

Wilma Charlene Burgess

Born June 11th, 1939 in Orlando, Florida

Died August 26th, 2003 in Nashville, Tennessee

Born and raised in Orlando, FL Wilma Burgess attended Stetson University to study for a degree in physical education and had no intentions of a career in music, although she had performed on local television. She was initially only interested in pop music but a visit to an Eddy Arnold concert changed her mind.

After graduation in 1960, she was persuaded by a friend to go to Nashville to demo some of his songs for music publishers. Charlie Lamb of Sound Format Publications was more interested in her singing than the songs and brought her to the attention of Owen Bradley. In 1962, she moved to Nashville and cut a single for United Artists, “Confused” b/w “Something Tells Me” and then Bradley signed Wilma to Decca in 1964. Her first single release for the label was “Raining On My Pillow” b/w “This Time Tomorrow”. Two more singles were released and then in 1965 Wilma had her first Top 10 record with “Baby”, penned by Canadian Ray Griff, which went all the way to number 7. The same year, she purchased Patsy Cline’s “Dream house” from Patsy’s Husband Charlie Dick. Included in the sale was one of Patsy’s cars.

At the 8th Annual Grammy Awards held on March 15th, 1966, Wilma was nominated for a Grammy for “Best Country Vocal Performance – Female” for “Baby”. The other nominees that year were Molly Bee, Dottie West, Skeeter Davis and Jody Miller, who took the Award for “Queen of the House”. 1966 also saw the release of her debut album “Don't Touch Me”, from which the title track went all the way to number 12 and the album was number 3 on the Billboard “Top Country Albums” for that year. Her follow up album would reach number 5 in the same category the following year. Titled after one of the biggest hits of 1967 and the song she would become most identified with, “Misty Blue” went all the way to number 4 and cemented Wilma’s place in music history. The song was soon covered by everyone from Ella Fitzgerald to Eddy Arnold.

Between 1965 and 1969 she had Top 10 chart hits on Decca with “Baby”, “Don't Touch Me”, “Misty Blue”, “Tear Time”, and “Parting Is Such Great Sorrow”.

In 1973, she left Decca and joined Shannon Records (owned by Jim Reeves Enterprises and close friend and widow of Jim Reeves, Mary Reeves Davis), where she managed some minor hits including a Top 20 duet with Bud Logan (one time leader of Reeves' band, the Blue Boys) on “Wake Me Into Love”, and another single of her own titled "I'll Be Your Bridge". It was also on the Shannon label that Wilma recorded “Love Is Here”, which was a Top 50 chart hit and her personal favorite of all her cuts.

She then signed with RCA, but the label only released a couple of singles from 1975 to 1978 with little promotion. Her last chart hit was in 1975 and her last recorded album was the 1982 album "Could I Have This Dance" on the 51West Label.

After her RCA contract expired, Wilma left the music business, or one could say she was finally driven out in frustration. Wilma was the first and perhaps to this day the only openly gay Country singer in an industry and genre with zero tolerance. Even in the '60s she made no bones about her sexuality behind the scenes, but as long as she was making a lot of people a lot of money, most turned a blind eye. She was, however fodder for constant gossip and rumour and treated very badly by most of her peers. She was blocked for membership with The Grand Ole Opry while others with much less “Star” power were welcomed. The Nashville Sound was also being killed off by the early '70s, but not before Wilma had several years of great records and hits, especially with Decca. She had a great love and respect for her first Producer, the Legendary Owen Bradley with Decca Records. Like Patsy Cline before her, the only time they “buted heads” was over material. Wilma insisted on recording songs that were “gender correct” for her. In other words, the singer could be singer to either a man, or a woman. To record “Ain’t Got No Man” in particular didn’t sit well with Wilma, but the very few she recorded that “didn’t work” were worked out with “trade offs” for songs she wanted to record that Owen didn’t like.

In the late '80s she took her earnings from her recording career and opened Nashville's first women's bar and sometimes performed there. Wilma also worked with Mary Reeves Davis off and on running the Jim Reeves Museum in Nashville for years.

Wilma's life was closely intermingled not only with her Mother, who eventually moved to Nashville with her and lived with Wilma until she passed away, but also with Mary Reeves Davis from the time she came to Nashville. The two shared a passion for golf and playing cards.

In later years Wilma fell on hard times. She stored her personal affects, memorabilia and awards in a storage unit owned by Mary Reeves for temporary safe keeping. Shortly after, Mary developed aggressive Alzheimer's disease and was convinced to sign everything over to her then Husband, who promptly sold the entire Estate to the first bidder. The Jim Reeves Museum, a Nashville landmark built in 1792 called "Evergreen Place" at Gallatin Road and Briley Parkway fell into disrepair and was left to slowly disintegrate, as was Mary who was placed in a nursing home. She passed away in 1999 and several years of legal fights over Jim Reeves estate followed and even though there were assurances Wilma would be able to retrieve her possessions, she never saw them again. All efforts to save "Evergreen Place", the second oldest home in Davidson County were also lost when a "stop work order" was ignored and a Home Depot now sits in it's place.

Wilma passed away unexpectedly Monday, August 26th, 2003 at 4:05 a.m. at Centennial Medical Center in Nashville, largely forgotten and without even a mention in the Nashville press. She had been hospitalized for a week for tests and had seemed to be on the road to recovery, but suffered a massive heart attack. She was only 64.

Wilma Burgess, one of country music's best and most underrated female vocalists of all time. She never compromised who she was and I admired that. She was a friend and she is missed.

Selected Singles

Year	Single	<u>U.S. Country</u>	Album
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1965	" Baby " 11-65	7	<i>Don't Touch Me</i>
1966	" Don't Touch Me " 04-66	12	<i>Don't Touch Me</i>
1966	" Misty Blue " 10-66	4	<i>Misty Blue</i>
1967	"Fifteen Days" 03-67	24	<i>Misty Blue</i>
1967	"Tear Time" 07-67	15	<i>Tear Time</i>
1974	"Wake Me Into Love" 11-73 (with Buddy Logan)	14	<i>Wake Me Into Love</i>

[\[edit\]](#) **Selected Albums**

Year	Album	US Country
1966	<i>Misty Blue</i>	
1966	<i>Don't Touch Me</i>	3
1967	<i>Wilma Burgess Sings Misty Blue</i>	5
1967	<i>Tear Time</i>	36
1968	<i>The Tender Lovin' Country Sound</i>	
1969	<i>Parting Is Such Sweet Sorrow</i>	
1974	<i>Wake Me Into Love</i> (with Buddy Logan)	

1982	<i>Could I Have This Dance</i>	
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WILMA BURGESS SINGLES

*Catalog number * Title A / Title B * Date (dd-mm-yy) * (-/-) country/pop chart position*

United Artists (1962)

UA-523	Confused / Something Tells Me - 12-62
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Decca (1964-1972)

31653	Raining In My Pillow / This Time Tomorrow - 08-64	
31759	You Can't Stop My Heart From Breaking / Happy Fool - 03-65	
31826	Closest Thing To Love / Where You're Not Around - 08-65	
31862	Baby / Wait Till The Sun Comes Up - 11-65	7/-
31941	Don't Touch Me / Turn Around Teardrops - 04-66	12/-
32027	Misty Blue / Ain't Got No Man - 10-66	4/-
32105	Fifteen Days / Two Little Rivers Of Tears - 03-67	
32178	Tear Time / (How Can I Write On Paper) What I Feel In My Heart - 07-67	
32273	Watch The Roses Grow / Only A Fool Keeps Hangin' On - 02-68	
32359	Sweet Promises / Look At The Laughter - 07-68	
32437	Parting (Is Such Sweet Sorrow) / Shine A Little Sun Of Me - 01-69	
32522	Happiness Is So Hard To Forget / Woman In Your Life - 06-69	
32593	Sun's Gotta Shine / Only Mama That'll Walk The Line - 11-69	
32684	Lonely For You / I Don't See Me In Your Eyes Anymore - 05-70	
32811	Until My Dreams Come True / Everything's Gonna Be Alright - 04-71	
32868	I See Her Love All Over You / Woman In Your Life - 08-71	

Shannon (1972-1976)

S-810	Feelin' The Way A Woman Should / I'll Always Love The Days - 73
S-813	I'll Be Your Bridge (Just Lay Me Down) / I'll Always Love The Days - 08-73
S-816	Wake Me Into Love / Here Together - 11-73 w. Bud Logan

S-820	Best Day Of The Rest Of Our Love / It Ain't Nothing But Love - 05-74 w. Bud Logan
S-821	Love Is Here / Sweet Lovin' Baby - 08-74
S-826	Love Is The Foundation / I'm In Love With Everything - 01-75 w. Bud Logan
SH-83 5	Baby's Not Forgotten / Just Because You Understand Your Woman - 06-75
SH-83 9	Satisfied Man / I Will Think Of You - 11-75

RCA Victor (1977)

PB-11057	Use Me / Darlin' - 07-77
PB-11179	Once You Were Mine / I'm Turnin' You Loose - 11-77