



TOP 50 DEATH SONGS

1

"St. James Infirmary Blues" Louis Armstrong (1928)

Top version of much-covered lament. Man drops by morgue to see late girlfriend.

2

"Gloomy Sunday" Billie Holiday (1941)

Haunting song rumored to have inspired countless suicides. Ask Billy MacKenzie, who covered it in 1982. Oh, hang on...

3

"Long Black Veil" Lefty Frizzell (1956)

Deceased lover sings of illicit affair with best friend's wife. Moral: adultery is bad.

4

"Stagger Lee" Lloyd Price (1959)

American legend shoots innocent Billy in card game. Nick Cave's 1996 rereading ups body count considerably.

5

"Tell Laura I Love Her" Ray Peterson (1960)

Will he win the stock-car race and buy his baby a ring? Or will he crash and die? What do you think?

6

"Johnny Remember Me" John Leyton (1961)

He hears his lost lady love in the wind and the treetops, you know. Produced by gifted-but-gaga Joe Meek.

7

"Dead Man's Curve" Jan And Dean (1964)

Daredevil teen racer exits road at notorious blackspot.

8

"Terry" Twinkle (1964)

Unfaithful girl only has herself to blame for boyfriend's motorbike crash. The UK's "Leader Of The Pack." Speaking of which...

9

"Leader Of The Pack" The Shangri-Las (1965)

Sweet girl tells biker boy it is over. He vrooms off. Tires screech. "Look out! Look out! Look out!" Melodrama *par excellence*.

10

"I Want My Baby Back" Jimmy Cross (1965)

Teen's girlfriend dies in car crash. They're reunited—when he digs her up...

11

"Hey Joe" Jimi Hendrix (1966)

Oft-covered murder ballad, though Hendrix's breakthrough hit is definitive. Man shoots unfaithful woman then hotfoots to Mexico to avoid noose.

12

"Ode To Billy Joe" Bobbie Gentry (1967)

Her boy leaps to death from bridge. Quite why, no one knows. (Inspired movie.)

13

"The End" The Doors (1967)

Song about killing dad and boffing mom graces *Apocalypse Now*. Die is cast.

14

"Honey" Bobby Goldsboro (1968)

Girl crashes car—but survives! Then, inconveniently, is abducted by angels.

15

"Midnight Rambler" The Rolling Stones (1969)

Boston Strangler: naughty boy.

16

"The Seventh Seal" Scott Walker (1969)

Knight is checkmated by Death. Inspired by 1957 film of same name.

17

"Suicide Is Painless/Theme From M*A*S*H" Johnny Mandel (1970)

Eerily matter-of-fact view of self-immolation.

18

"Lady D'Arbanville" Cat Stevens (1970)

Is she sleeping? Not exactly. Melancholy ode to grave-bound sweetheart.

19

"Ben" Michael Jackson (1972)

Tender tribute to pet rat. (See also Elvis Presley's "Old Shep.")

20

"I Love The Dead" Alice Cooper (1973)

Tender lament to blue-fleshed cadaver. (See also Cannibal Corpse.)

21

"The Great Gig In The Sky" Pink Floyd (1973)

Vocalist Clare Torry was paid £30 (U.S. \$60) for warbling on what was originally titled "The Mortality Sequence."

22

"Psycho" Jack Kittel (1974)

Crazy killer lays waste to ex-wife, her paramour, puppy, and small girl. Songwriter Leon Payne committed suicide after composing song.

23

"Rock 'N' Roll Heaven" The Righteous Brothers (1974)

"If there's a rock and roll heaven, well you know they've got a hell of a band." Tribute to too-fast-to-live stars including Jimi, Janis, and Jim.

24

"Seasons In The Sun" Terry Jacks (1974)

Deathbed farewell to sundry loved ones, updating Jacques Brel's "Le Moribund" ("The Dying Man").

25

"Emma" Hot Chocolate (1974)

Atypical suicide song from 1970s popsters. Failed wannabe actress declares "I just can't keep on living on dreams no more" before exiting stage.

26

"Detroit Rock City" Kiss (1976)

Fan killed en route to show inspires band's best-loved song, complete with car-crash effects and a flamenco guitar solo.

27

"(Don't Fear) The Reaper" Blue Öyster Cult (1976)

Hairy rockers with tongues in bearded cheeks get Byrdsy on evergreen ode to the Great Beyond.

28

"Hello, This Is Joanie (The Telephone Answering Machine Song)" Paul Evans (1978)

Car crash claims narrator's girlfriend. How can he hear her again? Simple: call her answerphone...

29

"Suicide Solution" Ozzy Osbourne (1980)

Alcoholic ambiguity, inspired by AC/DC's Bon Scott and Ozzy himself. Cited in unsuccessful lawsuits by parents of troubled teens in United States.

30

"One Hundred Years" The Cure (1982)

Robert Smith's manifesto in nutshell: "It doesn't matter if we all die."

31

"Hallowed Be Thy Name" Iron Maiden (1982)

Postcard from Death Row.

32

"Angel Of Death" Slayer (1986)

Controversy-baiting anthem about Nazi lunatic Josef Mengele, memorably featured in *Gremlins 2* (the song, not Mengele).

33

"Sometimes It Snows In April" Prince (1986)

Misguided movie (*Under The Cherry Moon*) yields super soundtrack (*Parade*) and fine finale (this).

34

"One Tree Hill" U2 (1987)

For Bono's assistant, Greg Carroll, killed in motorbike accident. Named after volcanic island in Carroll's native New Zealand.

35

"The Mercy Seat" Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds (1988)

Last words from electric chair; not dead yet, but getting there.

36

"Dead Homiez" Ice Cube (1990)

Cube gets finger-waggingly stern. Four years later he records "Natural Born Killaz."

37

"Then She Did" Jane's Addiction (1990)

Dave Navarro and Perry Farrell's deceased mothers earn moving requiem.

38

"Cop Killer" Body Count (1992)

"If you believe that I'm a cop killer," grumbled Ice-T, "you believe that David Bowie is an astronaut."

39

"Try Not To Breathe" R.E.M. (1992)

Most of *Automatic For The People* is about death. Except the one about the snake.

40

"Murder Was The Case" Snoop Dogg (1993)

Trigger-happy rapper sells soul to Satan to allay doggy demise.

41

"Disarm" Smashing Pumpkins (1993)

"I never really had the guts to kill my parents," said Billy Corgan, "So I wrote a song about it instead."

42

"I'll Be Missing You" Puff Daddy (1997)

Police-sampling tribute to Notorious B.I.G. from mogul pal.

43

"Exit Music (For A Film)" Radiohead (1997)

Written for Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*. Contributed "We hope that you choke" to *OK Computer*'s litany of cheer.

44

"Mer Girl" Madonna (1998)

Madge's spookiest ode to deceased mother.

45

"Climbing To The Moon" Eels (1998)

Heartbreaking highlight of *Electro-Shock Blues*, officially Best Death Album In The World... Ever.

46

"Stan" Eminem (2000)

Obsessed fan meets maker. Dido sample made her as big as Shady himself.

47

"The Nobodies" Marilyn Manson (2000)

Bitterest of Manson's reactions to 1999 Columbine High School massacre, for which he was fatuously blamed.

48

"Jenny Was A Friend Of Mine" The Killers (2004)

Jealous boyfriend murders girl; story continues in "Midnight Show" and unreleased "Leave The Bourbon On The Shelf."

49

"The Cool" Lupe Fiasco (2006)

Slain gangsta climbs out of grave, only to be robbed by his assassins.

50

"Welcome To The Black Parade" My Chemical Romance (2006)

Finest song about cancer patient to top UK chart.



DANGEROUS OCCUPATIONS

Does what you do in a band affect your chances of succumbing to an early demise? Here are rock's most perilous positions, in ascending order of risk. Being a bassist is surprisingly safe—a large number of the sub-group seem to have spent most of their waking hours doing unimaginable quantities of drugs (Nikki Sixx, Lemmy), yet still live to tell the tale. There are, however, more cautionary stories. Take out extra life insurance if you decide you want to be one of the following:

1

DRUMMER

While a role-call of the drummers we have omitted should suffice (including Karen Carpenter, Feeder's Jon Lee, Lush's Chris Acland, the Byrds' Michael Clarke, and metal journeyman Cozy Powell), drumming tops our chart thanks to just one man. Jeff Porcaro, cofounder of Toto and a sessioneer whose credits include Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, sprayed his yard with pesticide in 1992, only for an allergic reaction to trigger a fatal heart attack. The legacy of Spinal Tap—whose drummer John "Stumpy" Pepys died in a "bizarre gardening accident"—lives

2

SINGER (MALE)

Whether you are Darby Crash (fronted punk pioneers the Germs, died the day before John Lennon in 1980) or Falco (rocked Amadeus, but collided with a bus in 1998), you will buy the farm if you grab the mike. Bulking up is no defence, as Luther Vandross (stroke, 2005) and Barry White (kidney failure, 2003) demonstrate. The exception that proves the rule: Aerosmith's Steven Tyler. Oft found turning blue and vomiting blood in his narcotic heyday, Tyler's survival is even more remarkable because he began as a...

3

GUITARIST

The fame! The fortune! The *Guitar World* obituary! Dimebag Darrell (see page 238), Stevie Ray Vaughan (see page 120), and Randy Rhoads (see page 91) illustrate that guitarists may not just die early, but die spectacularly. Even if you leave your car by a bridge and vanish, like Richey Edwards of Manic Street Preachers in 1995, history will judge you more dead than gone. Unless you have the unstoppable constitution of Keith Richards ("I was number one on the 'Who's Likely To Die' list for ten years").

4

KEYBOARD PLAYER FOR THE GRATEFUL DEAD

Ronald "Pigpen" McKernan cofounded the trippy behemoth. His drinking was more accomplished than his playing, and he died in 1973. Keith Godchaux expired in an automobile accident in 1980. Brent Mydland overdosed in 1990. Vince Welnick may or may not have cut his own throat, but was certainly dead by 2006. All five died in California. Bruce Hornsby, who filled in for a tour or two, is still alive and kicking, but was sampled on a Tupac record (so the omens are stacking up).

5

SINGER (FEMALE)

Janis Joplin (see page 32), Selena (see page 148), and Aaliyah (see page 200) are some of the songstresses that didn't even make it to thirty. Other premature deaths that didn't make it into the book include Eva Cassidy (killed by cancer at thirty-three years old in 1996), Ofra Haza (succumbed to mysteriously undisclosed illnesses in 2000 at forty-two years old), and Tammy Wynette (exhumed to settle a dispute about whether painkillers contributed to her 1998 demise—apparently, they didn't).