

Great Singers

6 Articles

Check articles you have read:

☐

Leontyne Price
239 words

☐

Billie Holiday
268 words

☐

Ella Fitzgerald
183 words

☐

Louis Armstrong
336 words

☐

Pete Seeger
226 words

☐

Frank Sinatra
238 words

Leontyne Price

The text is from “America’s Story from America’s Library” by the Library of Congress.



interview with Leontyne Price in 2008

Do you ever imagine yourself winning a Grammy award? Singer Leontyne Price won 18 Grammy awards, but it wasn't winning an award that first inspired her. When she was a little girl, Price heard the legendary African American singer Marian Anderson.

"When I saw this wonderful woman come from the wings in this white satin dress," she said, "I knew instantly: one of these days, I'm going to come out of the wings . . . The light dawned. It was a magic moment."

Lyric soprano Leontyne Price was born on February 10, 1927, in Laurel, Mississippi. She was only five or six years old when she started performing. . . .

Price caught the performance bug when her parents bought her a toy piano. "I was center stage from the time I received that toy piano . . . I had the disease then . . ."

Price attended the Julliard School of Music and sang the role of Bess in the American opera *Porgy and Bess* in New York City from 1952 to 1954. She was the first African American to sing opera on television, but she still had to fight racial prejudice. Despite the praise of European critics and her enormous popularity at home, Price did not appear at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City until 1961. One of her many awards is the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Price came a long way from that day she heard Marian Anderson sing.

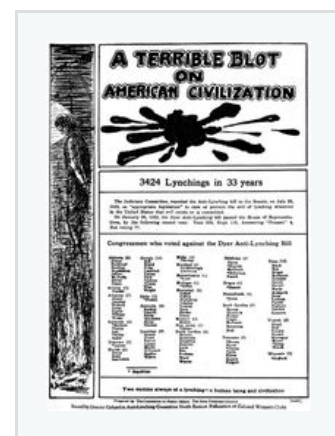
Billie Holiday

The text and images are from "America's Story from America's Library" by the Library of Congress.

This lady could sing the blues! Jazz singer Billie Holiday, later nicknamed "Lady Day," was born on April 7, 1915, in Baltimore, Maryland. In her autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues*, Holiday says, "Mom and Pop were just a couple of kids when they got married; he was 18, she was 16, and I was three." Despite a challenging childhood and no formal musical training, Billie Holiday made her professional singing debut in Harlem nightclubs in 1931. By 1933, she had made her first recordings.

...

Born Eleanora Fagan, she gave herself the stage name Billie after Billie Dove, an early movie star. While becoming a star, Holiday faced racism. Some laws created separate facilities, public spaces, and seats on buses for blacks, and some restaurants would serve only white people. As a result, Holiday sometimes found herself singing in clubs that refused service to blacks. Her 1939 version of "Strange Fruit," a song about lynching, was described as the most haunting and sad "expression of protest against man's inhumanity to man that has ever been made in the form of vocal jazz."



Holiday sang her heart out about the inhumanity she experienced as an African American.



Billie Holiday worked with many jazz greats including Count Basie and Benny Goodman.

She sang in small clubs, large concert halls, and the film *New Orleans*. She even arranged and composed her own songs such as "I Love My Man" and "God Bless the Child." Many people mourned the loss of "Lady Day" when she died in New York at the age of 44. . . .

Lady Day sings her life: Billie Holiday in 1947.

Ella Fitzgerald

The text and images are from "America's Story from America's Library" by the Library of Congress.

Jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald could sing like a saxophone. . . . April 25, 1918, is the day she was born in Newport News, Virginia. She mastered a technique called "scat" in which the singer makes up nonsense syllables to imitate musical instruments: Skee-ba-doobie-do-wah.

Ella Fitzgerald first showcased her amazing talents during Amateur Night at Harlem's famous Apollo Theater. The crowds loved Ella, who went on to sing with several groups and many well-known artists such as Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie. She made her first recordings in 1935, then went on to record 19 albums from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s!



Ella Fitzgerald, one of the leading jazz singers of all time

In recordings, concerts, and television appearances, Ella Fitzgerald recorded hundreds of songs by great American songwriters such as Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Johnny Mercer, and Irving Berlin. Her unmatched style became nationally recognized and still is.

Though scatting may date back to West Africa, Fitzgerald, along with Louis Armstrong, made it popular in the United States. . . .



Ella sings to the crowd while Dizzy Gillespie listens, 1947.

Louis Armstrong

The text and images are from "America's Story from America's Library" by the Library of Congress.



Louis Armstrong and his trumpet -- more than anyone else he laid the foundation for modern jazz.

Louis Armstrong, was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on August 4, 1901 (according to the most recent research), in the poorest section of town. He overcame poverty to become one of the most important people in the history of music.

Louis Armstrong was called "the single most important figure in the history of jazz" by *Billboard* magazine, a publication that tracks the recording industry. The jazz magazine *Down Beat* agreed. . . .

No one before Armstrong had ever played the trumpet the way that he did. He was one of the first great soloists of jazz music. The solos he played were as interesting and innovative as any music written at the time. Rather than follow notes on a page, he improvised, playing what was in his head instead. This type of playing laid the foundation for all jazz to come.



Louis Armstrong (third from left) and friends playing in New York City

Armstrong also pioneered a type of singing. . . .

. The new style of singing that Louis Armstrong pioneered was called "scat." Scat singing is a lot like improvising on a musical instrument. Instead of singing real words, with scat one sings nonsense words to the melody. Armstrong became as famous for his scat singing and gravelly voice as his trumpet playing. He recorded many songs with another jazz great and scat singer, Ella Fitzgerald.



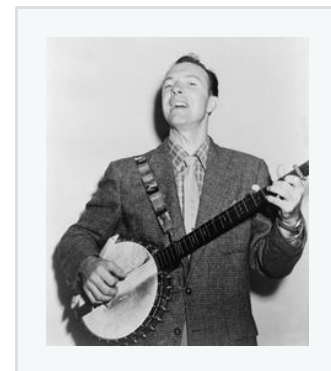
Louis Armstrong, the king of scat (with Velma Middleton) at Carnegie Hall, New York

In addition to all of his accomplishments, Louis Armstrong holds the record for being the oldest artist ever to have a Number 1 record. He accomplished this when he was 63 years old with his version of the song "Hello, Dolly," from the musical of the same name. What is even more extraordinary is that he reached Number 1 in 1964 by toppling the Beatles from the top of the charts! Louis Armstrong had come a long way from his poor Louisiana beginnings.

Pete Seeger

The text and image are from "America's Story from America's Library" by the Library of Congress.

You probably know that the Beatles, Supremes, Rolling Stones, Michael Jackson, and Aerosmith, among many others, are in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. You may never have heard of Pete Seeger, but he is no less an important member. Pete Seeger is one of America's greatest folk singers and composers. Folk songs are usually simple in melody and are often played on acoustic guitar. . . .



Pete Seeger is one of the most important folk singers.

Many folk singers write songs about current events, and Peter Seeger was no different. "We Shall Overcome," which he co-wrote, was a song often sung during civil rights protests of the 1960s. "Turn! Turn! Turn!" a song popularized by the Byrds in 1965, draws its lyrics from the Bible's Book of Ecclesiastes. It says that there is a time and a place for everything—even war. The song was released during the height of the Vietnam War. Its last line is "A time for peace, I swear it's not too late."

Pete Seeger was born in 1919 and has received many honors during his long career. He is still very active today. In 2000, he helped the [United States Library of Congress] celebrate its 200th birthday by performing during a concert. During the celebrations, he was named a Living Legend by the Library. A legend is someone who inspires others. . . .

Frank Sinatra

The text and images are from "America's Story from America's Library" by the Library of Congress.

Fans flocked to see him. Women swooned. Just a few years after he made his recording debut with the Harry James band on July 13, 1939, Frank Sinatra became a teenage heartthrob.

Sinatra was more than just an overnight sensation. Unlike other pop artists, Sinatra's career didn't end after five or ten years but lasted more than half a century. He performed for millions, including presidents John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon, and his recordings still appeal to audiences of all ages.



Old Blue Eyes himself, Frank Sinatra in 1947



Frank Sinatra looks over his music before singing with the band.

When you were younger you may have sung a song that Sinatra made famous. . . . "High Hopes," the song about the ant and the rubber tree plant, was one of many songs written for Frank Sinatra. Children sing it in school, but Sinatra's recording of it won an Academy Award in 1959. Sinatra was also a talented actor. He won an Academy Award for his performance in *From Here to Eternity*. If you like to watch old movies, you've probably already seen Sinatra in at least one of the more than 30 other films he made, including *Guys and Dolls*, *High Society*, and *Pal Joey*.

Sinatra continued to perform until February 1995. On May 14, 1998, the man the world knew as "Old Blue Eyes" died, but through his recordings and movies, he gains new fans [every day]. . . .