

Bittles' Magazine

As many of you are probably aware, **Frankie Knuckles**, the famous DJ and producer, passed away at his home in Chicago on the 31st of March 2014 from type II Diabetes-related complications. One of the originators of the house sound Frankie was much loved by everyone who had had the pleasure of meeting him, heard his music, or experienced the aural delight of one of his legendary DJ sets. By **JOHN BITTLES**

One of the few genuinely nice people to succeed in the music business he never abided by the moody DJ persona, was strictly anti-drugs and never wavered from supporting the music that he loved.



I was at work when I found out about the death of 'The Godfather of House'. Usually celebrity deaths don't affect me since there is more than enough loss encountered in everyday life to mourn the passing away of someone whom I didn't even know. That wasn't the case with **Frankie Knuckles** though. His death truly brought a great sadness to my heart since, even in the era of the moody DJ, he always came across as a genuinely nice person. Oh, and his music was pretty damn great!

Frankie Knuckles was born in New York on January 18th 1955 and first came to prominence through his DJ residency at the notoriously decadent *Continental Baths* where he played a luxurious mixture of soul and funk. Performing together with the legendary **Larry Levan** to an up for it predominantly gay crowd, those that were there still talk about these sets with a hushed sense of reverence.

Yet, it was at the *Warehouse* in Chicago where he was resident from 1977 to 1982 that his disco edits and passionate DJing began to see his name being dropped by taste makers in the know. It was also through the *Warehouse* club that 'House Music' is rumoured to have gotten its name, even though Frankie has since claimed that he never actually played any house there. In fact it was only after he moved to **Ron Hardy's Music Box** that house developed into the main focus of his sets. Later, he also became a resident at the infamous *Sound Factory*, covering for the mighty **Junior Vasquez**. It was during this period in the late 80s and early 90s that he was first deferentially referred to in dance music circles as the undisputed **Godfather of House**.

Playing a mixture of gospel and soulful house which formed his signature sound he became one of the very first superstar DJs of the 90s, playing at the best clubs all over the world. The *Hacienda* were one of the first to bring him to the UK, yet he was perhaps better known for his epic sets at *Delirium* in London where he would play to a fervent and ecstatic crowd.

While he was quite rightly known as one to the best DJs in the world, **Frankie Knuckles'** production work

never quite had the same impact as his masterful command of the dancefloor. Yet, *Let the Music Use You* which he released under the alias of **The Nightwriters** is one of the most emotionally moving piece of house music ever committed to wax. *Your Love* is another bona fide dance anthem with that instantly recognizable bassline which never fails to send shivers up and down the spine. *Tears*, *Whistle Song* and, or course, *Baby Wants to Ride* with **Jamie Principle** are also top tunes that saw respectable sales and huge critical success. Also be sure to check out *It's A Cold World* which is one of my all time faves and is house music with an absolutely gorgeous soul.



Frankie Knuckles was also loved for his wide selection of funky-assed remixes that took even the most commercial of pop tunes and gave them a spiritual makeover that moved the soul as much as the feet. Numerous remixes for **Michael Jackson**, **Chaka Khan** and **Diana Ross** saw his stock rise steadily until the term Frankie Knuckles remix was seen as a sign of quality by all. Yet, it is his re-rubs of **Electrabe 101**, **Alison Limerick**, **Pet Shop Boys** (*Left To My Own Devices* is a gem) and **Depeche Mode** which are pretty damn essential and are still vital to this day. Able to raise the roof in any club, these songs can inject a ray of sunshine and love onto even the darkest of dancefloors.

In 2004 the city of Chicago named a street where the *Warehouse* used to be *Frankie Knuckles Way* to highlight the cultural impact he had on the city where he helped create that musical movement called house. At the same time the 25th August 2004 was also declared to be *Frankie Knuckles day*. After that, being inducted into the *Dance Music Hall of Fame* in 2005 probably didn't seem like such a big deal.

Still playing fantastic sets all over the world right up until the end, it is his deep-rooted enthusiastic love of the house music that made his name which will live longest in most peoples minds. He tended to talk about music in hushed spiritual terms recognising that a great song is so much more than a shallow collection of sounds. **Frankie Knuckles** was someone who lived music, breathed music, and who leaves behind a legacy that is rivalled by none.

Just a couple of weeks ago *Xlr8tr Magazine* gave us an unearthed and exclusive mix by **Frankie Knuckles** from his residency at The Sound Factory in 1990 which you can [hear/download here](#) For me, it perfectly captures the musicality and melody at the heart of his sets which is one of the many reasons why he will always be so revered and loved.

| JOHN BITTLES