

# ARTS & FEATURES

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## LOSING A LEGEND

*"I don't know where I'm going from here, but I promise it won't be boring."*

David Bowie

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David Robert Jones, more commonly known as David Bowie, died on Jan. 10.

According to CNN, Bowie had been fighting an 18-month battle with cancer, still actively recording his last album, "Blackstar", as his illness worsened.

The deaths of a celebrity as influential as Bowie sparks a wide range of emotions from people of all backgrounds. Following Bowie's death, social media sites received a flood of mourning, and conflicting opinions emerged.

Jimmy Jackson, a DJ for On Your Feet Productions from Canton, North Carolina, is a devoted David Bowie fan and articulated what he believes made Bowie a crucial artist of the past four decades.

"David changed personas many times over the course of his career," Jackson said. "He was extremely ahead of his time; he didn't care what your views on his sexuality, identity, gender or anything else were."

Jackson explained that David Bowie was a very independent artist.

"He went through a lot of managers. He spent lots and lots of money buying out their contracts, terminating them, hiring new ones," Jackson said. "He was always doing things outside of the box."

Sam Tomaka, a 21-year-old philosophy student at UNC Asheville, explained how Bowie's art was constantly evolving and widely influential.

"One thing I think is particularly fascinating is his affinity for German culture. He lived in West Berlin from 1977 to 1979, already quite famous and reportedly fell in love with the German people while there," Tomaka said. "I think that's an important context to keep in mind if you're trying to understand his life and his work."

Tomaka also noted Bowie's acknowledgements of racial inequality in the music industry.

"He was also a huge rap fan, apparently, and gave a great interview on MTV during which he railed the network for its persistent exclusion of black artists," Tomaka said. "He even cited Kendrick Lamar's 'To Pimp a Butterfly' as an artistic inspiration for his 'Blackstar' album."

Mark West, a mass communication professor at UNCA, said Bowie's mastery of reinvention was what made him such a cultural figurehead during the last few decades.

"Bowie was, to my mind, an artist who was always reaching for something different," West said. "I wasn't one of those people who saw him as a foremost artist in my own personal estimation, but he always had the capacity to surprise by whom he picked to work with."

West said Bowie first caught his attention when working with Brian Eno on the Berlin Trilogy.

"I really came to listen to Bowie later than a lot of people," West said, "I particularly liked his tribute to Florian Schneider, on V2 Schneider, and his work with Nile Rodgers, 'Let's Dance,' that was a very different Bowie."

West said out of all the material Bowie's produced, his latest work was the most fascinating.

"His last album was a real different mood," West said. "His last work was really astonishing, it was so evocative and astonishing that he really kind of found an area to work in that I thought was really important."

West said Bowie was particularly notable, because, unlike many of his contemporaries, he was able to avoid entering a cycle of doing nothing but replaying his biggest hits during live performances.

"Bowie, of all those musicians, was able to break free of that repetition, not by leaving the playing field like The Beatles did, but by reinvention, and I think that's what made him special in people's minds."

