# Houston, Whitney (1963-) Encyclopedia Article

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# Houston, Whitney (1963—)

Singer Whitney Houston, an African American beauty with a clear soprano voice, became a megastar in the 1980s. She was born (in East Orange, New Jersey) the daughter of gospel singer Cissy Houston and a cousin to singing star Dionne Warwick, and began singing herself at age 11 with the New Hope Baptist Choir. In her teens she sang backup for Chaka Khan and Lou Rawls, but at 18 became a successful model and appeared in television comedies, while pursuing her singing career. This took off when she was signed exclusively by Clive Davis of Arista Records. Under his careful management, she launched her first album, *Whitney Houston,* in 1984. It sold 14 million copies, setting a debut album record. She became a household name and, by the late 1990s, she was the recipient of five Grammy Awards, 21 American Music Awards, and numerous Gold and Platinum discs. In 1982, Houston married singer Bobby Brown, and embarked on a screen career, starring opposite Kevin Costner in *The Bodyguard*. She acted on screen again in *Waiting to Exhale* (1985), directed by actor Forest Whitaker with an all-female African American cast, and in *The Preacher's Wife* (1996) with Denzel Washington. All three movies yielded massive hit songs, most notably "I Will Always Love You." Houston's commanding, multi-octave range has allowed her to sing a wide range of material—gospel, R&B, pop, rock, and, most popularly, love ballads. By the late 1990s, despite commercial competition from performers such as Mariah Carey, Whitney Houston was still a favorite among female American vocalists, both at home and in Britain.

## Further Reading:

Whitburn, Joel. *The Billboard Book of Top 40 Hits*. New York, Billboard Publication, Inc. 1996.