

CILLA

Cilla Black 1943-2015 "Goodnight Swinging Cilla"

Priscilla White was born in Liverpool on 27th May 1943 and grew up in the Scotland Road area of the city. She attended St. Anthony's School and later Anfield Commercial College, where she studied Shipping Management. Priscilla sang from an early age, standing on the kitchen table to sing during family parties. She began working as a typist at BICC in 1959 and it was around this time that she started making guest appearances with local bands. She first sang on stage with Rory Storm And The Hurricanes at The Iron Door Club where she performed Peggy Lee's 1958 hit 'Fever'. She made several further appearances with the band, sometimes singing 'Boys' with Ringo Starr. "We did it as a duet" Cilla remembered later "He had a microphone over the drums and I used to have to sing it bending over his kit." She became friends with Ringo and would cut and dye his mother's hair, getting paid in spam, chips and beans. She also began singing with other bands such as The Big Three and Kingsize Taylor And The Dominoes and became known as "Swinging Cilla". Her repertoire included 'Fever', 'Always', 'Boys' and 'Summertime'. She dated Ted "Kingsize" Taylor and her friend Pauline Behan dated George Harrison.

She began using the stage name Cilla Black in July 1961 after Bill Harry mistakenly printed her surname wrong in the first issue of MERSEY BEAT. She worked as a waitress at the Zodiac club in 1961 and later as a cloakroom attendant at The Cavern Club. She occasionally sang with The Beatles and John Lennon gave her the nickname 'Cyril'. In 1963 John persuaded Brian Epstein to audition Cilla. She sang 'Summertime' backed by The Beatles but failed the audition, partly due to nerves, and partly because of The Beatles playing their version of the song in a different key. In her 2004 autobiography WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT? she wrote "I hadn't rehearsed it with The Beatles... The music was not in my key". After seeing her perform again, Brian Epstein signed Cilla on 6th September 1963. Within three weeks Brian had introduced her to the Beatles A&R George Martin who signed her to Parlophone Records and produced her first single.

Her debut single, 'Love Of The Loved' was written by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, recorded at EMI Studios by George Martin. It went to #35 on the UK Singles Chart. Cilla appeared on the all-Merseyside edition of THANK YOUR LUCKY STARS in 1963 along with The Beatles. In December she supported them during THE BEATLES CHRISTMAS SHOW in London. Her next single was a cover of the Dionne Warwick song 'Anyone Who Had A Heart'. Cilla's version went to #1 in the UK. She had a second UK number one with 'You're My World'. A string of sixteen top 30 hits followed including the Lennon-McCartney songs 'It's For You' and 'Step Inside Love' (featuring Paul on piano) which were both especially written for her by John and Paul. Her other hits included 'You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin', 'I've Been Wrong Before' and 'Alfie' (from the movie starring Jane Asher). Cilla's version was arranged and conducted by composer Burt Bacharach and went to #9 in the UK. She appeared on the TV specials AROUND THE BEATLES in 1964 and THE MUSIC OF LENNON AND McCARTNEY in 1965. She toured with Gerry and The Pacemakers and appeared in their 1965 movie FERRY CROSS THE MERSEY. In 1965 she made her debut on THE ED SULLIVAN SHOW and appeared in cabaret at the Plaza Hotel in New York in an attempt to break America. Although Elvis Presley was a big fan of her voice ('You're My World' was on his jukebox), Cilla was never a success in America. She did better in Australia where she took 'You're My World' to #1 and had several other hits. She toured there in 1964.

In the UK the hits continued into the '70s and in 1971 her single 'Something Tells Me' went to #3. During her career Cilla recorded several covers of songs by The Beatles including 'Yesterday', 'In My Life', 'For No One', 'Across The Universe' and 'The Long And Winding Road'. She also covered Paul McCartney's song 'Junk' and John Lennon's songs 'Oh My Love' and 'Imagine'. In 1972 she recorded the George Harrison composition 'I'll Still Love You (When Every Song is Sung)'. The track was produced by George Harrison and features Ringo Starr on drums. Cilla wasn't happy with the recording and re-recorded the song in 1974, though it wasn't released until 2003.



Cilla and Ringo

*Cilla with Paul and John on the set of
'Music of Lennon and McCartney', 1965*

Cilla with George and Brian, 1964





*Cilla with Paul, recording
'Step Inside Love' at
Chappell Studios*



*Cilla with Ringo, John and Paul
(top right)*

*Cilla with Barbara and Ringo, 2011
(right)*



(Ringo recorded a version of the song in 1976). George and Ringo originally wrote 'Photograph' for Cilla which she also finally released in in 2003. George also wrote 'The Light That Has Lighted The World' for her although she never released it. Cilla stopped working with George Martin in 1974 and became better known for her TV work.

She was given her own show, CILLA, in 1968 and Paul McCartney wrote the theme tune 'Step Inside Love'. Among her many guests was Ringo Starr who appeared on the show in 1968 and 1971. The show ran until 1976 and other guests included Cliff Richard, Dusty Springfield, Georgie Fame, Marc Bolan and Sandie Shaw. She made the TV special, CILLA IN SCANDINAVIA, in 1971 and Ringo made a guest appearance. She starred in CILLA'S COMEDY SIX in 1975 and CILLA'S WORLD OF COMEDY in 1976. In 1984 she began presenting SURPRISE SURPRISE which ran until 1997. She also began presenting a second show, BLIND DATE, in 1985 that ran until 2003. Cilla was awarded an OBE in 1997. She went on to present THE MOMENT OF TRUTH in 1998 and in 2006 she was a judge on SOAPSTAR SUPERSTAR. Cilla also appeared as a panellist on LOOSE WOMEN a guest presenter on NEVER MIND THE BUZZCOCKS and appeared in the comedy series BENIDORM. In 2013 she starred in her own TV special THE ONE AND ONLY CILLA BLACK presented by Paul O'Grady. In 2014 she was lovingly portrayed by actress Sheridan Smith in the excellent three-part television drama series CILLA.



In 1969 Cilla married her long time boyfriend and manager Bobby Willis. They had three sons together, Robert (1970), Ben (1974) and Jack (1980). Bobby died of cancer in 1999. Cilla Black died at her home in Spain on 2nd August 2015. She was 72.

Paul McCartney said in a statement: "Such a shock to hear about Cilla's passing. She had a fine distinctive voice and was always a bit of a laugh. It was a privilege to know and love her." Ringo Starr tweeted: "She was a good friend. We will all miss her. Peace to Cilla".

By Danny Friar