

Nat "King" Cole

Nathaniel Adams Coles was born in Montgomery, Alabama on March 17, 1919. Nat was the son of Edward Coles, a Baptist minister and Perlina Adams. He grew up in Chicago and played organ in his father's church. In high school Nat organized and led a 14 piece band. He also played in his brother Eddie's group, The Solid Swingers. Nat first became recognized as an exceptional jazz pianist, but it was his relaxed and sultry style of singing that brought him his immense popularity.

In 1936 Nat married Nadine Robinson and played piano for [Eubie Blake](#). Nat and Nadine moved to Los Angeles in 1937 where he formed the King Cole Trio with guitarist Oscar Moore and bassist Wesley Prince in 1939. The group struggled along without much success until 1943 with the release of his first hit, Straighten Up and Fly Right. In 1946 he hit top of the charts with his version of The Christmas Song.

Nat began to move away from the jazz piano and concentrated more on solo singing during the mid forties. In 1948 he recorded Nature Boy, which became his first gold record. Some of his other top hits were Mona Lisa, Route 66, Unforgettable, and Too Young.

Cole's Group was popular with both white and black audiences and in 1948, the King Cole Trio began broadcasting their own national radio show. In 1956 Nat and his group were signed to do a show on national television. The show never got off the ground and was canceled before it began because the major advertisers wouldn't sponsor a show featuring an African American in 1956. Nat career also included international tours and movie appearances. One of my favorites is [Cat Ballou](#) in which Nat and [Stubby Kaye](#) appear throughout the narrative as a pair of balladeers who comment on the action musically.

Nat King Cole died of lung cancer at the peak of his career in Santa Monica, California on February 15, 1965. His music enjoyed a revival in the early 1990s, when his daughter Natalie Cole released an album with her voice dubbed on top of her father's recordings.

Sources:

[Encyclopedia Britannica](#)

[Encyclopedia Africana](#)