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# He Was Only Visiting This Planet: Larry Norman 4/8/47 – 2/24/08

Fred Mills  
February 25, 2008

Larry Norman, the legendary musician and Christian rocker, died early Sunday morning at his home in Corpus Christi, Texas, from heart failure. His mother, siblings and several friends were with him at the time of his (peaceful) death. Norman was 60.

Though Norman was often referred to as “the Father of Christian Rock”— he was often associated with the countercultural Jesus People movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s—in some secular quarters he was also affectionately called “the Frank Zappa of Christian Rock” due to his outspokenness about the record industry, his uncompromising approach to making music and his sometimes eccentric ways. His career began in 1966 as frontperson for pop/psychedelic group People!, who had a huge hit single in 1968 with the Chris White-penned “I Love You.” The album of the same name also contained the terrific “We Need A Whole Lot More Jesus (and a Lot Less Rock ‘n’ Roll)” as well as the aptly-titled 13-minute “The Epic” (which

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took up all of side two).

Later, as a solo artist, Norman would record for both major labels (Verve, which issued the brilliant *Only Visiting This Planet*—one song on the album spawned the catch phrase, “Why should the devil have all the good music?”) and indie (Nashville’s Impact; Hollywood’s One Way), although by the mid ‘70s he’d established his own grassroots label, Solid Rock, in order to release his music without outside interference. In the ‘80s he also started the Phydeaux label as a means to counteract the spread of bootleg LPs bearing his name, for by that point he was beginning to be rediscovered by younger fans and musicians who’d heard of his complex, engaging, emotional music but had a hard time tracking down what were often limited edition pressings.

Speaking personally, Norman was a huge inspiration to me. I was smitten early on by the first People! album, and when I later encountered his solo work I didn’t really make a distinction between secular/nonsecular; it was all rock ‘n’ roll to me. Whether he was in Dylanesque troubadour mode, jamming in full-on blues-rock mode or channeling his inner John, Paul, George and Ringo pop savant, he had an instinctive way of drawing the listener in—and his message of Faith was there if you wanted to listen to that, too. And as a record collector, it was a delightful challenge to me trying to dig up his records at record fairs, mail order or, later, internet auctions.

Among Norman’s more high profile fans were U2 and the Pixies’ Black Francis—the latter, upon going solo, covered Norman’s “Six-Sixty-Six” on the debut album from Frank Black and the Catholics. Reportedly, Norman had been working on an album featuring contributions from Black and Modest Mouse’s Isaac Brock. In May, the Portland-based Arena Rock label plans to issue a 20-song retrospective of Norman’s work, *Larry Norman: The Anthology*. You can read more details about it at [the Arena Rock website](#). There’s also a good overview of Norman and his career at [his Wikipedia entry](#).

In 2001 Norman was inducted into the Gospel Music Association’s Hall of Fame as a solo artist, then in 2007 his rock credentials were formally recognized when he was inducted into the San Jose Rock Hall of Fame, both as a member of People! and as a solo artist.

This morning a message was posted by Norman’s brother Charles at the LarryNorman.com website that read, in part:

“Our friend and my wonderful brother Larry passed away at 2:45 Sunday morning. Kristin and I were with him, holding his hands and sitting in bed with him when his heart finally slowed to a stop. We spent this past week laughing, singing, and praying with him, and all the while he had us taking notes on new song ideas and instructions on how to continue his ministry and art.

“Yesterday afternoon he knew he was going to go home to God very soon and he dictated the following message to you while his friend Allen Fleming typed these words into Larry’s computer:

I feel like a prize in a box of cracker jacks with God's hand reaching down to pick me up. I have been under medical care for months. My wounds are getting bigger. I have trouble breathing. I am ready to fly home.

My brother Charles is right, I won't be here much longer. I can't do anything about it. My heart is too weak. I want to say goodbye to everyone. In the past you have generously supported me with prayer and finance and we will probably still need financial help.

My plan is to be buried in a simple pine box with some flowers inside. But still it will be costly because of funeral arrangement, transportation to the gravesite, entombment, coordination, legal papers etc. However money is not really what I need, I want to say I love you.

I'd like to push back the darkness with my bravest effort. There will be a funeral posted here on the website, in case some of you want to attend. We are not sure of the date when I will die. Goodbye, farewell, we will meet again.

Goodbye, farewell, we'll meet again  
Somewhere beyond the sky.  
I pray that you will stay with God  
Goodbye, my friends, goodbye.  
—Larry

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"I want the people to know that He saved my soul but I still like to listen to the radio/ They say rock and roll is wrong give you one more chance/ I say I feel so good I gotta get up and dance/ There's nothing wrong with playing blues licks/ If you gotta reason tell me to my face/ Why should the Devil have all the good music" -- Larry Norman, "Why Should The Devil Have All The Good Music," *Only Visiting This Planet*, 1972

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