

Music and Civil Rights Icon Odetta Holmes Passes Away

Written by Robert ID4564

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Music and civil rights icon Odetta passed away December 2 as a result of multiple illnesses. Her music made history and her renditions of civil rights anthems will live on as part of her legacy. She was born Odetta Holmes in Birmingham, Ala., on Dec. 31, 1930, and released her first album, "The Tin Angel," in 1954. In her life time Odetta received a National Medal of Arts and a Living Legend Award. She died at Lenox Hill Hospital; Odetta Holmes was 77 years old.

One of the contributing illnesses that took the life of Odetta was pulmonary fibrosis (PF), an illness that relentlessly fills the lungs with scar tissue and suffocates its victims, and is one of the deadliest yet least well known diseases in the country. Despite being diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis two years ago, a diagnosis that was essentially a death sentence, Odetta went on to perform extraordinary concerts all over the world. Her doctors were amazed at her determination to sing while battling the disease.

"We are deeply saddened at the loss of such a beloved singer and civil rights legend," said Mishka Michon, chief executive officer for the Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis (CPF). "We lose 40,000 people a year to this disease (as many as are lost to breast cancer), and each loss is painful. Odetta's death highlights for the nation, and for her fans, what those of us fighting pulmonary fibrosis already know - that there is a killer disease randomly striking thousands and we have no treatments. Marlon Brando, Gordon Jump and Robert Goulet's lives were among those cut down by pulmonary fibrosis - we don't want to see these losses continue at their current pace. We can only hope that, with increased awareness and funding for research, the future will change for others."

Despite her markedly reduced lung capacity, she managed to complete entire concerts and only access her supplemental oxygen as she left the stage.

Odetta's manager, Doug Yeager, told the CPF she was diagnosed with PF two years ago but refused to let the grim prognosis get her down. Most patients live less than three years and few are able to continue a normal life because of the extremely life limiting breathlessness and related exhaustion.

Odetta used supplemental oxygen for the two years she suffered, but somehow had the strength to perform more than 60 concerts after her diagnosis around the world - all of her performances except for one were completed without her having to use an oxygen tank, Yeager

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said.

"She wouldn't use her oxygen during her concerts. Somehow, she'd go out and sing for 90 minutes without it," Yeager said. The only concert she performed with supplemental oxygen was one in Denver, Colorado, a city that sits at 5,280 feet of elevation, he said.

Odetta's last concert performance was October 26th of this year, according to Yeager. She also performed a concert October 6th, in front of 100,000 people at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park.

Pulmonary Fibrosis (PF) is a tissue debilitating lung disease that causes progressive scarring of the lungs, ultimately robbing a person of the ability to breathe. As many people die each year to PF as to breast cancer, yet most have never heard of it until they receive the devastating diagnosis. More than 128,000 suffer from the disease and incidence and prevalence has increased more than 150 percent in the last several years.

There is no FDA approved treatment for PF, no known cause and no cure. Odetta is one of 40,000 people who will die this year from Pulmonary Fibrosis (PF). The CPF has counseled thousands of patients and family members who've faced pulmonary fibrosis. To learn more, please visit: www.coalitionforpf.org .