

## Andy Gibb – In the Shadow of the Bee Gees

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Teen idol Andy Gibb had a slew of hits in the late 1970s but struggled to emerge from the shadow of his older siblings. On what would have been his 53rd birthday, we take a look back.

Born Andrew Roy Gibb on March 5, 1958, Andy grew up near Brisbane, Australia, the youngest son of Hugh and Barbara, working-class musicians who'd emigrated from Manchester, England. The Gibb parents encouraged their five children to pursue showbiz and Andy's three older brothers proved wildly successful.

Barry, Maurice and Robin – better known as The Bee Gees – would dominate the charts, first in the late 1960s as a soft rock act whose finely honed pop sensibilities won them comparisons to The Beatles (who they often covered), and later during the disco era when their music was showcased in the film *Saturday Night Fever*. More than a decade younger than the oldest Bee Gee, Andy at once sought to emulate and distance himself from his successful brothers early in life, as their fame brought him unwanted attention at school, where he was subject to bullying and ridicule by classmates convinced that his musical heritage gave him a superiority complex.

While he sought his own identity, he didn't stray far from the family business. At age 13, he began performing in Ibiza, a tourist destination in Spain popular with vacationing Brits. While it was generally assumed he would join The Bee Gees when he got old enough, Andy was determined to forge his own path.

Well, sort of.

His first band, Melody Fayre, was named after a Bee Gees song. The first song he recorded in a studio, "My Father Was Reb," was written by his older brother Maurice. The band was managed by his mother. Unlike his brothers, Andy never had to struggle through years of obscurity playing Brisbane speedways and Queensland resort towns, and unlike them, he'd never been exposed to the gray, working-class environs of England, but grew up amidst the sunshine and beaches of Australia. His more laidback, casual approach to work frustrated his bandmates. While Andy could rely on the largesse of The Bee Gees, they needed the steady income that came with gigging and recording. Eventually, guitarist John Anderson and drummer John Stringer returned to England. The short-lived Melody Fayre was no more.

Deciding to continue on as a solo artist, Andy recorded the single "Westfield Mansions," which charted in Sydney but had little impact elsewhere. He toured in support of the Bay City Rollers as a member of the band Zenta. After relocating to Miami he entered the studio to record his first full solo album – albeit with older brother Barry producing and penning both hit songs on the record.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-xfQWaK1s&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-xfQWaK1s&feature=player_embedded)

The album was a smash, with "I Just Want to Be Your Everything" – a tribute to Andy's new bride (a year later, she'd be divorced from him and pregnant with his child) – staying in the Billboard Top 40 charts for 23 weeks. The follow-up, "(Love Is) Thicker Than Water" actually bested his brothers' "Stayin' Alive" before being toppled by another Bee Gees song, "Night Fever." (That, in turn, was knocked off by Yvonne Elliman's "If I Can't Have You," a song written by Barry Gibb, making him still the only songwriter in history to simultaneously hold the top four slots in the Billboard Hot 100).

Andy's next album, *Shadow Dancing*, benefitted from the help of all three brothers, with the titular tune they co-wrote spending seven weeks at number one and going platinum – making Andy Gibb the first male solo artist to have three successive number one hits.

Despite his success, he was more likely to appear on the cover of *Teen Beat* than *Rolling Stone*

and was in some quarters dismissed as a blow-dried pin-up idol coasting on his brothers' coat tails. With the nascent punk rock and new wave scenes beginning to dominate England and "Disco Sucks" T-shirts a common sighting in America, the musical tide was turning. By the early 1980s, the hits stopped coming for the brothers Gibb.

His elder brothers were perhaps better positioned to weather this sea change. They'd had more than a decade of success, were all in their 30s and happily married. Andy may have felt his career was cut off at its peak – he was only 22 years old when he recorded *After Dark*, his final studio album.

He tried diversifying into acting, starring in a Broadway production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. The performance was well received but short-lived – he was fired for absenteeism. A hosting gig for TV's *Solid Gold* ended the same way, and those around him worried about his increasing cocaine and alcohol addictions. His tumultuous romance with TV star Victoria Principal ended in 1982 over his drug use.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWE-B0V0XgE&feature=player\\_embedded#at=15](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWE-B0V0XgE&feature=player_embedded#at=15)

"The most embarrassing thing for me was the day Bob Hope called," Andy Gibb later told an interviewer. "I was supposed to do his TV special and didn't turn up. Consequently, I was blacklisted by NBC for a long time. I damaged my career."

By 1985, his family had persuaded him to enter the Betty Ford Clinic. He successfully went through rehab and moved to Miami to be near his brothers, living on \$200 a week after having declared bankruptcy. With his demons seemingly behind him, he signed a recording contract with Island Records and was preparing to enter a London studio when he died at age 30, a few days after complaining of chest pains while celebrating his birthday with his mother.

The official cause was an inflammation of the heart brought on by viral infection. Though many felt that years of cocaine abuse had weakened his heart, the attending physician announced there was no evidence that the condition had been brought on by drug or alcohol abuse. His family later admitted Andy was drinking heavily during the final weeks of his life.

"A lot of people remember particularly his kindness," [Maurice Gibb](#) told VH1. "Because he helped a lot of people. He just couldn't help himself."