

Johnny Hallyday

Jean-Philippe Léo Smet; (15 June 1943 – 5 December 2017), better known by his stage name **Johnny Hallyday**, was a French rock and roll and pop singer and actor, credited for having brought rock and roll to France.

During a career spanning 57 years, he released 79 albums and sold more than 110 million records worldwide, mainly in the French-speaking world, making him one of the best-selling artists in the world. He had five diamond albums, 40 golden albums, 22 platinum albums and earned ten *Victoires de la Musique*. He sang an estimated 1,154 songs and performed 540 duets with 187 artists. Credited for his strong voice and his spectacular shows, he sometimes arrived by entering a stadium through the crowd and once by jumping from a helicopter above the Stade de France, where he performed 9 times. Among his 3,257 shows completed in 187 tours, the most memorable were at Parc des Princes in 1993, at the Stade de France in 1998, just after France's win in the 1998 FIFA World Cup, as well as at the Eiffel Tower in 2000, which had record-breaking ticket sales for a French artist. A million spectators gathered to see his performance at the Eiffel Tower, with some 10 million watching on television.

Usually working with the best French artists and musicians of his time, he collaborated with Charles Aznavour, Michel Berger and Jean-Jacques Goldman. Hugely popular in France, he was referred to as simply "Johnny" and seen as a "national monument" and a part of the French cultural legacy. He was a symbol of the Trente Glorieuses when he emerged in 1960 and a familiar figure to four generations. More than 2,500 magazine covers and 190 books were dedicated to him during his lifetime, making him one of the people most widely covered by the media in France. His death from cancer in 2017 was followed by a "popular tribute" during which a million people attended the procession and 15 million others watched the ceremony on TV. He remained relatively unknown in the English-speaking world, where he was dubbed "the biggest rock star you've never heard of" and introduced as the French version of Elvis Presley.

Early life

Jean-Philippe Smet was born in the 9th arrondissement of Paris on 15 June 1943 to a Belgian father, Léon Smet, and a French mother, Huguette Eugénie Pierrette Clerc. Léon Smet, who worked as a nightclub performer, left his wife and son a few months later. Clerc started a modeling career, which left her with little time to care for her son.^[1] Hallyday grew up with his aunt, Hélène Mar, and took his stage name from a cousin-in-law from Oklahoma (Lemoine Ketcham) who performed as Lee Halliday. The latter called Smet "Johnny" and became a father figure, introducing him to American music.

Career

Influenced by Elvis Presley and the 1950s rock n' roll revolution, Hallyday became known for singing rock 'n' roll in French. His debut single, "Laisse les filles", was released on the Vogue label in March 1960. His first album, *Hello Johnny*, was released in 1960. In 1961, his French-language cover of "Let's Twist Again", "Viens

Danser Le Twist", sold over one million copies and was awarded a gold disc. It topped almost every European chart, although the track did not appear in the UK Singles Chart. He appeared on the American *The Ed Sullivan Show* with American singing star Connie Francis in a show that was taped at the Moulin Rouge nightclub in Paris. He staged many appearances in the Paris Olympia under the management of Bruno Coquatrix. For their first concert, The Jimi Hendrix Experience opened for Johnny Hallyday in Nancy on 14 October 1966. Film footage from October 1966 exists of Hallyday partying with Hendrix, his manager Chas Chandler and others. He also socialised with Keith Richards and Bob Dylan.

At the end of the 1960s, Hallyday made a string of albums with Foreigner's Mick Jones and Tommy Brown as musical directors, and Big Jim Sullivan, Bobby Graham and Jimmy Page as session musicians. These are *Jeune homme*, *Rivière... Ouvre ton lit* (also known as *Je suis né dans la rue*) and *Vie. On Je suis né dans la rue*, Hallyday hired both Peter Frampton and the Small Faces and they all play on most of the tracks on the album. Steve Marriott and Ronnie Lane of the Small Faces contributed their compositions "Amen (Bang Bang)", "Reclamation (News Report)", and "Regarde pour moi (What You Will)" to the album. "Amen" is a French-language variation on "That Man", a previously-released 1967 Small Faces song played in a heavy rock style. Tensions between the Small Faces during the recording sessions led to Marriott leaving the band and forming Humble Pie with Frampton, and rearranged English language versions of both "Reclamation (News Report)" and "Regarde pour moi (What You Will)" appeared on Humble Pie's debut LP of 1969. Often forgotten is Hallyday's non-LP single and EP track "Que je t'aime" from the same sessions. By 1969 alone, his record sales exceeded twelve million units.

One of Hallyday's later concerts, *100% Johnny: Live à la tour Eiffel* in 2000, attracted an audience of 500,000 and 9.5 million television viewers (the show was broadcast live on French TV). In December 2005, Hallyday had his third number-one single on the French SNEP singles chart since its establishment in 1984, "Mon plus beau Noël" (after "Tous ensemble" and "Marie"), dedicated to his adopted daughter Jade. Shortly before announcing his retirement from touring in 2007, he released a blues-flavored album, *Le Cœur d'un homme*. In addition to the lead single "Always", *Le Cœur d'un homme* features "T'aimer si mal", a duet with blues musician Taj Mahal and "I Am the Blues", an English-language song (uncharacteristically for Hallyday) written by U2's lead singer Bono. His next album, *Ça ne finira jamais*, released in 2008, another No. 1 on the French album chart, and its lead single, "Ça n'finira jamais", also reached No. 1. Hallyday's album *Tour 66: Stade de France 2009* was a live set recorded at Stade de France during his farewell tour. In 2011 Hallyday released album *Jamais seul*, recorded with Matthieu Chedid, and started touring again. In 2012 he gave concerts in different countries, including Russia, and released the album *L'Attente*. Later Hallyday released two live albums, *On Stage* and *Born Rocker Tour* (a recording of his 70th anniversary concerts in Bercy and Theatre de Paris). Albums named *Rester Vivant* and *De L'Amour* were released in 2014 and 2015 respectively. In 2015–2016 Hallyday had the *Rester Vivant* Tour. A concert in Brussels was released as a live album in 2016.

Personal life

Marriages and children

Hallyday was married five times, including twice to the same woman, with the first four marriages ending in divorce. His last marriage was his longest, lasting twenty-one years.

His first marriage was to French singer Sylvie Vartan, lasting fifteen years from 1965 to 1980. Their son David was born in 1966. His second marriage to Babeth Étienne was his shortest, lasting for 65 days. Hallyday had a four-year relationship with French actress Nathalie Baye. Their daughter Laura was born in 1983. His third and fourth marriages were to the same woman, Adeline Blondieau, from 1990 to 1992, and from 1994 to 1995. Officiated by Nicolas Sarkozy, his fifth and final marriage was to Læticia Boudou from 1996 until his death. The couple adopted two girls from Vietnam: Jade Odette Désirée, born 3 August 2004 (formerly Bui Thị Hoà), in November 2004, and Joy in 2008.

Illness and death

In July 2009, Hallyday was diagnosed with colon cancer, and underwent surgery. On 26 November 2009, Hallyday underwent surgery in Paris to repair a herniated disc. He suffered complications and was admitted to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. Doctors announced that they had put Hallyday into a medically-induced coma so they could repair lesions that had formed as a result of the surgery, and to relieve his pain. On 17 December 2009, Hallyday and his wife started legal proceedings against Stephane Delajoux, the doctor who had performed the original surgery. The conflict was resolved in February 2012 following Delajoux's vindication by medical investigators.

Hallyday died of lung cancer at 10:10 pm on 5 December 2017 in Marnes-la-Coquette, near Paris, at the age of 74. French President Emmanuel Macron paid tribute, saying he "transcended generations and is etched in the memory of the French people". On 9 December, his funeral was held in Paris; 900,000 lined the Champs-Élysées as his body was taken to the Madeleine Church. The service was attended by Macron and two of his predecessors.

He was buried on the French Caribbean island of Saint Barthélemy in the cemetery of Lorient parish church (*Église de Lorient*) on 11 December 2017.

In February 2018, his two oldest children, David and Laura, announced that they were contesting his will, which left his entire estate to his last wife Læticia and their two adopted children. The will was drafted in the US, and their lawyers contended that this violated French law, which prevents children from being disinherited.

Legacy

Hallyday was once called "the French Elvis". The *Daily Beast* described Hallyday as "a hip swiveling, leather-clad Gallic answer to Elvis Presley who shook up his home country's music scene with American-style rock-n-roll and bad-boy antics." He remained largely unknown outside the francophone world and was sometimes described as "the biggest rock star you've never heard of" in English-speaking countries. He was made *Chevalier* (Knight) of the Legion of Honour in 1997 and Officer of the Order of the Crown (Belgium) in 2001.