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Larry Norman, Singer of Christian Rock Music, Dies at 60

By DENNIS HEVESI
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Larry Norman, a singer and songwriter considered by many to be the father of Christian rock despite years of being shunned by more traditional Christians, died on Feb. 24 at his home in Salem, Ore. He was 60.



Ron Harris/Associated Press

Larry Norman in 2007.

The cause was heart failure, his brother, Charles, said.

Although most of Mr. Norman's dozens of albums, recorded over nearly 40 years, carried conventional spiritual messages, his hippie-length hair, ragged jeans and sometimes radical social themes kept his recordings off the racks of most Bible stores for much of his career. Some of his songs protested racism and poverty; others tried to raise awareness of sexually transmitted diseases.

With its hard-rock rhythm and volume, Mr. Norman's 1972 song "Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?" especially rattled devotees of traditional hymns.

Still, according to his profile for the Gospel Music Hall of Fame, into which he was inducted in 2001, it was Mr. Norman "who first combined rock 'n' roll with Christian lyrics."

"His style of music had been controversial for almost 15 years before the Jesus Movement sprang up," according to the profile, which but "in later years he began to gain wider acceptance."

A 1995 article by Nicholas Dawidoff in The New York Times Magazine about the rise of Christian rock said: "Contemporary Christian music (C.C.M., to industry insiders) was created in the late 1950s by a guitar-strumming, longhaired Jesus freak named Larry Norman, who sang hymns about venereal disease to astonished parishioners in California churches. Sometimes Norman was invited back. Mostly he wasn't."

[Larry David](#) Norman was born in Corpus Christi, Tex., on April 8, 1947, one of four children of Joe and Margaret Norman. His father was a high school English teacher. The family moved to California in the 1950s, and Larry began performing his own rock 'n'

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roll songs at school.

Besides his brother, Charles, of Salem, Ore., Mr. Norman is survived by two sisters, Kristy Norman, also of Salem, and Nancy Overmeyer of Davis, Calif.; and a son, Michael, of Portland, Ore.

In the 1960s, Mr. Norman moved to San Jose and began playing with a band called People! The band was signed by Capitol Records and began opening for the [Grateful Dead](#), [the Doors](#), the [Byrds](#) and other rock groups.

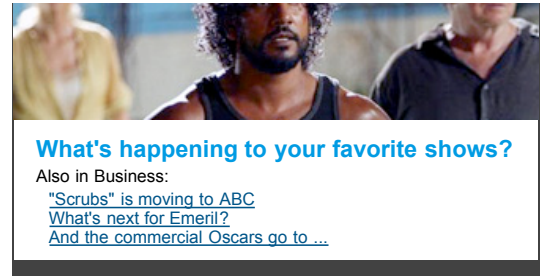
Mr. Norman left that band in the early '70s and later started his own record label, Solid Rock. His first album was titled "We Need a Whole Lot More of Jesus, and a Lot Less Rock and Roll."

That song's lyrics departed from the message of "Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?"

Part of the controversial 1972 song says: "They say rock 'n' roll is wrong, we'll give you a chance./I say I feel so good I gotta get up and dance." Another part says: "There's nothing wrong with what I play./'Cause Jesus is the rock and he rolled my blues away."

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