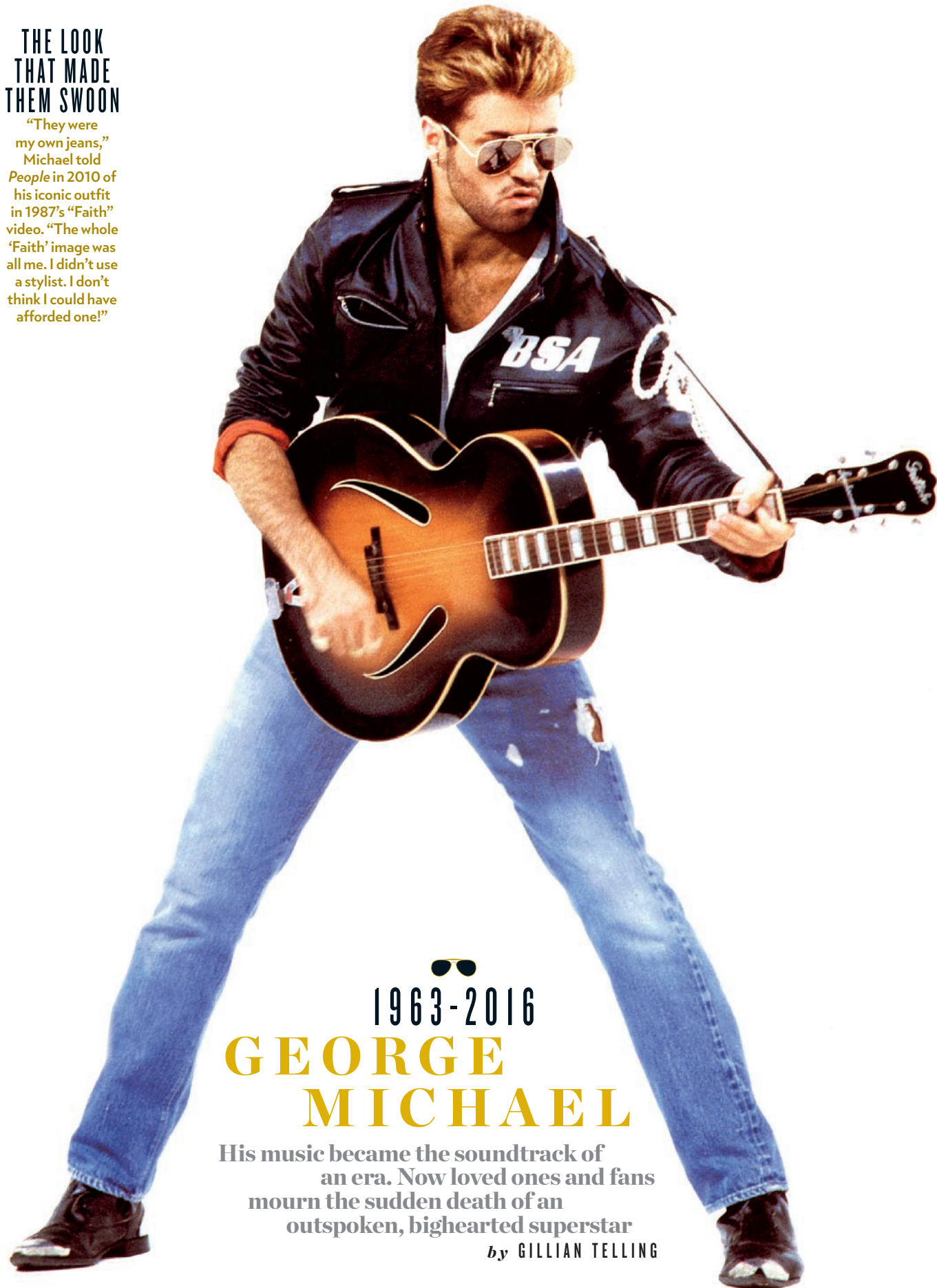


THE LOOK
THAT MADE
THEM SWOON

"They were my own jeans," Michael told *People* in 2010 of his iconic outfit in 1987's "Faith" video. "The whole 'Faith' image was all me. I didn't use a stylist. I don't think I could have afforded one!"



1963-2016

GEORGE
MICHAEL

His music became the soundtrack of an era. Now loved ones and fans mourn the sudden death of an outspoken, bighearted superstar

by GILLIAN TELLING



George Michael taught a generation about sex, faith and freedom. A teen idol who put the boom-boom into the hearts of legions, he grew into a pop innovator whose beats powered the dance music of the '80s and '90s.



bered an Englishman whose kindness eclipsed all the talk of his troubled past. “He was a major part of my life,” said his former partner Kenny Goss. “I loved him very, very much.”

As news of Michael’s death spread around the world, fans gathered outside his country home and his residence in London’s Highgate neighborhood, leaving flowers, candles and notes and singing the songs that were the soundtrack of their adolescence. Although he largely shunned the spotlight in recent years, Michael’s reach as a musician was global. As a member of Wham! and a solo artist, he sold more than 100 million albums. But to loved ones he was simply “Yog,” a constant friend with a silly sense of humor who loved going out to eat or to the movies with old pals or tucking in at home

with the classic soap opera *Coronation Street*. “I love Sunday mornings,” he said in a 2014 interview. “Loads of episodes of *Corries* to watch!”

Living a cozy sort of English life appealed to Michael, but even in little Goring-on-Thames he kept to himself. “To be honest, we hardly ever saw him,” a neighbor told *People*. “He was a bit of a recluse. He had put on a lot of weight and hardly ever left the house. Occasionally he would pop to the local pub, but he wasn’t exactly a regular.”

In the end that kind of seclu-

SAYING GOODBYE TO AN IDOL

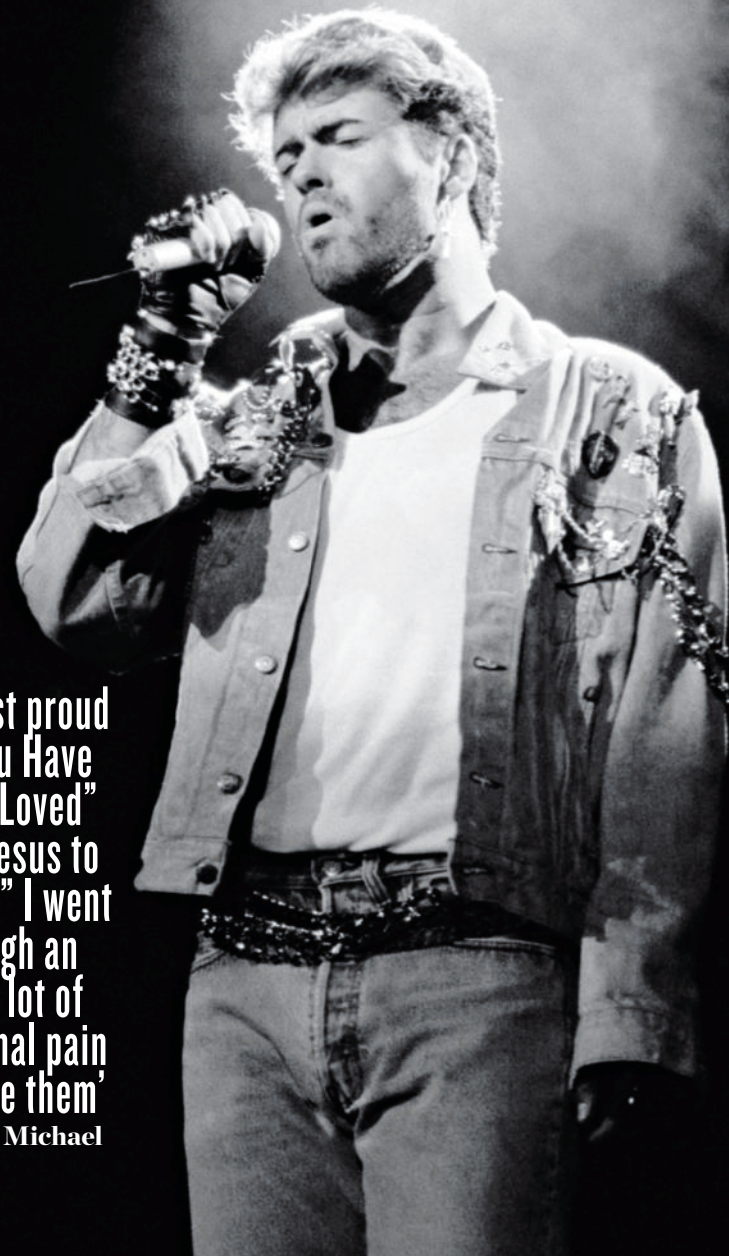
Fans gathered at the gates of Michael’s London home to leave candles, flowers and cards, while industry friends took to Twitter. “George Michael’s sweet soul music will live on,” wrote Paul McCartney.



For more on the icon’s life and legacy, watch the full episode of *People Cover Story: George Michael*, available now on the new *People/Entertainment Weekly Network (PEN)*. Go to people.com/PEN, or download the PEN app on Apple TV, Roku players, Amazon Fire TV, Xumo, Chromecast, iOS and Android devices.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: FROM LEFT: CHRIS CUFFARO/IG; PHOTO: HERRI BTTT/STRUNK ARCHIVE; THIS SPREAD, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: CENTER: STEFAN ROUSSEAU/JA; IMAGES: GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL: PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES; NATHAN SHANAHAN/WIREIMAGE; CAMERON RICHARDSON/REX/USA

“I’m most proud of “You Have Been Loved” and “Jesus to a Child.” I went through an awful lot of emotional pain to write them.”
—George Michael



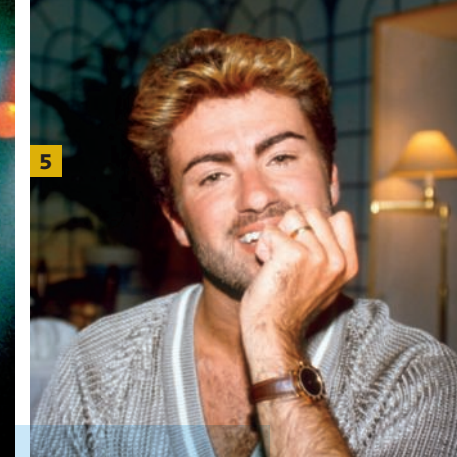
THE MEN HE LOVED



After coming out in 1998, Michael was in a 13-year relationship with American Kenny Goss (top, with George in Tokyo in 2005); in 2012 he began seeing hairstylist Fadi Fawaz (above, with Michael in Australia in 2012), who was with him the day he died and discovered his body. “I will never stop missing you,” Fawaz later tweeted.



A LIFE IN THE SPOTLIGHT 1. A young George Michael, age 5, pictured in a 1968 family album photo. From an early age Michael showed a gift for music. 2. With his Wham! bandmate and schoolmate Andrew Ridgeley in the mid-1980s. 3. Touring the Great Wall following the act's history-making concert in Beijing in 1985.



4. Wham! rocks short shorts at a 1983 U.K. concert. 5. After the release of *Faith*, 1988. 6. Celebrating his 30th birthday with his mom, Lesley Angold, at Newmarket racecourses in 1993. 7. The star performs in front of a sea of screaming fans during a concert at London's famed Wembley Stadium, June 2007. "I still believe that music is one of the greatest gifts God ever gave to man," the singer once said.



sion seems to be what Michael longed for. "There is no such thing as a reluctant star," he told the British TV host Jonathan Ross. "Stars are almost always people who make up for their own weaknesses by being loved by the public, and I am no exception to that." Still, he often seemed to resent his celebrity, so much so that Frank Sinatra wrote an open letter to the singer in 1990. "Come on, George, loosen up. Swing, man," Sinatra wrote. "Talent must not be wasted." By then Michael, just 27, was a sensation and a masterly songwriter, the voice behind hits such as "Freedom! 90," "I Want Your Sex" and "Careless Whisper." If he was not always comfortable with megasuccess, it simply could not get enough of him.

The son of a Greek Cypriot immigrant restaurateur and an English dancer, Michael showed an early talent for music. Born in East Finchley, London, and raised in the Hertfordshire village of Radlett, he busked on the Underground trains and formed a singing duo with his high school classmate Andrew Ridgeley. In 1983 the 20-year-old Michael and his partner released their first album, *Fantastic*, and became pinups nearly

FAMOUS FRIENDS

Michael preferred a low-key life in later years but counted some of the world's most famous people as friends. From left: Elton John, Boy George, Princess Diana and Aretha Franklin all became close to the singer through collaboration and charity work.

overnight. Their 1984 record *Make It Big!*, with its infectious hit "Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go," turned them into international superstars.

When the pair broke up in 1986, Michael pursued a solo career, and in 1987 he released "Faith," a record that became an instant pop classic. No longer a bubblegum heartthrob, Michael became a stubbly, leather-jacketed sex symbol, and the single "I Want Your Sex" became a hit despite being banned from many radio stations. His new sound was captured in iconic videos—

"Freedom! 90" starred supermodels Naomi Campbell, Cindy Crawford, Christy Turlington and Tatjana Patitz. "I think it was like George saying, 'You know what? I don't want to be onscreen; I'm not playing this game anymore,'" Turlington said recently. A sense of rebellion—Michael became embroiled in a bitter dispute with his label Sony Records—permeated his sound.

Michael fought being packaged by the music industry, but he remained at odds with himself. Although he explored sexuality in his lyrics, the singer

'Wham! was about being young and exuberant. You can't re-create that feeling'
—Michael on why he and Andrew Ridgeley never reunited

was publicly closeted until 1998, when he was outed by tabloids after being arrested for a "lewd act" while propositioning an undercover officer in a Beverly Hills park. The incident forced him to officially say he was gay, an admission he said he was never ashamed of. "The press seemed to take some delight that I previously had a 'straight audience' and set about trying to destroy that," he said. Michael said he kept his secret out of respect for his mother. "In the years when HIV was a killer, any parent of an openly gay person was terrified," he told the BBC in 2014. "I knew my mother well enough that she would spend every day praying that I didn't come across that virus. She'd have worried like that." After Michael's admission he became an outspoken advocate for gay rights. "Freedom! 90" was embraced by the LGBTQ community as a coming-out anthem, and the star made no effort to hide his relationship with Goss, a Texan art dealer, with whom he'd live for 13 years until their split in 2009.

But even when he found success and personal happiness, Michael was plagued by the weaknesses he spoke of—most particularly substance-abuse issues. Michael's health suffered, and in 2011 he battled back from a near-fatal case of pneumonia.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: AVALON/ZUMA; MICHAEL PUTLAND/RETNA; PHIL DENT/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES; SAINT TRO PRESS/REX SHUTTERSTOCK; IRINA KALASHNIKOVA/AP; ROB KOZLOFF/AP; TIM GRAHAM/GETTY IMAGES; ANDRE CSILLAG/REX SHUTTERSTOCK; DAVE HOGAN/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; NEAL PRESTON

In 2015 he reportedly entered rehab for drug addiction. Michael took to Twitter to deny those stories, but reports that the singer had become dependent on heroin have circulated in the British press. The poignancy of those struggles was foreshadowed in his lyrics. “There’s no comfort in the truth,” Michael sang in “Careless Whisper.” “Pain is all you’ll find.”

Despite that, Michael’s friends remember a gentle man who cared deeply for those he loved. “He was very talented, of course,” remembers photographer Chris Craymer, who worked with the singer in the early days of Wham! “But he was also very kind, sensitive, and a good person. He had great empathy for people. So this great talent combined with this great personality? That’s how I’ll remember him.”

That giving spirit touched millions. Michael donated 100 percent of the royalties from hit singles such as “Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Me” and “Jesus to a Child” to charity. And even in his darkest times he never lost his wry, self-lacerating sense of humor. Of his 1998 arrest he joked, “The most horrific thing that happened was that I was photographed with my shirt off and I was fat. Can you imagine two worse things than being fat and gay?”

At the time of his death, Michael had thrown himself into new creative projects: He planned to produce a documentary about his colorful life and was contemplating a return to the studio to record a new album. (His last release was 2014’s *Symphonica*, a collection of covers and his own classics alongside an orchestra.) Not that Michael longed to perform live again. “I’m not keen on singing ‘Wake Me



‘My greatest fear? Losing my ability to create music’

—George Michael, in a 2014 interview

Up Before You Go-Go,’” he said in 2014. “I’m [also] fed up with ‘Careless Whisper.’ I don’t know why it made such an impression!” Still, when asked what year he’d travel back to if he could, he said that he’d rewind right back to 1981, when his life was simple, his hair was big, and Wham! was just taking off: “Back to when it all started,” he said. “What a ride!”

With reporting by Mariah Haas and Monique Jessen