

Don Brooks

Harmonica virtuoso Don Brooks was born in Dallas in 1947. Influenced by the thriving Dallas blues scene, he chose his instrument after hearing an album by seminal harpist Sonny Terry. In the mid-1960s, Brooks was a regular at clubs and coffeehouses throughout the greater Dallas area, often sharing the stage with legends such as Mance Lipscomb and Lightning Hopkins, and legends-to-be such as Jerry Jeff Walker. He became one of key bridges between the blues and folk movements.

In 1967, Brooks moved to New York City, where he quickly fell in with the flourishing folk music scene. Major stars recognized his talent, and in the early 1970s he recorded with such luminaries as Rita Coolidge, Tim Hardin, Judy Collins, Don McLean, Garland Jeffries, Yoko Ono, and many others. In 1973, he joined country singer Waylon Jennings's band, in which his harmonica playing helped create the sound of "Outlaw" country music both live and on countless recordings.

Although loyal to Jennings, Brooks found time to lend his talents to a vast number of recordings by high profile artists. Throughout the 1970s, his harmonica can be heard on records by Ringo Starr, the Bee Gees, Guy Clark, Bette Midler, and Michael Martin Murphey. His dominance of studio session work continued throughout the 1980s as he appeared on records by Billy Joel, Diana Ross, Melissa Manchester and the Talking Heads.

He performed on Broadway in Roger Miller's "Big River" in 1985, and "The Gospel at Colonus" in 1988. His harmonica was heard in the Ken Burns public television documentary "The Civil War."

"My job was always to make other people sound good," Brooks once said. Despite the eclectic variety of artists with whom he collaborated, his roots remained in the blues. "Everything I do, everything I play, is the blues." Don Brooks died of leukemia in New York City on October 25, 2000, at age 53.