

MUSIC

George Michael and his last Christmas



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City-based singer-songwriter REGI VARGHESE talks of growing up to the sound of Wham! in the Eighties

Songs you've heard in your youth have a habit of hiding in some dark corner of your mind and popping up at the most unexpected times.

I was at a Christmas dinner the day before, listening to a live band playing music from the 80s. I had grown up with a lot of the songs, but the one that stuck that night was George Michael's 'Last Christmas'. I found myself whistling this as I drove home, and I was still humming the tune when I switched on the television to the news that George Michael was dead. Throughout the day, ticker tapes at the bottom of every international and Indian

news channel carried the news. I got calls from my band mates, saying they would be adding a few George Michael songs for their gig at the Boat Club on New Year's eve.

George Michael burst on to the music scene as one half of the boy band Wham!. The band's first album, *Fantastic*, reached No. 1 in the U.K. in 1983 and produced a series of top 10 singles like 'Young Guns', 'Wham! Rap' and 'Club Tropicana'. Their second album, *Make it Big*, reached No. 1 on the U.S. album charts and they had four chart-busting singles – 'Wake Me Up before you Go-Go', 'Freedom', 'Everything She Wants' and 'Careless Whisper'.

Wham! also had a highly publicised tour of China in 1985, the first by a western pop band, which generated worldwide media coverage. The audience for the concert included members of the Chinese government.

But despite all the success, George Michael would've been forgotten, much like his Wham! bandmate Andrew Ridgeley has been, if he had continued with the boy band, dance hits.

His transformation from Wham! to a mature solo star was anything but tame. His first single, 'I Want Your Sex', was banned for being "sexually dangerous".

Who would have thought the lead singer of Wham!, the boy next door, would join the bad boys of rock, like The Rolling Stones, The Who and the Sex Pistols by getting himself banned? 'I Want Your Sex' got him out of the shackles of the boyband image.

The now-famous, iconic image of George Michael in the 'Faith' video sealed this transformation: he traded in the clean-shaven, likeable boy-next-door looks for a three-day-old stubble, sunglasses, acoustic guitar, Levi's and a black leather jacket. That was the defining moment in a career that has spanned over 30 years.

George Michael went on to sell over 100 million records and won numerous awards, including three Brit Awards – winning Best British Male twice, four MTV Video Music Awards, four Ivor Novello Awards, three American Music Awards, and two Grammy awards from eight nominations.

As I'm writing this, that song is still knocking around in my head:

"Last Christmas I gave you my heart

But the very next day, you gave it away..."

The world had given him their hearts many decades ago, when he was just a boy. Turns out that last Christmas, two days ago, was really George Michael's last Christmas with us.

The writer is singer-songwriter of Chennai-based band Second Coming. Their music is a unique blend of jazz, rock and poetry.

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