

Earth, Wind & Fire founder Maurice White dead at 74

BY DAVID BAUDER AND HILLEL ITALIE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK (AP) - Earth, Wind & Fire founder Maurice White, whose horn-driven band sold more than 90 million albums, died Feb. 3 at his home in Los Angeles.

White, who was 74, suffered from Parkinson's Disease and had retreated from the public even as the band he founded kept performing.

Earth, Wind & Fire, a nine-piece band featuring the two White brothers, Maurice and Verdine, singer Philip Bailey, and the distinctive horn section, were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2000. The band's most successful period started with the 1975 album "That's The Way of The World" and continued through the rest of the decade. Earth, Wind & Fire will be honored at the Grammy Awards on Feb. 15.

White publicly revealed he had Parkinson's at the time of the band's Hall of Fame induction, but he had shown symptoms of the neurological disease back in the 1980s. He stopped touring with the band in 1995.



White

White said in an interview with The Associated Press in 2000 that he wanted the band's music to inspire instead of just entertain.

"That was the whole objective, to try to inspire young people to believe in themselves and to follow through on their ideas," he said. "We've touched so many people with these songs."

After White relocated to Los Angeles, he formed a new band and named it Earth, Wind & Fire after the three elements in his astrological chart.

The band's early sound was jazzy, but evolved into an exuberant, horn-driven mix of jazz, funk, gospel and Big Band music. Their appeal wasn't just on records but on stage, their concerts a whirl of dancing, fog machines, multi-

colored lights and glittery costumes. Earth, Wind & Fire performed everywhere from the Super Bowl to the White House.

Maurice White also had a substantial side career producing other artists, including Barbra Streisand and Cher. In the 1970s, he co-wrote and co-produced the Emotions' No. 1 hit "Best of My Love."

White was born in Memphis in 1941, the son of a doctor and grandson of a New Orleans piano player. He showed musical gifts at an early age, studying at the Chicago Conservancy.

"We live in a negative society," White told Newsweek at the height of the band's success. "Most people can't see beauty and love. I see our music as medicine."

White's memoir, "Keep Your Head to the Sky: My Life with Earth, Wind & Fire," is scheduled to be released Sept. 13 by Amistad. The book features a forward by Steve Harvey and an afterword by David Foster.

AP Entertainment Writers Nekesa Mumbi Moody and Derrick J. Lang contributed to this report.

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