

CAROLE FREDERICKS: FULL CIRCLE

When Carole Fredericks first left home, she moved from Springfield, Massachusetts, a sleepy, leafy New England town, all the way cross-country to San Francisco, a city in the early 1970s synonymous with a vibrant, iconoclastic New Age lifestyle. Seven years there transformed her into an experienced performer but exposure in the Bay Area clubs left her feeling dissatisfied and unfulfilled. San Francisco was larger than Springfield, but it still wasn't large enough. Fredericks was a big Black woman with a big, rich voice. She wanted to sing to the world, and she wanted the world to hear her. Ambitious and fearless, she moved again. This time, however, she was not simply leaving home; she was leaving the United States of America. And in 1979, in a time-honored tradition featuring Josephine Baker in the Twenties, Richard Wright in the Forties and James Baldwin in the Fifties, she moved to Paris. The City of Lights became her home for twenty-two years and her final resting place.

Although Fredericks left her mother country, she never left her roots. Steeped in the fertile music traditions of her parents, striving professionals from the Carolinas and the West Indies, she emerged as a powerful singer who wove the passionate threads of blues, jazz, gospel and R&B into a uniquely French tapestry. Johnny Hallyday, Mylène Farmer, Patricia Kaas and other European stars hired her for background vocals in concerts and session work. In 1990, she joined Jean-Jacques Goldman and Michael Jones to form the phenomenally successful trio, Fredericks Goldman Jones. For ten years they performed in front of sold-out crowds throughout Europe, Africa, Southeast Asia and Japan. During this period Fredericks also released two popular solo albums, *Springfield*

(1996), an album in English dedicated to her mother and her hometown, and *Couleurs et parfums* (1999), a tour de force of cultural mixes including Wolof, the national language of Senegal, a country where she always, instantly felt at home.

She had done the impossible—struck out on her own and achieved international fame and success—when, at age 49, she was suddenly felled by a massive heart attack in Dakar in 2001. She was buried in Montmartre Cemetery.

One particularly intriguing element in Fredericks's life story is the fact that she thrived in France although when she first arrived she spoke no French. She became such a confident conversationalist and performer that native speakers often thought she was born into a francophone family. After her death, her many grieving relatives were astonished by the extent of her musical career, her years of dedicated humanitarian work with Les Enfoirés des Restos du Coeur, the outpouring of condolences from fans around the world and other special but previously unknown qualities of her life.

Fredericks's only sister, Connie Fredericks-Malone, was inspired to honor her achievements by creating a living memorial. With the help of Nancy Gadbois, a highly respected French teacher in Springfield, Fredericks-Malone developed an innovative program designed to connect American schoolchildren to contemporary French language and culture. *Tant Qu'elle Chante, Elle Vit!* (As Long As She Sings, She Lives) uses Fredericks's dynamic performance videos in conjunction with lyrics, workbooks and the Internet to teach students not only how to speak French but also how to envision and communicate with a wider world. Every year Fredericks-Malone travels around the country making presentations to schools, institutions and organizations, garnering ever-widening support for *Tant Qu'elle Chante, Elle Vit!* as a valuable pedagogical tools.

Transcending place and race, music once again speaks directly to the irrepressible force that resides within the human spirit to fulfill its destiny. That the career of Carole Fredericks blossomed most fully in French comes as no surprise to lovers, speakers and teachers of French. That her musical legacy will continue to reach a new and broader audience in her mother country is the ultimate round trip.

CAROLE FREDERICKS: FULL CIRCLE was written by Barbara Summers.