

Brooklyn-bred Singer, Actress, and Community Advocate Naomi Johnson Dies at 87 Years Old

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, October 1, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The youngest of seven siblings, Naomi Josephine Stansil was born on January 13, 1937, in Boston, Massachusetts, to Mattie Louise Smith-Stansil and Joseph Francis Stansil who were lovers of art, opera, country, blues, jazz, and gospel and just about every genre of music.

Naomi's parents exposed their children to the performing arts at an early age. Each of their children learned piano, violin, voice, dance, and reciting poetry. When Naomi was four years old, she had already developed a passion for singing. She was a featured soloist in a church concert that her mother organized, spotlighting all the Stansil children.

When she was nine years old, her mother passed away, suddenly. Her sister, Mary Lou died the same year at the age of twenty-one.

Naomi's father, a newly single parent, moved his precious, young clan to Ohio. That period of loss was confusing for Naomi, who deeply mourned the deaths of her mother and sister. Yet, she pushed through, excelling at East High School, her alma mater in Cleveland, where she started honing her jazz-singer chops.

As a young woman and budding jazz vocalist, Naomi began her career performing at the historic Majestic Hotel's Rose Room Cocktail Lounge with the renowned Duke Jenkins Band. Often in collaboration with Cleveland's popular radio station KYW, she went on to perform around that jazz loving city, where, at 19, she met the legendary Nancy Wilson. Their friendship endured for



Naomi Johnson

more than 60 years. They cooked together, shopped together, hung out, and made music with some of the world's most iconic musicians. Sometimes, when Nancy needed a break from gigging, Naomi filled in, performing in her friend's stead. While working at The Blue Morocco, Naomi struck up a lifelong friendship with the late arranger, composer, and keyboardist, Arthur Jenkins, her musical director for five decades. During those 50 years, she also collaborated with such shining stars as Bill Salter, Dion Parson, G. Earl Grice, Buddy Williams, Ivan Pepe Hampden Jr., Courtney Ajaye Bennett, and especially during her later years, songwriter, composer, arranger, and dynamic pianist, Aziza Miller.

In 1959, she relocated to New York City, where she kept building a life as a singer. She juggled jobs at Record Shack and Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI). During that period, Naomi met Betty Staton and Dorothy Staton, blood sisters who became Naomi's sister-friends. For a year, Naomi lived with the Staton siblings and their mother and stepfather Beulah Staton Reese and Love Reese.

In 1962, six ladies founded a club that they named Les Filles Charmante — or The Charming Girls — Naomi, Betty Staton-Payne, Dorothy Staton, Anne B. Jones, the late Adele Brandon Toussaint, and the late designer and seamstress Frances Payne-Hobson immersed themselves in acts of

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community service that were largely focused on uplifting Black girls and women. Eventually, Dolores Jones-Walker and the late Teresa Williams-Payne joined the group as it hosted charity fashion shows and various other events. This incredible bond formed a legacy of love and family that carries on through the lives of their children and their children's children.

In 1963, Betty informed Naomi about a new apartment building in Brooklyn's Clinton Hill neighborhood. For 59 years, Naomi lived in that building, 21 St. James Place, where the Staton sisters still reside.

In 1965 on New Year's Eve, Naomi met her soulmate and future husband, Joseph Stanley Johnson Jr. at a jazz gig in Norwalk, Connecticut. A talented jazz drummer and conga player, he courted Naomi for a year and five months. They married on May 6, 1967. Nikki Apicha Jawelo Johnson and Christopher “Kojo” Johnson are the sweetest fruits of their union.



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Over the years, Naomi showcased her jazz talents at many of New York City's most prestigious venues, such as Ashford & Simpson's Sugar Bar, Sweetwater's, Small's Paradise, The Cutting Room, 200 Fifth Club, Two Steps Down, Baby Grand, and numerous more. As Naomi's parents had done, she immersed her children in music and musical instruction. She often brought them along while showcasing her talents at some of those famous venues around the city.

During that time, Naomi also took her singing and community service to church. After visiting Emmanuel Baptist Church (EBC) of Brooklyn, New York for two years, she was baptized in 1974. For 50 years, she faithfully served under the leadership of Rev. Dr. H. Edward Whitaker, EBC's first African American pastor, and then Rev. Dr. Michael N. Harris and the current pastor, Rev. Anthony L. Trufant. She proudly served on the committees recommending the hiring of Rev. Harris and Rev. Trufant. At EBC, she was a member of more than fifteen choirs and ensembles, the Mission and Benevolence Committee, and the Graduation Committee. She was a three-term member of EBC's Trustee Board; chairperson of the years-long Sanctuary Restoration and, the Alice Mann Learning Center; and a board member for Emmanuel's Daycare and Sunday School and served on the Board of Religious Education and Community Concerns. She directed EBC's Summer Camp and was part of the committee to establish EBC's Girl Scouts. She was the co-chairperson for the 125th Church Anniversary. She was part of the team administering EBC's afterschool program, spearheaded by the late Alice Mann, another dear friend.

On the career front, Naomi, studied community affairs at Pace University and continued her administrative work as an office aide at St. Augustine's Parish Day School and later, at Wonderland Daycare Center in Brooklyn.

Ultimately, she transferred her considerable skills at mentoring, mothering, cooking, coaching, and encouraging the spiritual growth of students, colleagues, kin, and friends to her 24-year tenure at Pratt Institute, where she retired as the Director of Operations at the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development. Its founder and director, Ron Shiffman, a pioneer in community development and Naomi's mentor and friend, helped sharpen her knowledge of community relations and development. She also spent two decades singing at graduation ceremonies at Pratt.

"I know that God placed me to live at 21 St. James Place to be a part of Emmanuel and Pratt," Naomi once professed. "My life has unfolded because of these two places, and only God knows what that has meant to me and my family."

In the broader community, Naomi served on the Board of Directors of the Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development Corporation, founded by the late Joseph E. Holley, Sr., another honored member of and servant at EBC. In later years, Naomi was a proud and committed member of the Brooklyn Interdenominational Choir (BIC), co-founded by Minister of Music Frank A. Haye. She was also a founding member of the Brooklyn Contemporary Chorus, established in 1971 in the Clinton Hill and Fort Greene area of Brooklyn.

Music was the first of the many loves of Naomi, who also reveled in modeling. She had the good fortune to be guided by the founder of Ophelia DeVore Charm School and leader of Grace Del Marco Agency. While under Ms. DeVore's tutelage, Naomi won the talent portion of the "Miss Empire State Contest."

When Naomi was a gray-haired and still gorgeous SAG actress (Screen Actors Guild/American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, also known as SAG/AFTRA, she appeared in a national TV commercial for Bank of America's "Five Fine Fillies" campaign. Gregory Alexander, her dedicated agent and friend, helped engineer that booking and Naomi's appearance in a myriad of other publications and commercials. She also appeared in commercials for the New Jersey Lottery, Eldercare, Tiger Toys, Flexon Sunglasses, and Linen n' Things. She was also featured in multiple episodes of the Emmy Award-winning Sesame Street series. She graced the pages of Essence magazine, among others.

She made a cameo appearance in Beyoncé's "Best Thing I Never Had" music video and served as a spokesmodel for Macy's Bras.

Naomi Josephine Stansil Johnson was a Black girl from Boston, a ride-or-die resident of Brooklyn, a mama, a wife, a confidante and devoted friend, a baker of a much-demanded chocolate cake, and a world traveler whose favorite vacation spots included New Orleans, Washington, D.C., California's Napa Valley, the U.S. Virgin Island of St. Thomas, Cancun, Mexico City, Canada, Egypt, and Paris.

The neighborhood centered in and around 21 St. James Place and it was her favorite location of all. It turned out to be the best place to live, raise children, create lifelong friendships and a legacy. In her spare time, Naomi cherished moments with her family and friends, particularly her grandchildren. Family was of utmost importance to her, and she dedicated herself to making sure family — whether by blood or other bonds—remained connected.

Naomi Josephine Stansil Johnson transitioned on Thursday, September 19, 2024, and was laid to rest on Sunday, September 29, 2024, at Emmanuel Baptist Church, in Brooklyn, New York.

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