before and after his death. Her daughter's decision to pursue painting helped ground her mother who now manages the young artist's career.

Fennell resisted painting at first, mostly because all aspects of the business had consumed her childhood. Growing up in San Diego, she spent summers helping her father sell his wares at events like the Monterey and Newport Jazz Festivals held there.

"I was 7. You know, summers at the festivals were not cool. I wanted to be at the beach," Fennell recalls.

When she was 16, her family relocated to Las Vegas. She had plans to pursue a career in acting and fashion design. During her adolescence, her mother invested heavily in modeling classes and other programs to support and cultivate the Palo Verde High School graduate's dreams.

Interestingly, Fennell received no formal training in painting, with the exception of a couple of art classes where she learned a few basics. Ultimately, it was that she absorbed her father's skill and credits her discipline to all the time she spent with her dad.

"I would watch him from start to finish, the lines, the colors," said Simone. "I had a very close relationship with my father. [His death] was so hard, yet so many positive things came out of it. I was able to receive so

much. And when I go out to receive his public, they are now my public."

Fennell has an affinity for depicting women as both edgy and reserved. "It's like two parts of my personality. Painting is my way of expressing my inner desires, my hopes," she said. "The ladies are very sexy, very smooth... these are all things that I want to be."

Her works show women through vibrant hues of reddish-orange, blue-green and a myriad of other colors. Her "Expressions" presents a woman in the painting's foreground in an elegant black evening gown reminiscent of a runway model. The background is a magnificent splash of bright colors that bring to life tall buildings that conjure scenes of New York City.

A sister piece, "Serenity," depicts a laid back female dressed in black, but surrounded by more tranquil colors, which leaves the character seeming more inviting and less intimidating than her alter-ego in the first piece.

Fennell's future includes more painting and, possibly, a mother-daughter project, she said. If the two decide to combine their talent, it won't be the first family joint venture.

Fennell's father and her mother, a writer, collaborated on a line of greeting cards, but couldn't agree on what sold them — his images, or her words. So, they discontinued it. Fennell's original artwork ranges from \$125 to \$1,800. A variety of her paintings and abstracts will be displayed at the gala event.

For more information, call the 24-hour line, (702) 391-4105.