

# R.I.P. 2020

*A look back at the famous faces we bid farewell in an exceptionally hard year.*

BY LINNEA CROWTHER | LEGACY.COM

Of all the places the story of 2020 has been told, one of the most poignant has been the obituary pages. Journalists around the country have observed that obituary writing has been more personal, more emotional, and more meaningful this year as communities everywhere had to grieve under difficult pandemic circumstances. That's been true for everyday Americans, and it's also been true for the national newsmakers whose deaths made headlines. Join us now in this look back at some of the most honored celebrities who died in 2020.

## Sports

The year began with shocking tragedy in the sports world as Los Angeles Lakers icon **Kobe Bryant**, a five-time NBA champion and 18-time All-Star, died in a helicopter crash in January. He wasn't the only basketball star we lost in 2020: **Fred "Curly" Neal** was one of the Harlem Globetrotters' greatest players of all time, while **Wes Unseld** was one of only two NBA stars to be chosen as MVP in his rookie year, as he played for the Washington Bullets. And **Gale Sayers** was an NFL legend despite his short career with the Chicago Bears: the "Kansas Comet" was the youngest player ever inducted to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

## Music

**Neal Peart**, drummer for the rock band Rush, was widely con-

sidered one of the best drummers of all time. He was the first of too many beloved musicians we had to say goodbye to this year. **Bonnie Pointer** was one of the hitmaking Pointer Sisters, and **Tommy DeVito** was the baritone voice of the 1960s stars the Four Seasons. **Joseph Shabalala** founded Ladysmith Black Mambazo, who recorded with Paul Simon on "Graceland,"

while **Ronald Bell** co-founded Kool & the Gang and wrote hits including "Celebration."

**Kenny Rogers** was an icon of country music thanks to beloved hits including "The Gambler," "Coward of the County," and "Lucille." **Jan Howard** was a star of the Grand Ole Opry known for her duets with Bill Anderson, and **Charlie Daniels** played an unforgettable fiddle solo

in "The Devil Went Down to Georgia." **Toots Hibbert** led the influential reggae band The Maytals, while **Helen Reddy** inspired the women's movement with her feminist anthem, "I Am Woman."

**Ellis Marsalis** was a New Orleans jazz legend and the patriarch of a musical family, while **John Prine** was a deeply respected folk singer and songwriter. **Malik B.** co-found-



CHADWICK BOSEMAN (DFREE / SHUTTERSTOCK)

## R.I.P. 2020 (cont.)

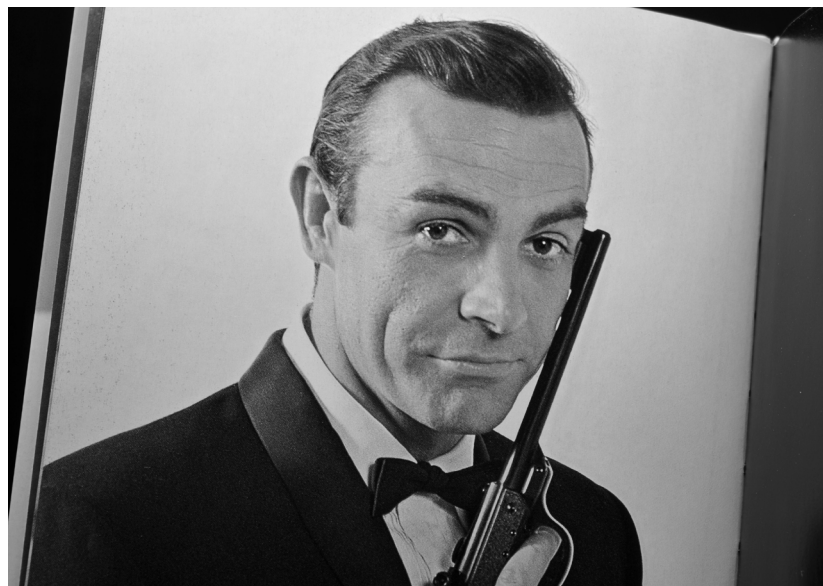
ed acclaimed hip-hop group The Roots, and **Adam Schlesinger** led alt-rockers Fountains of Wayne. Perhaps biggest of all, **Little Richard** was one of the architects of rock and roll, setting the stage for the genre with raucous hits like “Tutti Frutti” and “Good Golly Miss Molly.”

**Bill Withers** brought us R&B classics like “Lean on Me” and “Lovely Day,” while **Trini Lopez** sang folk favorites including “Lemon Tree” and “If I Had a Hammer.” **Charley Pride** had 30 No. 1 hits as the first Black superstar of country music, and **Mac Davis** wrote hits for Elvis Presley as well as scoring his own No. 1 with “Baby, Don’t Get Hooked on Me.” And **Eddie Van Halen** was one of the all-time great guitar gods, inspiring generations of rockers with his unmistakable licks for the hit machine Van Halen.

## Television

In 2020, we lost stars of classic sitcoms including **David Lander**, whose “Hello” was hilarious when he played Squiggy on “Laverne and Shirley.” **Conchata Ferrell** was the wisecracking housekeeper Berta on “Two and a Half Men,” and **Kelley Nakahara** played Nurse Kelley on more than 150 episodes of “M\*A\*S\*H.” **Ja’Net Dubois** was gossipy Willona on “Good Times;” **Jerri Stiller** made us laugh out loud as cranky Frank Costanza on “Seinfeld;” and **Carl Reiner** created and acted in the great TV classic, “The Dick Van Dyke Show.”

**Robert Conrad** played Secret Service agent James West on “The Wild Wild West,” and **Linda Cristal** was Victoria Cannon on “The High Chaparral.” **Phyllis George** broke down barriers as the co-host of “The NFL Today,” while **Diana Rigg**



SEAN CONNERY (STEFANO CHIACCHIARINI / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM)

set new standards for style and cool as Emma Peel on “The Avengers.” **Ken Osmond** was the irritating Eddie Haskell on “Leave it to Beaver,” and **Lyle Waggoner** was Steve Trevor on “Wonder Woman” as well as a beloved cast member of “The Carol Burnett Show.” And **Naya Rivera** is gone too soon, one of the bright young stars of “Glee” who played LGBTQ cheerleader Santana Lopez.

Two greats of TV news died in 2020: **Jim Lehrer**, who co-anchored PBS NewsHour for decades, and **Hugh Downs**, who was a longtime 20/20 co-anchor. **Regis Philbin** co-hosted “Live! With Regis and Kathy Lee” and “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire,” while **Grant Tinker** built robots and other gadgets as a host of “MythBusters.” And **Alex Trebek** was one of TV’s most beloved game show hosts, helming the quiz show “Jeopardy!” for 37 seasons.

## Movies

Two movie stars who died in 2020 were among our last links to Hollywood’s Golden Age: **Olivia de Havilland** was the last living star of “Gone With the Wind,” and **Kirk**

**Douglas** was a screen legend who starred in “Spartacus.” **Ian Holm** played Bilbo Baggins in “The Hobbit” and “The Lord of the Rings,” while **David Prowse** was the imposing figure inside Darth Vader’s uniform in the original “Star Wars” trilogy.

**Max von Sydow** played an iconic game of chess with Death in “The Seventh Seal,” **Brian Dennehy** was a star of stage and screen with memorable roles in “Tommy Boy” and “Ratatouille,” and **Joel Schumacher** was known for his work behind the camera as the director of “The Lost Boys” and two “Batman” films. And **Chadwick Boseman** played one of the great heroes of the Marvel universe, the powerful and brilliant Black Panther.

**Terry Jones** was a founder of the Monty Python team and directed movies including “Monty Python and the Holy Grail,” while **Wilford Brimley** played a senior citizen when he was just 50 as a star of “Cocoon.” **Kelly Preston** starred in “Jerry Maguire” and “Twins,” and **Fred Willard** was hilarious in mockumentaries like “Best in Show.” And **Sean Connery** was none other than 007, the first to play James

Bond on the big screen and an unforgettable Oscar winner.

## Culture

**Katherine Johnson** helped send Americans to the moon as the NASA mathematician whose work was honored in the 2016 film “Hidden Figures,” while **Chuck Yeager** set the stage for NASA’s greatness as a test pilot who was the first human to break the sound barrier.

**John Le Carré** wrote popular spy novels like “The Spy Who Came in from the Cold,” and **Mary Higgins Clark** was the Queen of Suspense, whose many bestselling novels include “Where Are the Children?”

**B. Smith** owned restaurants in New York and Washington DC and created home décor and design collections for nationwide retailers, while **Roy Horn** was half of the hot Las Vegas duo Siegfried and Roy, whose stage show incorporated magic with white tigers and lions.

## Politics

**John Lewis** was a hero of the civil rights movement and a leader of the famous 1965 Selma to Montgomery marches for voting rights, who later represented Georgia’s 5th District in Congress for 17 terms. **Herman Cain** was the CEO of Godfather’s Pizza who became a prominent candidate for the Republican nomination for president in 2012. And **Ruth Bader Ginsburg** was the second woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court and a powerful champion for women’s rights. ■

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