

## Eva Cassidy

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### Background information

Birth name	Eva Marie Cassidy
Born	February 2, 1963 Washington, DC; US
Origin	Maryland, United States
Died	November 2, 1996 (aged 33) Bowie, Maryland, US
Genres	Soul, Pop, Jazz, Blues, Folk, Gospel
Occupation(s)	Singer, Guitarist, Recording artist, Performer, Landscaper, Painter
Instruments	Vocals, Guitar, Piano
Years active	1981–1996
Labels	BLP (US), Liaison (US), Blix Street (US), Hot (Europe)
Associated acts	Chuck Brown, Alison Krauss, Katie Melua, Method Actor

Eva Marie Cassidy (February 2, 1963 – November 2, 1996) was an American vocalist and guitarist known for her interpretations of jazz, blues, folk, gospel, country, rock and pop classics. In 1992, she released her first album, *The Other Side*, a set of duets with go-go musician Chuck Brown, followed by the 1996 live solo album entitled *Live at Blues Alley*. Although she had been honored by the Washington Area Music Association, she was virtually unknown outside her native Washington DC, when she died of melanoma in 1996.

Four years later, Cassidy's music was brought to the attention of British audiences when her versions of "Fields of Gold" and "Over the Rainbow" were played by Mike Harding and Terry Wogan on BBC Radio 2. Following the overwhelming response, a camcorder recording of "Over the Rainbow", taken at Blues Alley in Washington by her friend Bryan McCulley, was shown on BBC Two's *Top of the Pops* 2. Shortly afterwards, the compilation album *Songbird* climbed to the top of the UK Albums Charts, almost three years after its initial release. The chart success in the United Kingdom and Ireland led to increased recognition worldwide; her posthumously released recordings, including three UK number 1 records, have sold more than ten million copies. Her music has also charted top 10 positions in Australia, Germany, Sweden, Norway and Switzerland.

## Early life

Born on February 2, 1963, at the Washington Hospital Center, Cassidy grew up in Oxon Hill and later Bowie, Maryland, suburbs of Washington, DC. She was the third of four children. Her father Hugh Cassidy, a retired teacher, sculptor, musician, former army medic and world champion powerlifter, is of Scottish and Irish descent, while her mother Barbara (Kratzer) was a horticulturist and originally German, born in Bad Kreuznach. From an early age, Cassidy displayed interest in art and music. When she was nine, her father began teaching her to play the guitar, and she began to play and sing at family gatherings.

At age 11, Cassidy began singing and playing guitar in a Washington-area band called Easy Street. This band performed in a variety of styles at weddings, corporate parties, and pubs. Due to her shyness, she struggled with performing in front of strangers. While a student at Bowie High School, she sang with a local band called Stonehenge. During the summer of 1983, Cassidy sang and played guitar six days a week at the theme park Wild World. Her younger brother Dan, a fiddler, was also a member of this working band. She enrolled in art classes at Prince George's Community College but dropped out after finding them unhelpful.

Throughout the 1980s, Cassidy worked with several other bands, including the techno-pop band Characters Without Names. During this period, Cassidy also worked as a propagator at a plant nursery and as a furniture painter. In her free time, she explored other artistic expressions including painting, sculpting, and jewelry design. Despite holding a belief in God, Cassidy was not part of any organized religion.

## Music career

In 1986, Cassidy was asked by Stonehenge guitarist and high school friend, David Lourim, to lend her voice to his music project, Method Actor. This brought her to Black Pond Studios, where she met recording engineer and bassist Chris Biondo. Biondo helped her find work as a session singer and later introduced her to Al Dale, who would become her manager. She sang back-ups for various acts, from go-go rhythm and blues band Experience Unlimited to rapper E-40. Biondo and Cassidy, who were in a romantic relationship for a time, formed the five-piece "Eva Cassidy Band" with Lenny Williams, Keith Grimes and Raice McLeod in 1990. They began to perform frequently in the Washington area. "Stormy Monday"

In 1992, Biondo played a tape of Cassidy's voice for Chuck Brown, the "Godfather of go-go". It resulted in the duet album *The Other Side* featuring performances of classic songs such as "Fever", "God Bless the Child," and what would later become Cassidy's signature song, "Over the Rainbow". The album was released and distributed in 1992 by Liaison Records, the label that also released Brown's Go-go albums. Brown originally intended to record an additional duet with Cassidy for his next solo album, but this was postponed due to ongoing negotiations between Dale and other labels for a solo deal. Cassidy's unwillingness to narrow her stylistic focus to one genre hindered her chances of securing a deal. After talks broke down, the two decided to record their own duet album. As a duo, they performed at the Columbia Arts Festival and opened for acts like Al Green and The Neville Brothers.

In 1993, Cassidy was honored by the Washington Area Music Association with a Wammie award for the Vocalist Jazz/Traditional category. The next year she was invited to perform at the event and chose to sing "Over the Rainbow".

A Washington Times review of the event called her performance "a show-stopper". She took home two Wammies that night, again for Vocalist Jazz/Traditional and also for Roots Rock/Traditional R&B. For a brief period that year, Cassidy signed a deal with Blue Note Records to pair up with pop-jazz band Pieces of a Dream to release an album and tour the country. She sang two tracks in a mainly instrumental album. It was a musically unsatisfying experience for her.

After having a potential contract with Apollo Records collapse when the label went bankrupt, Biondo and Dale decided that she should release her own live album. In January 1996, the material for *Live at Blues Alley* was recorded over a two-day period at Blues Alley in Washington, DC. Due to a technical glitch on the first night of recording, only the second night's recording was usable. Unhappy with the way she sounded due to a cold, she was reluctant to release the album. She eventually relented, on the condition that the studio track "Oh, Had I a Golden Thread", Cassidy's favorite song, would be included in the release, and that they start working on a follow-up studio album. Her apprehension appeared unfounded as local reviewers and the public responded positively. The Washington Post commented that "she could sing anything — folk, blues, pop, jazz, R&B, gospel — and make it sound like it was the only music that mattered." The subsequent studio album she worked on was released posthumously as *Eva by Heart* in 1997. In the liner notes of *Eva by Heart*, critic Joel E. Siegel described Cassidy as "one of the greatest voices of her generation."

## Death

In 1993, Cassidy had a malignant mole removed from her back. Three years later, during a promotional event for the *Live at Blues Alley* album in July 1996, Cassidy noticed an ache in her hips, which she attributed to stiffness from painting murals while perched atop a stepladder. The pain persisted and a few weeks later, X-rays revealed that the melanoma had spread to her lungs and bones. Her doctors estimated she had three to five months to live. Cassidy opted for aggressive treatment, but her health deteriorated rapidly. In the early fall, at a benefit concert for her at the Bayou, she made her final public appearance, closing the set with "What a Wonderful World" in front of an audience of family, friends, and fans. Additional chemotherapy was ineffective and Cassidy died on November 2, 1996 at her family's home in Bowie, Maryland. In accordance with her wishes, her body was cremated and the ashes were scattered on the lake shores of St. Mary's River Watershed Park, a nature reserve near Callaway, Maryland.

## Posthumous recognition

After Cassidy's death, local folk singer Grace Griffith introduced the Blues Alley recording to Bill Straw from her label, Blix Street Records. Straw approached the Cassidy family to put together a new album. In 1998, a compilation of tracks from Cassidy's three released recordings was assembled into the CD *Songbird*. This CD lingered in relative obscurity for two years until being given airplay by Terry Wogan on his wide-reaching BBC Radio 2 show *Wake Up to Wogan*, following recommendation by his producer Paul Walters. The album sold more than 100,000 copies in the following months. The *New York Times* spoke of her "silken soprano voice with a wide and seemingly effortless range, unerring pitch and a gift for phrasing that at times was heart-stoppingly eloquent."

Before Christmas of 2000, *Top Of The Pops 2* aired a video of Cassidy performing *Over the Rainbow*, which resulted in *Songbird* climbing steadily up the UK charts over the next few weeks. Just as ITV's *Tonight with Trevor McDonald* aired a feature on Cassidy, the album topped the chart. Shot at Blues Alley by a friend with a camcorder the same night the album was recorded, the video became the most requested video ever shown on *Top Of The Pops 2*. "There's an undeniable emotional appeal in hearing an artist who you know died in obscurity singing a song about hope and a mystical world beyond everyday life", wrote *The Guardian*.

Paul McCartney and Eric Clapton were among her new-found fans. Jazz critic Ted Gioia writes, "you might be tempted to write off the 'Cassidy sensation' [...] as a response to the sad story of the singer's abbreviated life rather than as a measure of her artistry. But don't be mistaken, Cassidy was a huge talent, whose obscurity during her lifetime was almost as much a tragedy as her early death." *Songbird* has since achieved significant chart success throughout Europe

and six times platinum status in the UK. Although still relatively unknown in the United States at that time, the album would eventually be certified gold in the United States as well.

In May 2001, ABC's Nightline in the United States broadcast a well-received short documentary about Cassidy, a labor of love from Nightline correspondent Dave Marash who was a fan of her music. Over the weekend, all five of Cassidy's albums occupied Amazon.com's best sellers list top spots. The Nightline episode has since been rebroadcast three times due to popular demand. Producer Leroy Sievers has said that it is "probably the most popular Nightline ever". In December, a nine-minute segment on NPR resulted in a similar sales surge, with five of the top seven spots going to Cassidy. A rebroadcast of the Tonight with Trevor McDonald feature on Cassidy in Britain also bumped up sales.

Since Songbird, several other CDs with original material have been released: Time After Time (2000), Imagine (2002) and American Tune (2003). 2008 saw the release of another new album titled Somewhere. Unlike previous albums, which consisted solely of cover songs, this release contains two original songs co-written by Cassidy. An acoustic album titled Simply Eva was released in January 2011.

Together with word of mouth and internet fansites, online commerce has played a big role in Cassidy's success. This point was further affirmed when in 2005, Amazon.com released a list of its top 25 best-selling musicians, which placed Cassidy in fifth position, behind The Beatles, U2, Norah Jones and Diana Krall.



In 2004, during the gala opening of the Bowie Center for the Performing Arts, the Bowie Regional Arts Vision Association, Inc. (BRAVA) dedicated the Star's Dressing Room to Eva. Following a moving tribute to Eva, Chuck Brown took the stage and performed his duet "with" Eva as her photos and video appeared in the background.

## Unofficial releases

The re-released Method Actor album cover showing Cassidy's prominent name placement which resulted in a lawsuit. The original LP cover artwork was done by Cassidy herself.

A collection of previously unreleased studio recordings from 1987 to 1991, was released in 2000 as No Boundaries. This release was not endorsed by the Cassidy family and was released under a different label. An AllMusic review of the album stated that even "a gifted vocalist like Eva Cassidy can only do so much with bad material".

In 2002, the self-titled 1988 album by the band Method Actor, which featured Cassidy, was re-released by the band's guitarist and producer David Lourim with Cassidy's name displayed prominently on the cover. The Cassidy family and Blix Street Records filed a lawsuit against Lourim, claiming that Cassidy's name was used in a misleading fashion and that Blix Street has exclusive rights to her recordings. Lourim had Cassidy's written permission to release the album and eventually the cover was changed to look like the original LP album while already released copies were affixed with a sticker indicating that they are not solo Eva Cassidy albums.

A bootleg recording that has been in circulation is called Live at Pearl's. It was recorded at Pearl's Restaurant in Annapolis, Maryland in 1994. Copies of the recording were circulated among friends and family after her death. Some of

the songs on the recording are also on *Imagine* and *American Tune*. Another recording from the early '90s, featuring Mick Fleetwood on drums and recorded at his restaurant (named Fleetwood's) in Alexandria, Virginia, was in the possession of writer/musician Niki Lee, the former wife of pianist Lenny Williams, 1988-1996. Lee discovered it in her garage and attempted to sell it on eBay in 2008. She asserts she converted the dollars to pounds incorrectly and was lambasted by Cassidy fans for her mistake. On September 19, 2013, Lee donated Eva Cassidy's lost recording, "Eva Cassidy Live at Fleetwoods," to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio. The recording will remain in the museum's archives. Two other lost cassettes of Cassidy's are being remastered for entrance.

## In popular culture

In 2001, a book titled *Songbird: Eva Cassidy: Her Story By Those Who Knew Her*, on the life and work of Cassidy based on interviews with close family and associates was released in the UK. The hardcover edition has since sold in excess of 100,000 copies. A US edition published by Gotham Books was released in late 2003 and includes two additional chapters on her influences and success in the US. Her life story has also been adapted into a musical and also a Broadway piece for cancer benefit.

At the 2002 Winter Olympics gala, and later on tour, figure skater Michelle Kwan brought Cassidy's music to a new audience when she skated to a recording of Cassidy's version of Sting's "Fields of Gold". Kwan's part in exposing the music of Cassidy to the international and American public led Cassidy's label to present her a gold record from the certification of *Songbird*. Subsequently, other figure skaters such as Kristi Yamaguchi, Sarah Hughes and Kimmie Meissner have used Cassidy's music in their routines.

Anglo-Georgian singer Katie Melua is a keen fan of Cassidy. Her debut album *Call Off the Search* contained the song "Faraway Voice", written in Cassidy's memory. Melua has also performed Cassidy's arrangement of "Anniversary Song" in concert. On Christmas Eve 2006, she performed alongside video footage of Cassidy singing *Over The Rainbow* on BBC One's "Duet Impossible". One year later, Cassidy's "What a Wonderful World" was spliced together with new vocals by Melua and released as a single exclusively at the British retail chain Tesco. It debuted at #1 on the UK Singles chart on December 16. All profits from the single went to the British Red Cross. Irish singer Chris de Burgh has stated that his

song "Songbird" from his album *The Road to Freedom* was written in honour of Cassidy. Singer Mary Chapin Carpenter made reference to Cassidy in the song "My Heaven" on the album *Between Here and Gone*: "More memories than my heart can hold, when Eva's singing 'Fields of Gold'." In 2008, her rendition of "Fields Of Gold" was also featured in the final set of scenes on the season finale of "Army Wives" on Lifetime television.

In 2008, Cassidy's recording of "Autumn Leaves" was used by the Canadian National Professional Latin Champions, Andre and Natalie Paramonov, when they competed in America's Ballroom Challenge as finalists in the International Latin Competition.

The first film to feature an Eva Cassidy recording was *Flight of Fancy* starring Dean Cain. Since then her music has appeared in various film and TV series including the *Dawson's Creek* season four episode titled "The Graduate," *Judging Amy*, *Joe Somebody*, *Love Actually*, *Maid in Manhattan*, *The Man from Elysian Fields*, *Alpha Dog* and *Smallville*. Cassidy's arrangement of "Over the Rainbow" is a popular cover choice by singing competition contestants, with American Idol season 5 runner-up Katharine McPhee and The X Factor season 3 winner Leona Lewis among the singers. Her interpretation of "Imagine" has been performed by American Idol season 7 runner-up David Archuleta.

In March 2012, Sweden's Caroline Larsson and Bengt Magnusson released an album entitled *A Tribute to Eva Cassidy*. The Eva Cassidy biography *Behind the Rainbow* by Johan Bakker won The People's Book Prize 2011/2012 in London on May 30, 2012.

## Possibility of future film

A number of filmmakers have proposed films based on Cassidy's life, and have worked with her family to greater or lesser degrees, but to date these projects have not progressed past the early development stages. In late 2007, AIR Productions acquired the rights to produce a film based on Cassidy's life. It is being produced by Amy Redford (daughter of Robert Redford), Irwin Shapiro and Rick Singer. In an interview a year earlier, Cassidy's parents suggested Kirsten Dunst or Emily Watson as possible actresses who could play their daughter.

A documentary on the life, art and music of Cassidy entitled *Eva's Song* was initially expected to be in theaters February 2013, but as of 2014 the project was still in development.

# Discography

## Albums

Title	Release date	Label	Notes
The Other Side	1992	Liaison	Chuck Brown with Eva Cassidy.
Live at Blues Alley	1997	Blix Street	Originally self-released under Eva Music in 1996.
Eva by Heart		Blix Street/Hot	Originally released under Liaison Records.  Cassidy's only solo studio album.
Songbird - 1.8 million sales]	1998	Compilation.	UK #1, US (Pop Catalog) #1 [UK - Certified 'Platinum x 6'
Time After Time2000			
Imagine			UK #1 [UK - Certified 'Platinum' - 300,000 sales]
American Tune 2003			UK #1 [UK - Certified 'Gold' - 100,000 sales]
Wonderful World	2004	Compilation.	UK #11 [UK - Certified 'Gold' - 100,000 sales]
Somewhere	2008		UK #4 [UK - Certified 'Gold' - 100,000 sales]

Simply Eva	2011	Blix Street	UK #4 [UK - Certified 'Gold' - 100,000 sales]
The Best of Eva Cassidy	2012		UK #22

## Singles

Title	Release date	Label	Notes
"Over the Rainbow"	2001		UK #42 - Appeared in the charts between April and August 2001
"Take My Breath Away"	2003		UK #54
"What a Wonderful World"	2007	Dramatico	Posthumous duet with Katie Melua. UK #1
"Songbird"	2009		UK #56

## Unauthorized releases

Title	Release date	Label	Notes
Live at Pearl's	1994 -		bootleg recording taped at Pearl's Restaurant in Annapolis, Maryland.



Videography

Title	Release date	Format Notes
Eva Cassidy Sings	2004	PAL DVD (Region 2 and Region 4)