Elton John
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Sir Elton Hercules John, CBE (born Reginald Kenneth Dwight; 25 March 1947) is an English singer, pianist, and composer. He has worked with lyricist Bernie Taupin as his songwriting partner since 1967; they have collaborated on more than 30 albums to date. In his five-decade career Elton John has sold more than 300 million records, making him one of the best-selling music artists in the world.[1] He has more than fifty Top 40 hits, including seven consecutive No. 1 US albums, 58 Billboard Top 40 singles, 27 Top 10, four No. 2 and nine No. 1. For 31 consecutive years (1970–2000) he had at least one song in the Billboard Hot 100. His tribute single, re-penned in dedication to the late Princess Diana, “Candle in the Wind 1997” sold over 33 million copies worldwide and is the best-selling single in the history of the UK and US singles charts.[2][3] He has also composed music, produced records, and has occasionally acted in films. John owned Watford Football Club from 1976 to 1987, and 1997 to 2002. He is an Honorary Life President of the club, and in 2014 had a stand named after him at the club's home stadium.

Raised in the Pinner area of London, John learned to play piano at an early age, and by 1962 had formed Bluesology. John met his songwriting partner, Bernie Taupin, in 1967, after they had both answered an advert for songwriters. For two years they wrote songs for other artists, including Lulu, and John also worked as a session musician for artists such as the Hollies and the Scaffold. In 1969 his debut album, Empty Sky, was released. In 1970 a single, “Your Song”, from his second album, Elton John, reached the top ten in the UK and the US, his first hit single. After decades of commercial chart success, John has also achieved success in musical theatre, both in the West End and on Broadway, composing the music for The Lion King and musicals, Aida and Billy Elliot the Musical.

He has received five Grammy Awards, five Brit Awards – winning two awards for Outstanding Contribution to Music and the first Brits Icon in 2013 for his “lasting impact on British culture”, an Academy Award, a Golden Globe Award, a Tony Award, a Disney Legends award, and the Kennedy Center Honors in 2004. In 2004, Rolling Stone ranked him Number 49 on its list of 100 influential musicians of the rock and roll era.[4][5] In 2013, Billboard ranked him the most successful male solo artist on the Billboard Hot 100 Top All-Time Artists (third overall behind Ray Charles and Madonna).[6] He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1994, is an inductee into the Songwriters Hall of Fame, and is a fellow of the British Academy of Songwriters, Composers and Authors. Having been named a Order of the British Empire in 1996, John was made a Knight Bachelor by the Queen's Diamond Jubilee outside Buckingham Palace in 2012.

He has been heavily involved in the fight against AIDS since the late 1980s. In 1992, he established the Elton John AIDS Foundation and a year later began hosting the annual Academy Award Party, which has since become one of the highest-profile Oscar parties in the Hollywood film industry. Since its inception, the foundation has raised over US$200 million. [7] John, who announced he was bisexual in 1976 and has been openly gay since 1986, entered into a civil partnership with David Furnish on 21 December 2005, and after same-sex marriage became legal in England and Wales in 2014, wed Furnish on 21 December 2014.

Life and career
Early life
Elton John was born Reginald Kenneth Dwight on 25 March 1947, in Pinner, Middlesex, the eldest child of Stanley Dwight (1925–1991) and only child of Sheila Eileen Inez Harris; 1925–2017).[8][9][10] He was educated at Pinner Wood Junior School, Redditch School and Pinner County Grammar School, until the age of 17, when he left just prior to his A-Level examinations to pursue a career in the music industry.[11][12][13]

When he began to seriously consider a career in music, Elton John's father, who served as a flight lieutenant in the Royal Air Force, tried to steer him toward a more conventional career, such as banking.[14] John has stated that his wild stage costumes and performances were his way of letting go after such a restrictive childhood.[15] Both of John's parents were musically inclined, his father having been a trumpet player with the Bob Miller Band, a semi-professional big band that played at military dances.[16] The Dways were keen record buyers, exposing John to the popular singers and musicians of the day, and John remembers being immediately hooked on rock and roll when his mother brought home records by Elvis Presley and Bill Haley & His Comets in 1956.[17][18]

Elton John started playing the piano at the age of three, and within a year, his mother heard him picking out Winifred Atwell's “The Skater's Waltz” by ear.[17][18] After performing at parties and family gatherings, at the age of 7 he took formal piano lessons. He showed musical aptitude at school, the ability to compose melodies, and gained some notoriety by playing like Jerry Lee Lewis at school functions. At the age of 11, he won a junior scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music. According to one of his instructors, John promptly played back, like a “gramophone record”, a four-page piece by Handel that he heard for the first time.[19]

For the next five years, he attended Saturday classes at the Academy in central London, and has stated that he enjoyed playing Chopin and Bach and singing in the choir during Saturday classes, but that he was not otherwise a diligent classical student. [20] “I kind of resented going to the Academy,” he says. “I was one of those who could just about get away without practising and still pass, scrape through the grades”.[21] He even claims that he would sometimes skip classes and just ride around on the Tube.[22] However, several instructors have testified that he was a “model student”, and during the last few years, he was taking lessons from a private tutor in addition to his classes at the Academy.[23]

Elton John's mother, though also strict with her son, was more vivacious than her husband, and something of a free spirit. With Stanley Dwight uninterested in his son and often physically absent, John was raised primarily by his mother and maternal grandmother. When his father was home, the Dways would have terrible arguments that greatly distressed their son.[24] When John was 14, they divorced. His mother then married a local printer, Fred Farebrother, a caring and supportive stepfather whom John affectionately referred to as “Dart”, his first name in reverse.[25] They moved into flat No. 1A in an eight-unit apartment building called Grove Court, not far from both previous homes. It was there that John wrote the songs that launched his career as a rock star; he lived there until he had four albums simultaneously in the American Top 40.[26]

Pub pianist to staff songwriter (1962–1969)
At the age of 15, with the help of his mother and stepfather, Reginald Dwight became a weekend pianist at a nearby pub, the Northwood Hills Hotel, playing Thursday to Sunday nights.[26] Known simply as “Reggie”, he played a range of popular standards, including songs by Jim Reeves and Ray Charles, as well as songs he had written himself.[27][28] A stint with a short-lived group called the Corvettes rounded out his time.[21]

In 1962, Dwight and his friends formed a band called Bluesology. By day, he ran errands for a music publishing company; he divided his nights between solo gigs at a London hotel bar and working with Bluesology. By the mid-1960s, Bluesology was backing touring American soul and R&B musicians like the Isley Brothers, Major Lance and Patti Labelle and the Bluebelles. In 1966, the band became musician Long John Baldry's supporting band, and played 16 times at the Marquee Club.[29]
The team of Elton John and Bernie Taupin wrote together more complex songs for John to record for DJM. The first was the single “I’ve Been Loving You” (1968), produced by Caleb Quaye, former lead singer of the Drifters, and arranged by touring drummer Roger Pope, and bassist Tony Murray. John recorded another single, “Lady Samantha”, and a duet, Empty Sky. For their follow-up album, DJM, Elton John and Bernie Taupin enlisted Gus Dudgeon as producer and Paul Buckmaster as musical arranger. Elton John was released in April 1970 on DJM Records/Pye Records in the UK and Uni Records in the US, and established the formula for subsequent albums—gospel-chorded rockers and poignant ballads. The first single from the album, “Border Song”, made it into the US Top 100, peaking at Number 92. The second single, “Your Song”, reached number seven in the US Single Chart and number eight in the UK, becoming John's first hit song as a solo artist. The album soon became his first hit album, reaching number four on the US Billboard 200 and number five on the UK Albums Chart. Elton John had a major hit with his debut single “Your Song” in 1970, reaching number 21 on the UK Singles Chart. In 1970, Elton John was featured on “Whatever Gets You Through the Night” on John Lennon’s album by Yoko Ono titled “Double Fantasy.”

Debut album to Goodbye Yellow Brick Road (1969–1973)

On the advice of music promoter Steve Brown, John and Taupin began writing more complex songs for John to record for DJM. The first was the single “I’ve Been Loving You” (1968), produced by Caleb Quaye, former lead singer of the Drifters, and arranged by touring drummer Roger Pope, and bassist Tony Murray. John recorded another single, “Lady Samantha”, and a duet, Empty Sky. For their follow-up album, DJM, Elton John and Bernie Taupin enlisted Gus Dudgeon as producer and Paul Buckmaster as musical arranger. Elton John was released in April 1970 on DJM Records/Pye Records in the UK and Uni Records in the US, and established the formula for subsequent albums—gospel-chorded rockers and poignant ballads. The first single from the album, “Border Song”, made it into the US Top 100, peaking at Number 92. The second single, “Your Song”, reached number seven in the US Single Chart and number eight in the UK, becoming John's first hit song as a solo artist. The album soon became his first hit album, reaching number four on the US Billboard 200 and number five on the UK Albums Chart. Elton John had a major hit with his debut single “Your Song” in 1970, reaching number 21 on the UK Singles Chart. In 1970, Elton John was featured on “Whatever Gets You Through the Night” on John Lennon’s album by Yoko Ono titled “Double Fantasy.”

The Rocket Record Company to 21 at 33 (1974–1979)

John formed his own label named the Rocket Record Company (distributed in the US by MCA and initially by Island in the UK and signed acts to it—notably Joe Cocker and Paul McCartney). John announced he was retiring from performing; Taupin began collaborating with others. His 1981 album, "A Single Man" (1981), was his first and only album under the label. The album reached number two in the UK and spawned the hit singles "Rocket Man" and "Kinky Cat", both of which were recorded at Trident Studios in London. The pop album "Don't Shoot Me I'm Only the Piano Player" came out at the start of 1973 and reached number one in the UK, the US, Australia among others. The album produced the hits "Crocodile Rock", his first US hit and "Rocket Man", the first album and single respectively on the consolidated MCA Records label in the US, and was the first album in the US to go gold based on sales of 500,000 copies. In 1973, Elton John released his first American concert took place at the Troubadour in Los Angeles in August 1970, and was a success. The concept of the "Crocodile Rock" album was a success. The album became a hit in the US, reaching number 21 on the Billboard 200. The album was released in May, followed by the single "Chicken Little". In 1972, Elton John and Bernie Taupin wrote the song "Tiny Dancer". In 1972, Elton John and Bernie Taupin wrote the song "Tiny Dancer". In 1972, Elton John and Bernie Taupin wrote the song "Tiny Dancer". In 1972, Elton John and Bernie Taupin wrote the song "Tiny Dancer".
In 2010, John performed at the Concert for New York City, performing "I Want Love" as well as "Your Song" in a duet with Billy Joel. [111]

In August 2003, he scored his fifth UK number one single with "Are You Ready for Love?" [112] Returning to musical theatre, John composed music for a West End production of Elton the Musical. [113] In 2005, Elton performed duets with Chris Martin. [114] On 11 September 2005, John announced on The Today Show that he was touring Australia, New Zealand, and the UK for two years. [115] In October 2006, John released Elton at Dodger Stadium, a live album recorded at the Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena on 25 September 2006. [116] The album included two new songs, "Two Bad Hands" and "Billy Joel's Mr. Media". [117] In 2007, John released his first album in five years, The Red Piano, which included a cover of "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me". [118] The album reached number one in the UK and was certified triple platinum by the BPI. [119] In 2008, John released his 27th album, The Road to El Dorado, which included a cover of "Ain't No Fun (If You Can't Dance)". [120] In 2009, John released his 28th album, Love Songs, which included a cover of "Sacrifice" to Elton John's catalog. [121] In 2010, John released his 29th album, The Voice. [122] In 2011, John released his 30th album, The Diving Board, which included a cover of "Tiny Dancer". [123] In 2012, John released his 31st album, The Aquaregia, which included a cover of "Rocket Man". [124] In 2013, John released his 32nd album, The Diving Board, which included a cover of "Tiny Dancer". [125] In 2014, John released his 33rd album, The Diving Board, which included a cover of "Tiny Dancer". [126]

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In 1976, Elton John became the club's chairman and director, appointing Graham Taylor as manager and
investing large sums of money as the club rose three divisions into the English First Division.

On 22 April 2017, he was discharged from hospital after two nights of intensive care for contracting "a harmful and unusual" bacterial infection during his return flight home from a South American tour in Santiago, Chile.

Elton John is a chairwoman of the Elton John AIDS Foundation, which is a major event to benefit AIDS charities, most notably Elton John's own Elton John AIDS Foundation, for which he is a chairwoman. John, who maintains a part-time residence in Atlanta, Georgia, became a fan of the Atlanta Braves baseball team when he moved there in 1991.

In 2012, Elton John resisted calls to boycott Russia in protest at the Russian LGBT propaganda law, but told fans at a Moscow concert that the Russian laws were "inhumane and isolating" and he was "deeply saddened and shocked over the current legislation."

Elton John and Furnish were amongst the first couples in the UK to form a civil partnership, which was held at the Windsor Guildhall.

In 2015, he admitted to spending £30 million on art. In October 2015, it was announced Elton John would release his 32nd studio album, "Wonderful Crazy Night," on 5 February 2016. As with his last album, it was produced by T-Bone Burnett.

The album's release date was pushed back, but on its release in September 2013 it reached No. 3 in the UK and No. 4 in the US.

In 2013, Elton John received the first Brits Icon Award for his "lasting impact" on UK Culture.

In 2003, John sold the contents of his Holland Park home—expected to fetch £800,000 at Sotheby's—to modernise his London home. In 2012, he was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) by the Queen.

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John has said that he took risks with unprotected sex during the 1980s and considers himself lucky to have avoided the AIDS epidemic. In 1986, he joined with Dionne Warwick, Gladys Knight and Stevie Wonder to record the single "That's What Friends Are For", with all profits being donated to the American Foundation for AIDS Research. The song won John and the others the Grammy Award for Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals. In April 1990, John performed his 1968 ballad "Skylight" at the funeral of Ryan White, a teenage haemophiliac who had befriended him.

Elton John became more closely associated with AIDS charities following the deaths of his friends Ryan White in 1990 and Freddie Mercury in 1991, raising large amounts of money and using his public profile to raise awareness of the disease. He founded the Elton John AIDS Foundation in 1992 as a charity to fund programmes for HIV/AIDS prevention, for the elimination of prejudice and discrimination against HIV/AIDS-affected individuals, and for providing services to people living with or at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. This cause continues to be one of his personal passions.

In 1993, he began hosting his annual Academy Award Party, which has become one of the highest-profile Oscar parties in the Hollywood film industry, and has raised over US$200 million. In early 2006, John donated the smaller of two bright-red Yamaha pianos from his Las Vegas, Nevada show to auction on eBay to raise public awareness and funds for the foundation. To raise money for his AIDS charity, he annually hosts a glamorous White Tie & Tiara Ball in the grounds of his home in Old Windsor in Berkshire to which many famous celebrities are invited. On 28 June 2007, the 9th annual White Tie & Tiara Ball took place. The menu consisted of a truffle soufflé followed by Surf and Turf (filet mignon with Maine lobster tail) and a giant Knickerbocker glory ice cream. An auction followed the dinner held by Stephen Fry. A Rolls Royce "Phantom" drophead coupe and a piece of Tracey Emin's artwork both raised £800,000 for the charity fund, with the total amount raised reaching £3.5 million.

In 2010, John sang "Deedle" with Tom Jones and "Big Spender" with Shirley Bassey. The 2011 guests included Sarah, Duchess of York, Elizabeth Hurley and George Michael (who performed "Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me" in a duet with John), and the auction raised £5 million, adding to the £45 million the Balls have raised for the Elton John AIDS Foundation.

Honours and awards

He was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility in 1994. He and Bernie Taupin had previously been inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1992. John was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 1995. For his charitable work, John was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II on 24 February 1998. In October 1975, John became the 1,662nd person to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

He was awarded Society of Singers Lifetime Achievement Award in 2003. He became a recipient of a Kennedy Center Honor in 2004, and a Disney Legends Award in 2006. In 2000, he was named the MusiCares Person of the Year for his artistic achievement in the music industry and dedication to philanthropy. In 2010, he was awarded with the PWS for Music Heritage Award, which was erected on The Namaste Lounge Pub in Northwood, London, where John performed his first gig.

Music awards

Academy Awards
- 1995: Best Original Song (won) for "Can You Feel The Love Tonight" from The Lion King
- 1995: Best Original Song (won) for "Circle of Life" from The Lion King
- 2001: Best Original Song (won) for "I'm Still Standing" from The Elton John Aids Foundation

Grammy Awards
- 1971: Best New Artist (nominated)
- 1971: Album of the Year (nominated) for Elton John
- 1971: Best Contemporary Male Vocalist (nominated for Elton John)
- 1972: Best Original Score Written for a Motion Picture (nominated for Saturday Night Fever)
- 1974: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (nominated for "Don't Go Breaking My Heart")
- 1975: Album of the Year (nominated for Caribou)
- 1975: Record of the Year (nominated for "Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me")
- 1975: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (nominated for "Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me")
- 1976: Album of the Year (nominated for Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy)
- 1976: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (nominated for Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy)
- 1977: Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal (nominated for "Don't Go Breaking My Heart") with Nikki Dee
- 1980: Best R&B Vocal Performance - Male (nominated for "Mama Can't Buy You Love")
- 1983: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (nominated for "Blue Eyes")
- 1985: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (nominated for "Restless")
- 1987: Record of the Year (nominated for "That's What Friends Are For", performed by Dionne Warwick & Friends (award shared with Dionne Warwick, Gladys Knight & Stevie Wonder))
- 1987: Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal (nominated for "That's What Friends Are For", performed by Dionne Warwick & Friends (award shared with Dionne Warwick, Gladys Knight & Stevie Wonder))
- 1988: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (nominated for "Candle in the Wind" (live))
- 1992: Best Instrumental Composition (won for "Busa"), performed by James Galway
- 1993: Best Pop Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal (nominated for "Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me") with George Michael
- 1993: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (nominated for "The One")
- 1995: Song of the Year (nominated for "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" from The Lion King)
- 1995: Song of the Year (nominated for "Circle of Life" from The Lion King)
- 1995: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (won for "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" from The Lion King)
- 1995: Best Song Written Specifically for a Motion Picture or for Television (nominated for "Can You Feel the Love Tonight" from The Lion King)
- 1995: Best Song Written Specifically for a Motion Picture or for Television (won for "Circle of Life" from The Lion King)
- 1995: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (nominated for "Believe")
- 1997: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (nominated for "Candle in the Wind 1997")
- 1999: Grammy Legend Award
- 2001: Best Musical Show Album (won for Elton John & Tim Rice's Aidsaward shared with Guy Babylon, Paul Bogaev & Chris Montan (producers), Tim Rice (lyricist) and the original Broadway cast with Heather Headley, Adam Pascal, and Sherie Rene Scott)
- 2002: Best Pop Vocal Album (nominated for Songs from the West Coast)
- 2002: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (nominated for "I Want Love")
- 2003: Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (nominated for "Original Sin")
- 2005: Best Pop Collaboration with Vocals (nominated for "Sorry Seems To Be the Hardest Word" with Ray Charles)
- 2011: Best Pop Collaboration with Vocals (nominated with Leon Russell for "If It Wasn't for Bad")

Theatre awards

Tony Awards
- 1998: Best Original Musical Score (nominated for The Lion King)
- 2000: Best Original Musical Score (won for Aida)
- 2009: Best Score (Music and/or Lyrics) (nominated for Billy Elliot the Musical)
- 2010: Best Play (nominated as producer for Next Fall)

Elton John Band

Since 1970, John's band, of which he is the pianist and lead singer, has been known as the Elton John Band. The band has had multiple line-up changes, but Nigel Olsson, Davey Johnstone, and Ray Cooper have been members (albeit non-consecutively) since 1970 (Olsson), 1972 (Johnstone) and 1974 (Cooper). Olsson left the band in 1984 but rejoined in 2000. Ray Cooper has worked on and off with the Elton John Band because he maintains obligations to other musicians as a session player and sideman as a road-tour percussionist.

Current members
- Elton John – lead vocals, piano
- Nigel Olsson – drums, vocals
- Davey Johnstone – guitar, musical director, vocals
John Mahon – percussion, vocals
Kim Bullard – keyboards
Matt Bissonette – bass
Ray Cooper – percussion

Previous band members
Guy Babylon – keyboards
Bob Birch – bass guitar, vocals
Tom Costello – drums
David Hentschel – synthesiser
Tony Murray – bass
Roger Pope – drums, percussion
Fred Mandel – keyboards, guitars
Dee Murray – bass guitar, vocals
James Newton Howard – conductor, keyboards, orchestrations
Caleb Quaye – guitar, drums, percussion
Kenny Passarelli – bass, background vocals
Charlie Morgan – drums
John Jorgenson – guitars, saxophone, pedal steel, mandolin, vocals
David Paton – bass guitar, vocals
Tata Vega – lead backing vocals
Rose Stone – backing vocals
Lisa Stone – backing vocals
Jean Witherspoon – backing vocals

Other notable contributors and guests
Leon Russell – piano, vocals
Gus Dudgeon – production
Paul Buckmaster – orchestrations
Lesley Duncan – acoustic guitar, vocals, background vocals
Dusty Springfield – background vocals
Rick Wakeman – organ
Jean-Luc Ponty – electric violin
Luther Vandross – vocals
Kiki Dee – background vocals
Bruce Johnston – vocals, background vocals
Carl Wilson – vocals, background vocals
Toni Tennille – vocals, background vocals
London Symphony Orchestra
London Philharmonic Orchestra
Melbourne Symphony Orchestra
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
David Sanborn – saxophone
David Paich – organ
Jeff Porcaro – drums
Petie Townsend – guitar
Stevie Wonder – harmonica
John Deacon – bass
Nik Kershaw – electric guitar
Freddie Hubbard – trumpet, flugelhorn
Eric Clapton – vocals
David Gilmour – guitar
k.d. lang – vocals
P.M. Dawn – vocals
Little Richard – vocals
Don Henley – vocals
Chris Rea – vocals
Tammy Wynette – vocals
Gladys Knight – vocals
Paul Young – vocals
Bonnie Raitt – vocals
Leonard Cohen – vocals
George Michael – vocals

Discography

Solo studio albums
Empty Sky (1969)
Elton John (1970)
Tumbleweed Connection (1970)
Madman Across the Water (1971)
Honky Château (1972)
Don’t Shoot Me I’m Only the Piano Player (1973)
Goodbye Yellow Brick Road (1973)
Caribou (1974)
Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy (1975)
Rock of the Westies (1976)

Blue Moves (1976)
A Single Man (1978)
Victim of Love (1979)
21 at 33 (1980)
The Fox (1981)
Too Low for Zero (1983)
I Just Called to Say I Love You (1985)
Leather Jackets (1986)

Reg Strikes Back (1988)
Sleeping with the Past (1989)
The One (1992)
The Big Picture (1997)
Songs from the West Coast (2001)
Peachtree Road (2004)
The Captain & the Kid (2006)
The Diving Board (2013)
Wonderful Crazy Night (2016)

Collaborative albums
Live in Australia with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (1986)
Duets (1993)